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ENGL 201-01, Introduction to Fiction Writing, Spring 2007

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Introduction to Fiction Writing ENG 201
 Section 1: MWF 11:00-12:15 am — Clough 304
 Section II: MWF 12:30-1:45 pm — Clough 304
 Texts: *Fiction Writer's Workshop*, Josip Novakovich
Short Fiction: Classic and Contemporary, ed. Charles Bohner [SF]

Assignments

Jan	11	Introduction.	March	1	"Rape Fantasies," 75; "Petrified Man," 1145
		Story Basics		2	Ex. 4 Dialogue Due
	16	Novakovich 71-91		6	"A Good Man Is Hard To Find," 875;
	18	"A&P," 1116; "Araby" 566 [SF]		8	"Guests of the Nation," 893
	18	Novakovich, 25-47; "The Point," 295; "The Grave," 945; "Gravity" 674			"Car Crash While Hitchhiking," 561;
	19	Exercise 1: Description			"Boys and Girls," 810
		Showing and Telling		13-15	SPRING BREAK
	23	Novakovich 177-195; "The Things They Carried," 852			
	25	Novakovich 151-164; "My Son the Fanatic" 639 "Shopping" 837 [SF]		20	Signs and Symbols Novakovich 164-172; "Shiloh," 726 "Cathedral," 163
	30	No class		22	"Conversion of the Jews," 964; "The Magic Barrel" 705
		Story #1 Due		23	Story #2 Due
Feb	1	Workshop		27	Workshop
	6	Workshop		29	Workshop
	8	Workshop			
		Character	April	3	Workshop
	13	Novakovich 48-66; "Paul's Case," 180; "The Darling," 183;		5	EASTER BREAK
	15	"Lady with the Dog" 217; "Everything that Rises Must Converge," 864		10	Other Modes "The Swimmer" 193; "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" 825; "
	17	Ex. 2 Character Sketch Due		12	"Lost in the Funhouse," 123; "The Passenger," 820.
		Point of View I		17	Novakovich 225-240; "The Bath," "A Small Good Thing" (handout)
	20	Novakovich 99-119		18	Story #3 Due
	22	"Babylon Revisited," 359; "A Rose for Emily," 347;		19	Workshop
	23	Ex. 3 Point of View Due		24	Workshop
		Dialogue and Voice		26	Workshop
	27	Novakovich 127-145; "Hills Like White Elephants" 514; "Soldier's Home," 519			Portfolios Due by 5:00 pm

Policies for English 201

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this class we will read, discuss, write, and revise **literary short fiction**. Literary fiction discloses truths about human experience in a moving and artful way. It strives for seamless mimesis while simultaneously making resourceful and aesthetically sound use of all the various aspects story telling, including language, point of view, plot, character, setting, metaphor, symbolism and tone. In short, you will endeavor to write *literature*. For the purposes of the class, you cannot write genre fiction—that is, fantasy, science fiction, mystery, children’s fiction, young adult fiction, and so on.

WRITING LOAD: Everyone will write and revise three (3) complete short stories over the course of this semester. Each story *submitted for discussion* should be “complete,” with a worked-out ending—even a bad one. (Fixing bad endings is one of the things workshop is for.) Each story submitted **must exceed 6 pages, double-spaced, in length at time of submission**. You are free to write about whatever you wish, so long as you fulfill, at semester's end, the following requirements:

- One story must be in the first person
- One story must be in the third person
- One story must be told from the point of view of someone *not* your (i.e. the author’s) gender

You will gather together both the original as well as the revised versions of all three stories into a final portfolio, which you will submit to me at the end of the semester for final evaluation. This portfolio should consist of polished, well-crafted fiction. In assessing the merit of the completed portfolio, I will pay special attention to the *revisions* you have made to stories that originally appeared in workshop. The portfolio should run anywhere from 5000 to 7500 words (between 16-22 pages), but can certainly be longer.

You will also write four (4) exercises, which I will grade. The average grade of these four exercises will constitute your “exercise average.”

STORY SUBMISSIONS: During workshop weeks, we will workshop roughly five stories per class period. You will submit your stories electronically, and I will then compile all the stories into three packets of five to six stories each, and email them to you as an attachment. Each of you is then responsible for printing out that day’s packet. Moreover, you will write *at least* a half-page of single-spaced comments for each story up for discussion. You can either write these comments on the packet printout itself or type them out on your own: the former method is easier, the latter option is more conscientious. These comments—both those you compose and those you verbalize in class during workshop—will factor into my evaluation of your final fiction portfolio, so take this process seriously.

GRADING:	Fiction Portfolio	60%
	Exercise Average	40%

ABSENCES: You may miss two classes, excused or otherwise, totally free of charge. An F on a pop quiz will count as an absence, as will failure to bring your book and/or story packet to class. Absences after those initial two will cost your *final course* average two tenths of a point. I make no distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. So if you can attend, you should. **If you miss more than eight (8) classes, you will fail the course.**

LATE PAPERS: Each assignment is due on the day stipulated on the syllabus. Any late assignment will be docked a tier reduction for each day that it is delayed. Any assignment turned in 5 class sessions *after* the original due date will receive a grade of F and can result in failure of the course itself. (See departmental policies at the end of the this syllabus.)

