Techniques of Fiction
Wesleyan University — Fall 2014

ENGL 296 02
ALLB 304
Fridays, 1:10-4:00pm

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Course Description

In this introduction to the elements of fiction, we will divide our time between reading contemporary literature and philosophies of writing, as well as crafting a cohesive body of creative work. Through close readings and in-class writing experiments, we will compose fictions inspired by our research. There will be weekly presentations on the literature we read, as well as class discussions and workshops of one another's creative work.

Objective: Guided contemporary literature and analytical investigation, students will craft a cohesive body of creative work while developing an engaged daily writing practice.

Some guiding questions: What is fiction? What does fiction aim to do and what does it ask of us? What does it mean to dream within the components of fiction? And how might we expand the boundaries of these components to contain our dreaming?

Class Format: Language, by nature, is about active thinking. In this class, we will think actively together. This is a discussion-based course; it is not a lecture-based course. This means that our class will be guided primarily by the questions, comments, investigations, concerns, and revelations that you bring to our discussions. So please, come prepared, engaged, and ready to ask and think through questions.
Required Texts

On Writing:
— *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* by Helene Cixous
— *Devotional Cinema*, by Nathaniel Dorsky
— *Making Handmade Books* by Alisa Golden (Lark Crafts)

Literature:
— *The Street of Crocodiles and other stories*, by Bruno Schulz
— *At the Bottom of the River*, by Jamaica Kincaid
— *The Pink Institution*, by Selah Saterstrom
— *Cosmicomics*, by Italo Calvino

Handouts (provided by Dr. Vogel) On Writing:
— “What is English Literature,” from *Lectures in America*, by Gertrude Stein
— “Poetry & Grammar,” from *Lectures in America*, by Gertrude Stein
— “The Book as a Container of Consciousness,” from *Finding a Form*, by William Gass
— “Finding a Form,” from *Finding a Form*, by William Gass

Assignments

1. **Weekly Writer’s Journal Entries** (20% of your final grade):

   Each week you are expected to have composed at least 1-3 full, hand-written pages (more if your handwriting is gigantic) in your journal. These entries should be focused on your research and writing, the books we read and your informed responses to them, as well as your revision processes.

   I want you to experiment with, and pay close attention to, your own acts of reading and writing. The books we read are demanding texts that will, if you read and re-read with care, disorient you, thus helping you to situate your writing practice. These entries are meant to detail your development, your concerns, your intentions as writers, and the questions and revelations that arise during this course. Be honest with yourself. Take risks within your pages.

   Please remember that this class is conversation based; it is rooted in our questions and concerns as writer-thinkers and how we investigate and talk through these concerns. As such, there will be ample time dedicated to constructive conversation focused around the topics outlined in your journals so please come having written and prepared to actively participate in conversation.

2. **Bi-Weekly Presentations** (20%):

   Each week three or four students will give engaged ten-minute presentations meant to respond to the readings. Students will be expected to speak between eight and ten minutes. I will stop you at ten minutes, so really think through the timing of your presentation. Missing the day when you are scheduled to give your presentation is a very bad thing. You will not have the opportunity to make up your presentation. Be prepared to hand in the lecture notes, etc. for your presentation to receive credit.

   (directions continued on next page)
These presentations may, and inevitably will, overlap somewhat with your weekly Writer’s Journal work. That is, you are permitted to use an edited and typed-up Writer’s Journal entry as your presentation.

Presenters should come prepared to answer questions as well as pose questions for class debate. The number of presentations each student will be responsible for will depend on the number of students who end up in the class.

3. **Bi-Weekly Creative Work (20%)**:

Every other week you will hand in 1-3 pages of creative work.

These pages will be inspired by in-class writing exercises spurred by the books we read.

NOTE: If you are scheduled to workshop, _____ copies should be brought in to our next meeting; if you are not scheduled to workshop, just bring one copy to hand in to me for critique.

4. **Bi-Weekly Workshops (20%)**:

Every other week, a selection of you will have your writing workshopped by the class. Each person will have his or her work workshopped 1 time over the course of the semester.

Workshops are careful, respectful, and constructive close readings/critiques of one another’s creative work. They are meant to help the writer to re-imagine, revise, and expand sections of their writing. Everyone is expected to actively participate in this conversation. In this class, you will learn how to constructively engage a piece of writing and contribute both macro and micro editing suggestions effectively.

5. **Final Projects (2-parts) (20%)**:

a. **Final Book Arts Project:**

A hand-bound book consisting of 10 or more pages of your revised creative work.

Details: You are each required to design, print, and hand-bind (at least 2 copies) of your revised, creative portfolio. This will be explored and discussed in great detail throughout the course.

On the last day of class we will have a gallery of our hand-made books as well as a reading.

