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CRWR 310.02: Intermediate Fiction Workshop

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CRWR 310 • Fall 2021 • T Th 12:30-1:50 • Room: LA 305

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UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Withdrawal/dropping

Please see the university calendar for all deadlines: <https://www.umt.edu/registrar/calendar.php>

Attendance/absence policy

Students who are registered for a course but do not attend the first two class meetings may be required to drop the course. This rule allows for early identification of class vacancies to permit other students to add classes. Students not allowed to remain must complete a drop form or drop the course through CyberBear to avoid receiving a failing grade.

Students who know they will be absent should contact me in advance. Communication, and the trust it builds up, goes a *very* long way. (This goes for all issues, not just absences.) The more often and clearly you communicate about your needs – *before* your lateness or absence, not *after* – the more understanding and accommodation you are likely to receive. There are nearly a dozen other people counting on your presence for the class to run with maximum effectiveness. Please be respectful of their time and mine.

Students are expected to attend all class meetings and complete all assignments for courses in which they are enrolled. I may excuse brief and occasional absences for reasons of illness, injury, family emergency, religious observance, cultural or ceremonial events, or participation in a University sponsored activity. (University sponsored activities include for example, field trips, ASUM service, music or drama performances, and intercollegiate athletics.) I will excuse absences for reasons of military service or mandatory public service; please provide appropriate documentation (see below).

Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student's customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive an authorized absence for a cultural, religious or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student's attendance or participation. Authorization for the absence is subject to approval by the instructor. Appeals may be made to the Chair, Dean or Provost. The excused absence or leave may not exceed five academic calendar days (not including weekends or holidays). Students remain responsible for completion or make-up of assignments as defined in the syllabus, at the discretion of the instructor.

Students in the National Guard or Reserves are permitted excused absences due to military training. Students must submit their military training schedule to their instructor at the **beginning of the semester**. Students must also make arrangements with the instructor to make up course work for absences due to military service.

Lateness:

Please be on time. Chronic lateness will result in docked grades.

Absence:

More than one unexcused absence will compromise your grade. Five or more unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. Here's the breakdown.

2nd absence: final grade drops one letter grade (example: A drops to B)

3rd absence: final grade drops two letter grades (example A drops to C)

5th absence: final grade is an F

Without attending class, you cannot perform your role as a student involved in learning, planning, inventing, drafting; discussing reading and writing; learning and practicing rhetorical moves and concepts; or collaborating with your instructor and classmates.

I reserve the right to adjust the policy in cases of significant, documented illness or emergency. Please note that instances of poor time management on your part do not constitute extenuating circumstances. If you must miss class, you are responsible for obtaining any handouts or assignments for the class from a classmate. Make sure you talk with me in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.

Lastly, just because an absence is excused does not mean you can have an unlimited amount. The range of the flexibility and accommodation depends on the situation and your corroboration as per the requirements above. **(Please also see, below, the particulars of attendance accommodations for students with disabilities.)**

COVID

- **Mask use is required within the classroom or laboratory.**
- If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please don't come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
- If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress. (Add specific information about how you, as the instructor, will continue providing course materials to students in quarantine or isolation.)
- (If instructors are comfortable sharing or including this) UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.
- Where social distancing (maintaining consistent 6 feet between individuals) is not possible, specific seating arrangements will be used to support contact tracing efforts.
- Class attendance and seating will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts.
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.
- (If applicable) Mask use is required in vehicles when traveling to field sites as part of class/fieldwork.
- (If applicable) Please note this class is being recorded. Notifying students is a requirement if this is the case.

- As the semester progresses, the class may need to amend this syllabus and schedule to suit changing needs, such as a shift to remote instruction. The university expects you to have ready access to computers or other electronic devices that will allow you to meet and communicate online.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined in the UM Student Conduct Code as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. In this course it will result in a failing grade. Or, as the Provost's office puts it, "All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code: (http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php)."

Info on accommodation of students with disabilities

Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction for students with disabilities in collaboration with instructors and Disability Services for Students, which is located in Lommasson Center 154. The University does not permit fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications. Please see https://www.umt.edu/dss/faculty-staff/Frequently_Asked_Questions.php for more information. **There is more information at the bottom of this syllabus. In brief, a DSS letter by itself will not be adequate as a justification for unlimited missed classes.** In concert with DSS, the English Department has arrived at a policy that requires a failing grade after 8 absences for a student with reasonable accommodations.