PROBLEMS? Anytime you have a problem with an assignment or class attendance, PLEASE get in touch with me. My office phone number and e-mail address are listed on the front of this syllabus.

PLAGIARISM: All work submitted for this class must not only be written *specifically* for this class but must also be your own work. You may not turn in stories you wrote elsewhere for other creative-writing classes. What’s more, the stories are, without caveat, subject to the requirements of the Honor System.

Description Exercise

1. First, write a one-to-two paragraph description of a rural landscape, a city street, a cluttered room, or a public space such as a train station or a doctor's office. Use *only* active verbs to describe inanimate as well as animate things. Avoid the pathetic fallacy.
2. Introduce into this setting a character who conveys any one of the following:
 - Complete emotional well-being
 - Fried brains
 - Emotional problems of some severity
 - A coyness that borders on the insipid
 - Profound authority
 - Astonishing arrogance
 - Total timidity
 - Amazing self-absorption

Of course, employ significant, concrete details and strong active verbs only.

NOTE: The one sure way to mess this one up is to employ linking or passive verbs. I will automatically lower your grade on this assignment on grade tier for every linking or passive verb I see. I mean business!

Due Friday, Jan. 19

Character Sketch Exercise

1. First, come up with three entirely disparate characters. These characters can be from anywhere on planet earth (rather than from some other planet) and from any class or part of the world you choose: they simply must all be alive at the same historical moment. For *each* character, fill out a Character Checklist, three copies of which are attached to the end of this syllabus. In other words, you will complete this checklist three times.
2. Write 2-3 page scene set in a public space in which you introduce, one-by-one, each of your three characters. For full credit, the scene **MUST** obey the following restrictions:
 - The setting must be a space that all three characters might plausibly share—i.e., a doctor's waiting room, an airport gate, a restaurant, a principal's office, a sports arena, a public street, etc.
 - The point of view must be *objective third person*. This means you will cast the scene from the perspective of some hovering "camera eye" which sees all that transpires within this setting but which has no access to any single character's mind.
 - Each character must *enter* the setting one after the other, preferably in discrete paragraphs.
 - After all three characters have entered the setting, they must all interact in some way.

The trick here is to present each of your three characters *directly*, imparting to your reader as much of the information from the checklist as you can without resorting to indirect (authorial) characterization or interiority. Each assignment will be evaluated according to how vividly and memorably it presents the three characters while still adhering to the restrictions listed above. NOTE: You will submit **BOTH** the three Character Checklists **AND** the 2-3 page scene.

DUE: Friday, February 17

Point of View Exercise

This one builds on your Character Sketch Exercise. There you introduced three characters into a public space and had them interact. Your perspective was that of an objective narrator. Here, you will rewrite the central scene in that episode **three** different times, each version from the perspective of one of the three characters. What's more, each version will represent a different point of view. For instance:

- One character's version will be cast in the first person
- One character's version will be cast in the second person
- One character's version will be cast in the third-person directed

The three versions should be consistent as regards events, so that each character should be wearing the same thing, and saying the same things, in all three versions. The key is to alter the perspective. Although you can condense or even shorten the overall episode so that the individual scenes are not necessarily as long as the original, you must still remain consistent in the overall presentation of events and so on. For a detailed description of the three types of point of view, see Chapter 7 of the Burroway book.

Due Friday, Feb. 23.

Dialogue Exercise

Select a conflict from the left-hand column below and write a two-to-three-page dialogue in which two characters disagree about which choice to make. At the same time, select an activity from the right-hand column below that will serve as the setting/frame for this dialogue. The characters should not only know each other well—brother/sister, husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend—but should also be easily distinguished from one another—fat/skinny, aggressive/passive, smug/sincere. What's more, the two characters should be evenly matched participants in the conflict at hand. Note: the activity you choose does not necessarily have to reflect the conflict; in fact, it can be at total odds with it!

All dialogue and activity must be presented directly. Punctuation counts.

Conflict

1. Should we really start seeing one another, particularly since we're both seeing other people?
2. Why do you (the parents) insist that I (the child) go to college when I want to work?
3. When are we going to tell the children about the divorce?
4. Which of us is going to tell mom and dad about the dent in the car?
5. When are you going to stop drinking? And when are you going to lay off?
6. Should we really tap into the professor's computer and download tomorrow's test?

7. Should we spend any more money on fertility treatments, or should we simply adopt?

Activity

1. Repairing the sink
2. Playing poker
3. Pumping iron in a gym
4. Painting a room
5. Giving someone a haircut
6. Cleaning out a church
7. Assembling a child's bicycle on

Due Friday, March 2

Character Checklist

1. Character's name and possible nickname
2. Age and Gender
3. Race and Class
4. Color/Style of Hair
5. Most prominent facial feature
6. Most prominent bodily feature
7. Style of dress
8. Family situation
9. Occupation
10. Type of home (apartment? house? trailer?)
11. Kind and name of pet (if any)
12. Hobbies
13. Favorite movies
14. Favorite books
15. Favorite CDs
16. Favorite food(s)
17. Secret fear
18. Secret desire
19. Best and Worst character trait
20. Life's ambition