Note: This book must include a 4-8 page statement on your writing practice (outlined below).

(directions continued on next page)
b. A Lyric Essay/Writing Statement:

Details: This will be a 4-8-page paper in which you discuss—creatively and critically—the evolution of your reading and writing practices over the semester. This will be either the foreword of afterward of your final book arts project.

You must (at the very least) cite:

1. 2 of the books we've read for the course
2. Your own creative works
3. Your Writer's Journals

Some Things to Consider for your Analysis:
- What three primary things did you observe about your process over the quarter (ground this in examples from your Writer's Journals and reveal their relevance)?
- What shifted in your thinking about writing and reading? Why?
- What are your future writing/reading intentions, goals, and challenges? And how will you meet them?
Attendance

Attendance at each class meeting is required. An absence will only beexcused if negotiated in advance or if it is a medical emergency. If necessary, you will be permitted one unexcused absence; each additional unexcused absence will lower your grade by one full letter. Three absences will result in failure of the course. Note: extra work will be required to make up any class you miss. Because the work we do in this class is participatory, you are expected to attend every class, be on time, and contribute to class discussions by doing the assigned homework. If you are more than 5 minutes late to class or 5 minutes late from break, 3 points will be deducted from your participation grade. If you must miss class, please contact me before the class via email. It is your responsibility to inquire what you missed, to pick up homework, etc. If you are absent and you miss any workshopping, your creative work is considered late.

Late for class/from break = 3 points will be deducted from your participation grade
1st absence = for medical/family emergencies or religious holidays
2nd absence = lowers your grade one letter (e.g., from A- to B+)
3rd absence = results in failure

Classroom Decorum

- No cell phones in use. If you are texting, you will be marked absent and asked to leave.
- No computers in use.
- We will take a break halfway through each class. Please refrain from leaving the classroom during class discussions and workshops.
- Late work will not be accepted; if you will be missing class, I expect your work to be emailed to me before our class would have met.
- Impolite behavior in the classroom or on a manuscript will not be tolerated. If I find your behavior inappropriate, I will ask you to withdraw from the class. This classroom will be a safe space for people to write. The stories submitted may or may not fit your aesthetic and that is okay. I expect your endnotes and comments to reflect what the writer wants from her story, not what you would do if you were the author.
- Students are expected to have all readings and assignments completed before class. Chronic lack of preparation (which is easy to identify) will lower your grade.

Disability Resources

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-5581 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.
Course Schedule  (subject to change)

September 5

In Class:
—Introduction to Fiction Writing & Course Objectives
—We ask: “What is Fiction”? We consider how we will make a path through this semester.

September 12

In Class:
—Make Workshop & Presentation Groups
—Outline personal Intentions and Goals
—Begin notes toward Intentions and Goals
—Outline components of Fiction
—Outline Reading like a Writer
—Read and discuss selections from Gertrude Stein’s “What is English Literature”
—Write a Writer’s Journal Response to Stein (remembering what it means to “read like a writer”).

Homework:
—Extend your Writer’s Journal entry on Stein’s “What is English Literature” and “reading like a writer.”
—Read: Cixous’ *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* and write an entry based on questions outlined during class.

September 19

In Class:
—Presentations by: Sarah, Patrick, Monica, & Derek
—Discussion of Cixous’ book.
—Writing Experiment

Homework:
—Complete Writing Experiment. Write 1-3 pages for next class spurred from in-class writing. To be handed in to me.
—Type and print out to hand in to me the answers/responses to the Intentions and Goals questions.
—Start reading *The Pink Institution* by Selah Saterstrom writing entries in your journal as you read. Put this book in conversation with your notes on Cixous.

September 26

In Class:
—Discussion of Intentions and Goals
—Discuss Workshopping Etiquette
—Entire Class Macro-Workshop.

Homework:
—Finish *The Pink Institution* by Selah Saterstrom. Continue to write entries. Remember to put this book in conversation with Cixous’.
October 3

In Class:
— Presentations by: Eileen, Isak, Maya, & Nahulu
— Discussion of Saterstrom’s *The Prink Institution* alongside Cixous’.
— Writing Experiment

Homework:
— Complete Writing Experiment. Write 1-3 pages for next class spurred from in-class writing. To be handed in to me.
— Start reading *Devotional Cinema* by Nathaniel Dorsky alongside Italo Calvino *Cosmicomics* selections. Write entries as you read.

October 10

In Class:
— Workshop. Group 1: Vikrant, Elias, Angela, & Patrick

Homework:
— Finish *Devotional Cinema* by Nathaniel Dorsky and Italo Calvino *Cosmicomics* selections. Continue to write entries.