(https://www.umt.edu/dss/faculty-staff/Frequently_Asked_Questions.php):

"Class attendance and assignment policies are set by faculty or departments. When the functional limitations of the disability affect a student's participation in his/her classes, the student's coordinator may recommend flexibility with attendance and deadline policies as a possible reasonable modification.

However, flexibility with attendance and deadline policies may not be reasonable if class participation is determined as an essential component of the class.

Instructors do not have to grant retroactive modification requests from students.

When requesting extended deadlines, students must to notify the instructors before the due date and make arrangements with the instructor to determine the new due date. The extended deadlines should not compromise the integrity of the course.

Instructors determine policies about make-up work, missed quizzes or exams. The instructors have the right to hold to their academic standards and are not required to lower or modify essential course elements to provide modifications to students with disabilities.

Discussion between the instructor and the student is essential. Disability Services coordinators are available to participate in such discussions."

Preferred Name & Preferred Gender Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

University of Montana Policy on Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Misconduct, Stalking and Retaliation: <https://www.umt.edu/policies/browse/personnel/discrimination-harassment-sexual-misconduct-stalking-and-retaliation>

CLASS POLICIES

Learning outcomes

In this class, we will use excerpts of published novels, short stories, discussion of creative-writing exercises, and workshopping of each other's stories to learn how to be better readers, better writers, and maybe even better human beings. What you take out of the class will be proportional to what you put in.

We will also practice being opinionated without being judgmental. **Tolstoy:** "If I were told that I could write a novel in which I should set forth the apparently correct attitudes toward all social questions, I would not devote even two hours of work to such a novel."

Expectations

- This class will take writing very seriously, and will regard writing as a discipline that has to do with technique no less than inspiration. We will not be journaling, or things like that; we will be discussing very specific and concrete notions of what makes a story interesting that you will be expected to try to incorporate into your writing.
- You will be expected to participate in the class discussion on a regular basis, and if you're not volunteering, I will call on you. The success of a class depends on students who participate in the conversation. If you're shy, come talk to me, and we will work something out. But if you are not participating due to lack of preparation, or to indifference, on a habitual basis, I will ask you to leave the class.
- This class will take grammar very seriously. You will be expected to read a chapter of Patricia T. O'Conner's *Woe Is I* (required text) every week and be prepared to discuss it. You should be prepared to have the grammar in the exercises you will be doing weekly discussed in class as well, and of course in the short stories you will be writing.
- You will learn a lot and, hopefully, be inspired. But I do not coddle, and I do not look the other way; I call out, and I grade without a curve. Think "intense, but fair." Or "fair, but intense" – wherever you prefer your emphasis. If you have an issue, you will find me reasonable and ready to work with you – I promise you that. (But you do have to come to me with the issue instead of stewing unhappily in private, or acting disengaged, as that will cause a problem for you and the class. You will **never** be punished for having a problem with the class.)

Grading

You will be graded on:

- Attendance and being on time (please see policy below) – 33%
- Sincerity of effort in your writing – 33%
- Class participation/sincerity of effort in your critiques of writing by others – 33%
- Please note there is no final project in this class, only the work you do during the semester, though we *will* meet during finals week.

Prep materials

You will be expected to print and bring to class everything we will be discussing. That's about 50 pages a week. I am not asking for this without mindfulness of the environmental impact – but there is no substitute for engaging with the work actively, pen or pencil in hand. Of course, it's possible to do so electronically, but **laptops and cell phones will not be permitted in class**, so hard copies it will have to be. I am not assigning any books other than the O'Conner specifically for this reason. I will supply you with all the PDFs you need.

Class structure

- For the first 2/3 of the course, you will be doing exercises weekly and uploading them to Moodle. (Each week, we will discuss three or four of these exercises, which you will be expected to print and bring to class, together with a print-out of your own exercise.) For the last 1/3 of the course, you will be workshoping stories by each other. You will be expected to produce, in response to these stories, substantial and meaningful critiques that incorporate the principles of great fiction that we have discussed throughout the semester. (You will be uploading these as well. Minimum 250 words.)

