2021SP ENGLSH 4510/ENGLSH 7510 Morgan & Thorp (01) Creative Writing: Advanced Fiction

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**Speer Morgan**

**Spring 2022**

**Wednesday 3:00-5:30**

Text: A sampling of stories from the beginning of the modern short story to the present day, all available through Canvas on Project MUSE or through links, which are included below.

English 4510 is a writing workshop for students with serious interest in prose fiction. This is not a beginning-level course. Students are expected to be competent at prose writing.

Each class will consider two stories from the anthologies, and most classes will also include discussion of at least two pieces by students in the class. \*If you are off campus and need to read linked stories via Project MUSE, you may first need to go to the MU Libraries site to access Project MUSE (library.missouri.edu)! If you receive a message saying the file can’t be opened, try copying and pasting the link into your browser.

**Students are required to**:

1. Attend class and participate (roll taken).
2. Write a minimum of 30 pages of finished fiction. To receive a passing grade, one must post stories on time for the class, and at the end of the semester post a revised version of at least one story. Revising two is encouraged but not required. No late grades will be given except in case of medical emergency.

Rule of thumb: If you’re writing 10-page stories, you should be completing them--and have them ready for presentation--every six weeks. If they are 15-page stories, submit once per nine weeks.

Zoom links for your class meetings are posted on Canvas.

**When posting** your work for review by the class, you’ll need to go to the Discussion section and **click to add a new discussion**. Be sure to attach your story, and once you upload the file, **under “Options,” select “Allow threaded replies.” Be sure to hit “Save”**when you’re finished. We’ve posted one of your first readings for the class as an example.

Present stories to class. After a story has been read and discussed, members of the class are to make notes on their copies and hand back marked copies to the author at that time or during the next class meeting. This allows for comment and encouragement outside the formal purview of the class.

1. Assignments and participation will be graded as a whole: grade at any moment in semester can be requested. Students who don't read assigned stories or edit fellow classmates' stories will not receive a passing grade.

**Class Introduction**

Getting acquainted and going over syllabus

Exercise: burning-match bio: details, highlights, compressed facts.  
Syllabus  
What is taste?

**Class 2**

* Class Readers:
* Leo Tolstoy, “The Death of Ivan Ilyich”  
  [http://books.ebooklibrary.org/members/penn\_state\_collection/psuecs/ivanilyc.pdf (Links to an external site.)](http://books.ebooklibrary.org/members/penn_state_collection/psuecs/ivanilyc.pdf)
* Deborah Galyan, “The Incredible Appearing Man”  
  <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v018/18.1.galyan.html>  
    
  **Discuss storytelling**  
    
  Each class member tells an oral story
  + Jokes, anecdotes, stories  
    What are some of a story’s elements in addition to the ones mentioned by Atwood? How do good storytellers “think” and present their material? Are there common threads in the attitudes that storytellers take toward the people in their stories?

**What makes a story?**

Rhythm, steps, conflict, discoveries

**Finding story**

The large variety of good stories; what are some of the typical things that make good stories?

**Class 3**

* D.H. Lawrence, “The Rocking-Horse Winner”  
  [http://www.classicshorts.com/stories/rockwinr.html (Links to an external site.)](http://www.classicshorts.com/stories/rockwinr.html)
* Nanci Kincaid, “Why Richard Can’t”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v019/19.1.kincaid.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v019/19.1.kincaid.html)  
    
  **Desire**
  + Desire in characters; it helps to remember that there are many different kinds of desire.  
    Primary reasons for desire or will

**Aspects of Will**

When dramatic action is will in conflict, what are some of the ways in which will manifests itself?

