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## ENGL 401-02 Advanced Fiction Writing, Spring 2011

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Authors	Boswell, Marshall
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Professor: Marshall Boswell  
 Office Phone/Voice Mail: 843-3581  
 E-Mail: boswell@rhodes.edu

Office: Palmer 316  
 Office Hours: MWF 12:30-2:00 p.m.  
 and by appointment

Advanced Fiction Writing ENG 401

Tuesday-Thursday 2:00-3:15 pm

Texts: *The Early Stories: 1953-1975*, John Updike (JU)  
*The Collected Stories of Peter Taylor*, Peter Taylor (PT)  
*Birds of America*, Lorrie Moore (LM)  
*A Model World*, Michael Chabon (MC)  
*The Collected Stories of Amy Hempel*, Amy Hempel (AH)

**Assignments**

Month	Day	Assignment	Due Date	Assignment
Jan	13	Introduction to Class		<b>Group 1, Story 3 Due</b>
			8	LM: pp. 78-95; 143-211
	18	JU: pp. 1-66	10	Workshop, Group 1, Story 3
	20	JU: pp 67-125		
			14-18	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>
		<b>Group 1, Story 1 Due</b>		
	25	JU: "Dear Alexandros," "Wife-Wooing," "The Lifeguard"	22	<b>Group 2, Story 3 Due</b>
		"Unstuck," "Giving Blood," "The Day of the Dying Rabbit"	24	LM: pp. 212-End
	27	Workshop, Group 1, Story 1		Workshop, Group 2, Story 3
			29	<b>Group 3, Story 3 Due</b>
		<b>Group 2, Story 1 Due</b>		MC, <i>A Model World</i> : "S Angel," "A Model World," "Blumenthal on the Air," "Millionaires"
Feb	1	JU: "The Music School," "Sublimating," "Eros Rampant," "Separating" "Problems"		Workshop, Group 3, Story 3
	3	Workshop, Group 2, Story	31	
	4	<b>Narrative #1 Due</b>		
		<b>Group 3, Story 1 Due</b>	April 5	<b>Group 1, Story 4 Due</b>
	8	PT: "Dean of Men," "The Other Times," "At the Drugstore"	7	MC, <i>A Model World</i> : Part II: "The Lost World" complete
	10	Workshop, Group 3, Story 1	8	Workshop. Group 1, Story 4
				<b>Narrative #3 Due</b>
		<b>Group 1, Story 2 Due</b>		<b>Group 2, Story 4 Due</b>
	15	PT: "What You Hear From 'Em?" "A Wife of Nashville," "Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time"	12	AH:
		Workshop, Group 1, Story 2	14	Workshop, Group 2, Story 4
	17		17	AH:
			21	<b>EASTER BREAK</b>
		<b>Group 2, Story 2 Due</b>		<b>Group 3, Story 4 Due</b>
	22	PT: "1939," "Guests," "Heads of Houses"	26	AH:
	24	Workshop, Group 2, Story 2	28	Workshop, Group 3, Story 4
			2	<b>Portfolios Due 5:00 pm</b>
		<b>Group 3, Story 3 Due</b>		
	1	LM: pp. 5-77		
March	3	Workshop, Group 3, Story 3		
	4	<b>Narrative #2 Due</b>		

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This class functions as the final installment of a three-part sequence of fiction-writing workshops. All students in the class should already have taken the Intro and the Intermediate workshops. As such, students are expected to have achieved a mastery of the basics of fiction writing worthy of “Advanced” status.

In this class we will read, discuss, write, and revise **literary short fiction**, with some attention paid to the short story cycle, broadly defined. 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 four (4) complete short stories during the course of this semester. Each story submitted for discussion must consist of *at least* 8 double-spaced pages and should be “complete,” with a worked out ending—even a bad one. (Coming up with better endings is one of the things workshop is for.) You are encouraged, although not required, to conceive of the individual submissions as part of some larger sequence, whether a linked story cycle, or a set of pieces exploring a consistent set of themes, or even a novella. If you are working on a novel or a novella, you can submit installments, yet these, too, must consist of self-contained units (i.e., “chapters” or “parts”). At the end of the semester, you will gather these revised stories into a portfolio, which you will submit to me for final evaluation. While there is no page limit on the total number of pages you write, there is a minimum requirement of 25 typewritten, double-spaced pages.