- For the first 2/3 of the course, you will also be reading about 50 pages of fiction a week. On Tuesdays, we will discuss exercises by 3-4 of you, in alphabetical order (though, again, everyone has to do them and bring print-outs – of theirs and of the students under discussion – to class). On Thursdays, we will discuss that week's fiction reading. (A different student will introduce the reading every week.) For the last 1/3 of the course, we will be focused on workshop.

Writing requirements and etiquette

DON'Ts

- 1) Please do not turn in writing that has spelling errors.
- 2) Please do not turn in writing that has not been proofread.
- 3) Please do not turn in writing that is not grammatical, unless lack of grammar or non-standard grammar has purpose in your story. (It will never have purpose in your written critiques.)
- 4) Please do not turn in writing that does not respect *some kind of* convention of fiction-writing, to be discussed in class. You can mark dialogue with double quotation marks, with single quotation marks, or with dashes – but you need to stick with one, and you need to use it every time someone speaks. You need to put your commas inside your quotation marks. Etc.
- 5) Please do not turn in things that were written the night before. It'll show every time. You will get a warning once, and after that, your writing will not be discussed.
- 6) Please do not turn in stories that you wrote for another workshop unless you have revised them extensively.

7) Please do not turn in your stories as non-editable PDFs. I make comments on your stories electronically for easier consumption. (I expect you to review these comments closely.)

If more than 10% of your work features the above problems, I will not look at it. As in everything, sincerity in effort is a major mitigating factor. If you're not certain about something, please ask – I would be very glad to help.

DOs

- 1) Please identify your writing with your name.
- 2) Please double-space your writing.
- 3) Please use 12-point Times New Roman font.
- 4) Please number the pages in your submissions.

- You are welcome and encouraged to write about people who are not like you, but please take care not to traffic in lazy stereotypes. Political correctness – NO. Curiosity, empathy, goodwill, and sensitivity – YES. Don't worry about making mistakes – as long as they're sincere, they're a great opportunity to discuss something meaningful. This is a safe space for exploration, learning, trying things out – as long as the trying is sincere. We're all on the same team. Let's stay there. If you're not certain about how to handle something, please ask.

- In your writing, be as experimental and non-traditional as you like, but respect us by turning in work into which you've put genuine effort. You will be welcome to participate in the discussion of your story, but:

- "You didn't get it" is not a useful response to feedback. If more than one or two people didn't get something, it might be because you could do a better job with it. Have a listen – you can always ignore it later.

- "It really happened that way" is not a useful response – great fiction has a very different structure from real life.

- "It's supposed to be vague" is not a useful response – ambiguity (though never vagueness) has a place in great fiction, but it's hard to pull off and in clarity is never a part of it. More like double-clarity. I'll explain.

- On the other hand, not everything you hear from your classmates (or me) will be useful. Feel free to ignore some, or all, of it. Trust your gut.

Reading requirements and etiquette

Stories: Print out the stories up for discussion, read them twice – first to understand what they says, second to evaluate them – mark them up heavily (we will discuss in class what I mean), compose a 250-word (at least) critique (*for the stories only*) about what you think worked and didn't, come to class ready to discuss this, return the marked-up stories + critiques (only) to the author, and upload the critiques AS ONE DOCUMENT to a dedicated folder on Moodle by class time. Don't wait to do these till the last minute, and please don't be late with them. You cannot e-mail me yours after class. (NB: You are welcome to enter your comments on a workshop story electronically, and print *that* out, but you do have to print it to have it on hand for the class discussion. How you return the marked-up story and critique to the author – e-mail or printed – is up to you, but if you print both, please do your classmate a favor and staple or paper clip your critique to the story. NB: Please do not post your critiques as replies to the story submission on Moodle, as that moves the story to the top of the thread and confuses things.)

Exercises: You will print out the ones under discussion that week, read them twice, mark them up with your comments, and come to class prepared to discuss them. But you will not be supplying me or the author with a written critique here. Please also bring a print-out of your own exercise, as you may be called on to read it out loud.

Published fiction: Print, read twice, mark up heavily, come to class prepared to discuss.

There are too many of us to go around the room one by one, and I don't like doing that, anyway – the point is to get a conversation going. Please volunteer your thoughts, or be prepared to be called on. The conversation will benefit from having everyone's voice, but if you are strenuously opposed to speaking, let me know.