Contrary will: The will that emerges in a character in opposition to other character  
Negative will: Desire not to be something  
Dialectical will: with two conflicting things carried within (Prince Hal in Henry IV).  
Confused will: with more than one element in conflict (Chekov’s characters, Hamlet)

**Class 4**

**Readers:**

* Jason Brown “Instructions to the Living from the Condition of the Dead” [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/656510 (Links to an external site.)](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/656510)
* Steve Yarbrough, “The Rest of Her Life”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v020/20.3.yarbrough.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v020/20.3.yarbrough.html)

**Conflict**

Desirability of conflict in storytelling  
How conflict arises  
Different methods of describing conflict and how it can define character  
How conflict can be internal as well. Resolution of conflict.  
Rightness vs. wrongness: less important than wisdom  
Whether authors always know their characters’ desires or those desires are discovered in the course of the story?

Discuss the evident course of **desire and conflict** in one well-known character from fiction:

Describe this famous fictional character (Emma Bovary, Huck Finn, etc.) as you would describe an interesting acquaintance—someone you knew but to whom you had no commitments. Extract him or her from his period and describe him or her as a personality. Notice the necessity of conflict and the discovery of motive in trying to recount character.

**Class 5**

**Readers:**

* Susan Vreeland, “A Night Different from All Others”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v021/21.1.vreeland.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v021/21.1.vreeland.html)
* Robert Olen Butler, “Titanic Victim Speaks Through Waterbed”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v019/19.2.butler.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v019/19.2.butler.html)  
    
  **Character**

Describe the **depth or dimension** of one of the characters in the stories we’ve read. Do all the characters have depth/dimension?

Discuss whether characters are complex. Are they truly *that* complex in the text, or does the sense of their complexity reside partly in the story, their environment, and questions they embody?  
  
How do characters arise and gain force within the writer?

**Class 6**

* Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man is Hard to Find”  
  [https://repositorio.ufsc.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/160332/A%20good%20man%20is%20hard%20to%20find%20-%20Flannery%20O%27Connor.pdf (Links to an external site.)](https://repositorio.ufsc.br/bitstream/handle/123456789/160332/A%20good%20man%20is%20hard%20to%20find%20-%20Flannery%20O%27Connor.pdf)
* Jane Gillette, “Visiting”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/v036/36.3.gillette.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/v036/36.3.gillette.html)

**How to convey thoughts and feelings**: Avoiding psychologizing  
**Bringing it to the surface**: Thinking in action and image.

**Class 7**

* Edith Wharton, “Roman Fever”  
  [https://www.newberry.org/sites/default/files/calendar-attachments/Roman%20Fever%20-%20Edith%20Wharton.pdf (Links to an external site.)](https://www.newberry.org/sites/default/files/calendar-attachments/Roman%20Fever%20-%20Edith%20Wharton.pdf)
* Seth Fried, “The Siege”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/v029/29.4fried.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/v029/29.4fried.html)

**Obliquity** (in dialogue and under-story)

Mental Exercise: Have a conversation in which two people are talking and don’t mention the thing that is really on their mind. Eating dinner.

**Class 8**

* Anton Chekhov, “The Darling”  
  [http://archive.org/stream/thedarlingandoth13416gut/13416.txt (Links to an external site.)](http://archive.org/stream/thedarlingandoth13416gut/13416.txt)
* Matthew Baker, “A Cruel Gap Toothed Boy”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/v035/35.4.baker.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/v035/35.4.baker.html)

**Composition** of action and image and story rhythm

**Denouements and Conclusions**

The Substantial Ending: change is rendered  
The understory revealed (“Homage”)  
Characters’ fates come clear ("Death of Ivan Ilych”)  
The Poetic Ending  
Rhythm and words try to capture both the feeling and something of the understory (“The Dead”)

**Class 9**

* Rachel Yoder, “the blood was the mountain and the mountain was the bear” [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/v036/36.1.yoder.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/v036/36.1.yoder.html)
* Linda Hogan, “Aunt Moon’s Young Man”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v011/11.1.hogan.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v011/11.1.hogan.html)

**Dialogue**

Use of dialect in story. What defines a local-color story?  
Keeping dialogue “in” scene; not trying to narrate through it  
Add business to dialogue  
Not following the syntactic rules of written language  
Magic: how can you make it more magical? (Specificity, symbolic words, choice of words, poetic words)  
Silences  
Subtexts and emotions often show, not just information exchange  
Letting business be dialogue  
Allowing voice and dialect in dialogue without it becoming a local-color story