Everyone will also write three (3) two-to-four page narratives, either a complete “short-short” or self-contained episode from some story that might or might not someday exist. The narratives work as follows:

**Narrative #1 [Feb. 4]:** In honor of John Updike’s “Olinger Stories,” write a 3-5 narrative reconstruction of a famous episode from an equally famous television sitcom—*The Brady Bunch*, *Leave It To Beaver*, *Family Matters*, *Saved by the Bell*, *The Cosby Show*, etc—being careful to cast the entire piece as a detailed homage to and/or parody of Updike’s style, complete with his ornate similes, winding sentences, and tactical precision.

**Narrative #2 [March 3]:** Using the third-person objective point of view in the present tense, write a 3-5 page episode cast entirely in dialogue in which two lovers engage in a civilized but still intense argument in the course of which person one either discovers something about the other that he/she didn’t know and which causes a change of heart, or inadvertently reveals something about him/herself that causes a reevaluation of the terms of the argument. Use no quotation marks to distinguish between text and speech, and keep expository prose down to no more than a sentence or two per paragraph.

**Narrative #3 [April 8]:** Write a 3-5 page piece (or “short short”) that exhibits all the primary components of narrative art—point of view, character, narrative, conflict, resolution—but which has been cast in one of the following forms: the script for a television commercial; a group of questions from the SAT, LSAT, GRE, or the equivalent; a student essay with the teacher’s comments attached; a letter, or series of letters, of complaint to a company regarding that company’s faulty product (and the letter writer’s experience with same); an annotated “discography” of someone’s CD collection.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:** Each Thursday, we will workshop 3-4 stories. You will submit your stories on a rotating system, so that you come up for discussion about every three weeks. By the

conclusion of the Tuesday class just prior to your Thursday workshop, you will send me, via e-mail attachment, a Word document of your story. I will then remove your name and compile a packet including your story as well as the remaining four stories from your group and resend this packet to the class as a whole. Each of you will then write *at least* a half-page of single-spaced comments for each story up for discussion. You can either write these comments on the mimeographed copy of the story itself or type them out: 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 constitute a sizable portion of your final grade, so take this process seriously. You are not being asked to pass opinions but to provide specific and considered constructive criticism. In addition, you are required to keep up with the assigned reading and to participate in our class discussions of these stories.

I will also begin some Tuesday classes with a brief “pop quiz” on the assigned reading. A failed grade on one of these quizzes will result in an unexcused absence *on top of any other absences you might already have accrued*. If you miss class on a day on which a pop quiz has been assigned, then, clearly, you cannot make it up, for your absence will cover that “missed” grade. Failure to arrive at Thursday workshop with a carefully annotated story packet will also result in an absence.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** This is a degree-level English course further designated as an advanced workshop in fiction writing. As such, I expect the stories you submit to exhibit correct grammar, spelling and punctuation, as well as demonstrated mastery of narrative craft. Because each of your stories will be closely read by the entire class, you are also required to submit stories that justify the good faith effort of your readers who, contrary to normal practice, cannot simply set aside a story they deem unworthy of close scrutiny. For these reasons, I reserve the right to withdraw stories that display egregious spelling, mechanical, and/or punctuation errors, or which constitute a waste of our workshop time, which is, after all, limited. Any story submitted after 3:30 p.m. on the relevant Tuesday will not be included in that packet. Your *final portfolio grade* will be docked *a full letter grade* if a story of yours has been excised from the packet. If more than one story is excised for whatever reason, you will fail the course.

**ATTENDANCE:** You may miss two classes, totally free of charge. An F on a pop quiz will count as an absence, as will failure to bring to class your book or a carefully annotated workshop packet. Absences after those initial two will result in a tier reduction in your fiction portfolio grade (B+ becomes B, B becomes B-). If you miss more than seven (7) classes, you will fail the course.

**PROBLEMS?** Take care of them in advance. If you know a story won’t be ready in time, work out an exchange with a classmate, or let me know well in advance so that we can make adjustments. I am more than happy to work with you if you give me enough lead time. Do not email me with questions that you could just as reasonably ask me in person the next class period. I will try to respond to emails sent during the week but won’t answer emails sent over the weekend, unless they are particularly urgent.

**PLAGIARISM:** All work submitted for this course must be not only your own but also composed specifically for this class. If you want to turn in a revised version of a story you wrote for another fiction-writing class here at Rhodes or elsewhere, *you must get permission from me in advance*. This is very important. The stories are, without caveat, subject to the Honor System.

**GROUP 1**

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**GROUP 2**

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**GROUP 3**

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