DON'Ts

- "I didn't like it" is not adequate criticism. "I didn't think there was enough at stake for the main character when they lose the dog – they never liked the dog in the first place" is.
- "I didn't understand it" is not adequate criticism. "I couldn't understand whether, in the end, the character becomes the dog, or remains human" is.
- "I don't like science fiction" is not adequate criticism. "I think that just because this is science fiction doesn't mean the universe shouldn't have rules and logic of its own" is.
- As I hope does not require saying, no ad hominem attacks – no attacks, period. You don't have to like the story, but you do have to help the author figure out how to make it stronger, in the context of what they were trying to achieve.

DOs

- Your criticism should be like your writing: Concrete, specific, vivid. Please cite examples. Please feel free to offer alternative solutions to what you see as the story's challenges, as long as they're suggestions rather than prescriptions.
- Please evaluate the writing in terms of what the author was trying to achieve. If the characters are detached and remote, is that because the author seems to want to make them come alive and just hasn't yet figured out how to do it, or because it's an intentional evocation of something essential to the story? Just because it's intentional doesn't mean it works, of course, and if you think it doesn't, you should say so (gently). But it's important to try to work from how they do it rather than how you'd do it.
- If you're looking for how to begin, it can help to start by summarizing what you understood to be the point, the contract, the intended achievement of the story. You might continue by specifying what worked well – and extreme concreteness is just as critical here. Then what didn't.
- Every piece of writing has to grapple with structure, pacing, characterization, dialogue, stakes, the usual craft business. Even alternative universes need logic and rules. Even autofiction needs to be shaped and distilled. If you're trying to figure out how to continue your critique, spoken or written, work down the checklist.

SYLLABUS

Woe is I throughout.

PART I

WEEK 1

Tuesday, August 31: Introductions, syllabus, workshopping order, presentation order, etc.

Homework:

- Reading for Thursday (pp. 1-37, David Benioff, *City of Thieves*), hopefully begun in advance

Thursday, September 2: Discussion of assigned reading, introduced by last person in alphabet

Homework:

- Exercises for Tuesday, uploaded by class time for everyone other than the first four names in the alphabet, who have to upload by midnight on Sunday. (**Everyone has to bring theirs to class and be prepared to read them out loud, in case we have extra time.**)

EXERCISE: In 250 words, do what Benioff does in the first 37 pages. Either in text describing the story, or by trying your hand at actual short story content, introduce conflict, stakes, and suspense. You can do it through the tools Benioff uses (compelling, adversarial characters in danger and a simple goal to save themselves from it) or others of your own devising.

- Print, read closely (at least two times), and make comments (for yourself) on exercises by the first four names in the alphabet. Come prepared to class to discuss them.

- Get started on reading for Thursday, September 9 (pp. 1-45, Stephen King, *The Shining*). Same logic. Print, read twice, make comments, come to class prepared to discuss from a craft perspective.

WEEK 2

Tuesday, September 7: Discussion of the exercises by the first four names in the alphabet.

Homework: Finish reading the published-fiction assignment for Thursday.

Thursday, September 9: Discussion of assigned reading, introduced by second-to-last person in alphabet

Homework:

- Exercises for Tuesday, uploaded by class time for everyone other than the next four names in the alphabet, who have to upload by midnight on Sunday.

EXERCISE: Do what you did last week, except to elicit suspense tinged with horror, for instance a bachelor party of standard-issue bros at a remote vacation home (say, on an island off Maine) that gets, say, fogged in, so no way out, and they start getting picked off one by one. (Obviously, you won't fit all of this into 250 words if you're trying to write the actual story. Just get us started. **This week, try to focus a little bit more on character – tell us a bit more what the people in your story are like.**)

- Print, read closely (at least two times), and make comments (for yourself) on exercises by the next four names in the alphabet. Come prepared to class to discuss them.

- Get started on reading for Thursday, September 16 (pp. 1-43, Tana French, *In the Woods*; Elmore Leonard, “3:10 to Yuma”). Same logic. Print, read twice, make comments, come to class prepared to discuss from a craft perspective.

WEEK 3:

Tuesday, September 14: Discussion of exercises by Students 5-8
Homework: Finish assigned reading.

Thursday, September 16: Discussion of assigned reading, introduced by third-to-last person in alphabet

Homework: See above.