October 17

In Class:
— Presentations by: Alayne, Ezra, Maurice, & Jamie
— Discussion of *Devotional Cinema* by Nathaniel Dorsky and Italo Calvino *Cosmicomics*.
— Writing Experiment

Homework:
— Complete Writing Experiment. Write 1-3 pages for next class spurred from in-class writing. To be handed in to me.
— Start reading “Poetry & Grammar” by Gertrude Stein and *At the Bottom of the River* by Jamaica Kincaid. Write entries as you read.

October 24

In Class:
— Workshop. Group 2: Eileen, Ashley, Isak, Maya, & Nahulu

Homework:
— Finish “Poetry & Grammar” by Gertrude Stein and *At the Bottom of the River* by Jamaica Kincaid. Continue to write entries.
October 31

In Class:
— Presentations by: Vikrant, Elias, Ashley, & Angela
— Discussion of “Poetry & Grammar” by Gertrude Stein and *At the Bottom of the River* by Jamaica Kincaid.
— Writing Experiment

Homework:
— Complete Writing Experiment. Write 1-3 pages for next class spurred from in-class writing. To be handed in to me.
— Check in on the edits for your final project.
— Begin your final Lyric Essay.

November 7

In Class:
— Workshop. Group 3: Eileen, Ashley, Isak, Maya, Nahulu

Homework:
— Make sure all of your creative edits are up-to-date. Bring a copy of all edited creative work that will be included in your final project to class.
— Finish a first draft of your final Lyric Essay. Bring 4 copies to class.
— Read *Making Handmade Books* by Alisa Golden and begin laying out a draft of your final project. Bring detailed notes and questions toward your final project.

November 14

In Class:
— Workshop. Group 4: Sarah, Monica, & Derek
— Writing Experiment/Workshop related to your Lyric Essays.
— Discussion of final projects

Homework:
— Finish Lyric Essay
— Bring layout and tools for composition of final projects

November 21

In Class:
— Book Arts Studio Time

Homework:
— Finish final projects

November 28

No Class

Complete Final Projects during this week off.
December 5

Final Projects Due

In Class:
—Gallery of final book arts projects
—Reading from essays and final projects
**Additional Requirements** (this will be graded as Extra Credit)

Students are required to attend 2-3 events per semester with visiting writers. Enrolled students must adjust their schedules accordingly.

All events are held on Wednesdays at 8 PM in the Russell House’s Millett Room, 350 High St. A reception and book signing follow each program. There will be a q+a with the visitors at 4:15 pm in Albritton 311 on those dates. The events are free and open to the public.

**Details:** Attend and write a 1-page creative or reflective response to the following readings

**September 17**

**AMY BLOOM**, Wesleyan’s Distinguished Writer in Residence, is the author of the novels *Lucky Us* (Random House, 2014), *Away*, and *Love Invents Us* as well as several collections of short stories. She has been nominated for the National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle Award and received a National Magazine Award, and her work has appeared in *Best American Short Stories, Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*, and numerous anthologies here and abroad.

**October 1**

**AILISH HOPPER** is the author of the poetry collection *Dark-Sky Society* and of the chapbook, *Bird in the Head*. Her poems have also appeared in *Agni, American Poetry Review, Ploughshares, Poetry, and Tidal Basin Review*, among other journals. She teaches at Goucher College.

**October 29**


**November 5**

2014 Jacob Julien Visiting Writer **ARIEL LEVY ’96** is a staff writer at *The New Yorker* and author of *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. Her work has appeared in *Best American Essays 2008* and *Best American Travel Writing 2011*, and in 2014 she received a National Magazine Award for her essay, “Thanksgiving in Mongolia.”

**November 12**

**PAUL HARDING** is the author of two novels, *Enon* and *Tinkers*, which was awarded the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and the PEN American Robert Bingham Fellowship for Writers.

**December 3**

**THOMAS SAYERS ELLIS** is the author of *Skin, Inc.* and of *The Maverick Room*, which won the John C. Zacharis First Book Award. His poems and photographs have also appeared in *Callaloo, Grand Street, The Baffler, Jubilat, Tin House, Poetry, The Nation*, and *Best American Poetry*, among numerous other journals and anthologies. He is co-founder of The Dark Room Collective and a recipient of a Whiting Writers’ Award. He is a Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Wesleyan this semester.
December 3  

HIRSH SAWHNEY is the editor of Delhi Noir, a critically acclaimed anthology of original fiction published by Akashic Books and HarperIndia. He is a regular contributor to The Times Literary Supplement and The Guardian, and his writing has also appeared in The New York Times Book Review, The Financial Times, The Indian Express, and numerous anthologies and journals. He is Visiting Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Wesleyan

Guideline for responses:

— Each effectively written response will add 2 points to your final grade.

— To receive credit, responses must be well-written, handed in the week of the reading, and formatted like this:

  — 1.5 line spacing
  — 1” margins on all sides of the page
  — 12-point Garamond font