**Class 10**

* William Gay, “Those Deep Elm Brown’s Ferry Blues”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v021/21.2.gay.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v021/21.2.gay.html)
* Seth Fried, “Loeka Discovered”  
  [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/257689 (Links to an external site.)](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/257689)

**Unity:** A story can achieve unity of effect through any or all of the standard elements of fiction: plot, characterization, theme, or style. One of the ways to help unify a plot is to have unity of time: the action occurring at a single important moment, or being told in a voice that melds together a series of events spread out in time by the perspective and voice—for example, an observer telling the story of what happened to a friend over a period of several years. By virtue of his distance, the observer can compress time with such devices as: "That was the last time I saw her until October of the same year."

A writer should always be trying to **make sense of the story** itself, what it is saying or what deeper dilemmas it is setting forth. Let a story run at times but keep wondering what it is about. I have noticed that when a story I’m reading excites me I almost always sense its unity even before I can articulate it. I will feel that it is of a piece before I can even say why.

Another element of plot unity can be had when a story has a clear **tone**.

**Class 11**

* Naquib Mahfouz, “Tales from Alleyways” [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v008/8.2.mahfouz.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v008/8.2.mahfouz.html)
* Michael Byers, “Wizard”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v020/20.2.byers.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v020/20.2.byers.html)

**Vary the pace/lens**

At times call attention to it, at times not. Pleasure in the passing of time, pleasure in the sense that one is getting just the important information, can help make something “riveting.”

**Class 12**

* Franz Kafka, “The Metamorphosis”  
  [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5200/5200-h/5200-h.htm (Links to an external site.)](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5200/5200-h/5200-h.htm)
* “Mr. Henry's Trousers,” William McCauley  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v023/23.3.mccauley.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v023/23.3.mccauley.html)

**Symbols**in fiction

**Class 13**

* James Joyce, "The Dead"  
  [http://www.online-literature.com/james\_joyce/958/ (Links to an external site.)](http://www.online-literature.com/james_joyce/958/)
* Jane Gillette, “The Trail of the Demon”  
  [http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri\_review/summary/v037/37.3.gillette.html (Links to an external site.)](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/missouri_review/summary/v037/37.3.gillette.html)

**Characterization**

Are characters **physically** there?  
Is there also an **impression** of them?  
Increase the magic: the use of metaphor, especially in physical description

**Raise the stakes**

Does the outcome matter?

**Class 14**

* Kim Coleman Foote, “How to Kill Gra’ Coleman and Live to Tell about It”  
  [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/672137 (Links to an external site.)](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/672137)
* May-lee Chai, “The Witness”  
  [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/665065 (Links to an external site.)](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/665065)

**Editing**

When discussing a piece of work one has to be able to shift between problems that are generally thought to be "details" (e.g. grammar) to those that are thought to be more important (structure, character concept, unity). Yet these problems are almost inseparable. The best editors I know are fearlessly concerned with every level of detail--about matters all the way from editing to getting books sold. Thus, one has to accept the importance of all aspects of editing.  
  
**Eliminate slack**in the story

Turn scenes **to narrative** where useful to pace

**Cut** with joy! Sacrifice: You must be willing to sacrifice first versions and even elements of stories that originally interested you. Sometimes you must even give up well-written paragraphs, if, finally, they impede the story.

**Textual revision**

Flow of thought  
Cut infelicitous doubles, repeats  
Check paragraphing

**Class 15**

* Tsung-yan Kwong, “Tooth”  
  [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/367271 (Links to an external site.)](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/367271)
* Alice Fulton, “Happy Dust”  
  [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/409508/pdf (Links to an external site.)](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/409508/pdf)

**Endings**

**ALTERNATE READINGS**

* Katie Chase, “Man and Wife”  
  [https://muse.jhu.edu/article/217349 (Links to an external site.)](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/217349)
* Peter LaSalle, “Oh, Such Playwrights!”  
  <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/454195>