EXERCISE: The usual 250, except this week, pay extra attention to **dialogue** and **setting**. I assigned you a story from Ireland and another from the Old West so we can do the same in our discussion of the reading. Think as well about the ways Leonard creates and resolves suspense in a short-story format, as opposed to the novel openings we've been reading.

- Reading for Thursday, September 23: pp. 1-49, Emma Donoghue, *Room*

WEEK 4:

Tuesday, September 21: Discussion of exercises by Students 9-12

Homework: Finish assigned reading.

Thursday, September 23: Discussion of assigned reading, introduced by fourth-to-last person in alphabet

Homework: See above.

EXERCISE: The usual 250, except this week, pay extra attention to point of view and voice, for instance, as in *Room*, the perspective of a child or another character who sees the world differently from your standard adult, deploying a distinct vocabulary to do so. (**We will discuss these on Tuesday, October 5.**) Reading for Thursday, October 7: Tobias Wolff, "Hunters in the Snow"; Jhumpa Lahiri, "Heaven-Hell"

WEEK 5:

We will not meet this week. You will still have assigned reading (pp. 1-50, Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*) and do/upload your exercises but there will be no assigned reading, as this "bye" week is meant to serve as an opportunity for you to begin to think about and plan the short stories you will write in the last third of the semester. In addition to uploading your exercises, you will also upload 250 words describing your conceptualization of your short story so far. Make sure to mention the conflict/stakes/suspense, characters, dialogue, setting, point of view, and voice.

EXERCISE: Copy Agatha Christie. Give me the opening 250 words of a short story in which a detective of foreign nationality is traveling through a foreign land, and encounters circumstances that suggest something out of the ordinary will happen.

PART II

WEEK 6: Transition to short stories

Tuesday, October 5: Students 1-3, exercises from the week before "break."

Homework: Finish reading for Thursday.

Thursday, October 7: Discuss assigned reading, introduced by fifth-to-last... (Extrapolate this for the remainder of the course.)

EXERCISE: Your choice, from the Exercise List (to be sent around)

Reading for Thursday, October 14: Kirstin Valdez Quade, “The Five Wounds”; Molly Antopol, “The Quietest Man”

WEEK 7

Tuesday, October 12: Exercises, Students 4-6.

Thursday, October 14: Discuss assigned reading.

EXERCISE: Your choice, from the Exercise List

Reading for Thursday, October 21: Raymond Carver, “Cathedral”; Flannery O’Connor, “A Good Man is Hard to Find”

WEEK 8

Tuesday, October 19: Exercises, Students 7-9.

Thursday, October 21: Discuss assigned reading.

EXERCISE: Your choice, from the Exercise List

Reading for Thursday, October 28: Annie Proulx, “Brokeback Mountain,” Junot Diaz, “Drown”

WEEK 9

Tuesday, October 26: Exercises, Students 10-12.

Thursday, October 28: Discuss assigned reading.

EXERCISE: Your choice, from the Exercise List

Reading for Thursday, November 4: Adam Haslett, “Notes to My Biographer,” Amy Bonnaffons, “Horse”

WEEK 10

Tuesday, October 30: Exercises, Students 13-15.

Thursday, November 4: Discuss assigned reading.

NO EXERCISE

Reading for *****Tuesday, November 9*****: Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery,” Mary Gaitskill, “Secretary”

WEEK 11: Short stories

Tuesday, November 9: Discuss assigned reading. Stories due for Students 1-2.

No class on Thursday, November 11 due to Veterans’ Day. Stories due for Students 3-4.

PART III: Workshop

WEEK 12: Transition to workshop

Tuesday, November 16: Students 1-2. Stories due for Students 5-6.

Thursday, November 18: Students 3-4.

WEEK 13: Workshop

Tuesday, November 23: Students 5-6. Stories due for Students due for students 7-8.
Thursday, November 25: No class. Thanksgiving. Stories due for Students 9-10.

WEEK 14: Workshop

Tuesday, November 30: Students 7-8. Stories due for Students 11-12.

Thursday, December 2: Students 9-10. Stories due for Students 13-14.

WEEK 15: Workshop

Tuesday, December 7: Students 11-12. Story due Student 15.

Thursday, December 9: Students 13-14

WEEK 16 (Finals week):

Student 15 + round-up