

## Intermediate Fiction Workshop

Hartwick College  
ENGL 311 (4 Credits)  
Spring 2019

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Office: 226 Clark Hall, ext. 4921  
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TuTh 2:30 – 4:30 pm, Clark Hall 252  
Office Hours: WF 11:00 am – 12:00 pm  
and by appointment

### Required Texts

Calvino, Italo. *Cosmicomics*. 1965. Translated by William Weaver, Harcourt Brace, 1968.<sup>1</sup>  
Carver, Raymond. *Cathedral*. 1983. Vintage, 2015.  
Eisenberg, Deborah. *Twilight of the Superheroes: Stories*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.  
Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*. 1983. Vintage, 2001.  
Gay, Roxane. *Difficult Women*. Grove, 2017.  
Kincaid, Jamaica. *At the Bottom of the River*. 1983. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000.  
Millet, Lydia. *Fight No More: Stories*. W. W. Norton, 2018.

Additional texts to be covered can be found on the calendar below. These will be available on D2L under “Content Browser: Readings.” See endnotes for bibliographic citations.

### Recommended Materials

I highly recommend acquiring a *folder* dedicated exclusively to this course. Students may also want to set aside roughly ten dollars for printing costs if they go beyond their allotted quota.<sup>2</sup>

### Prerequisites

The successful completion of ENGL 213 Introduction to Creative Writing is a prerequisite.

### Catalog Description

Practice in the writing of fiction; exercises in theme and technique. Workshop and conference. Readings in the short story and the theory of fiction. Does not count as a literature course. (EL)

### Course Description and Purpose

Welcome to Hartwick’s Intermediate Fiction Workshop. In this class, students will read the work of published fiction writers, compose short stories of their own, and write critically about contemporary fiction. Building upon work students have already done in Introduction to Creative Writing, the primary focus of this class will be on honing students’ *craft* in a workshop setting by engaging with the “nuts and bolts” of writing, the techniques, choices, and strategies that will allow students to continue to explore their fictional voice. We will cover a wide range of modern

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<sup>1</sup> It appears that the single volume version of Calvino’s *Cosmicomics* is now out of print, though it appears to be readily and widely available used. As such, the bookstore has ordered a few used copies of the single volume and new copies of: Calvino, Italo. *The Complete Cosmicomics*. 2002. Translated by Martin McLaughlin, Tim Parks, and William Weaver, Mariner, 2015. Either copy is acceptable. Page numbers have been provided below for each.

<sup>2</sup> Students who have any difficulties with printing should feel free to speak with me to work something out.

fiction in order to learn about and explore the formal elements necessary for successful narrative composition. Along with paying careful attention to the effective use of dialogue, plot, character, setting, conflict, and scene in stories, we will also be particularly interested in exploring the boundaries of what is possible in the short story form. This course's focus on *form* is geared toward giving students a better understanding of the various writers we will be reading and for helping workshop participants to explore the possibilities of their narrative art.

We will also discuss a wide range of short stories. It is essential for a writer to develop ways of thinking and talking critically about the work of others and to be aware of their social and cultural milieu, so students should be prepared to read and write about stories concerned with contemporary issues. Readings include engagement with late-twentieth-century writers such as Italo Calvino, Raymond Carver, and Jamaica Kincaid, and twenty-first-century writers such as Deborah Eisenberg, Roxane Gay, Lydia Millet, and others. Encountering the work of important modern short story writers will prepare students to think about broad issues within contemporary narrative art, analyze and assess other students' writing, and evaluate their own compositions. Readings will also invite students to think about the role and function of fiction at the present time. As the stories we tell increasingly move from the page to the screen—whether in film, television, videogames, or fiction read online—what is the role of the short story in 2019? Given the political and economic realities of our era, this course will explore some answers to this question and think about how we might tell different stories, give voice to narratives not yet heard, and imagine other ways of inhabiting our present.

### **How This Course Works**

The main concern of this class is *your* writing, and because of that, though we will be reading the work of established short story writers, you will be asked to bring in a substantial amount of your own work. You will be expected to write one flash fiction piece and three longer stories. Sometimes these stories will be composed in response to specific assignments and sometimes you will have the freedom to write whatever you like.

The primary way we will focus on your writing will be during class in a writing workshop. The first half of most classes will be devoted to discussing the assigned reading and the second half to conversations about student writing. It is rare for me to deviate from a course calendar, so come ready to discuss the various texts to be covered or workshopped each day.

Workshops will be run in a traditional fashion. Each student will have around 20–25 minutes devoted to their work by the class four times during the semester. Within the next two weeks, I will hand out a workshop schedule and assign a primary reader for each student. The primary reader will be principally responsible for responding to their assigned writer's work in writing and at the beginning of the workshop. (See "Primary Reader Assignment" for more details.) Each student will also be expected to write brief comments on their peers' work.

In workshops, students will read an excerpt from their work aloud, followed by a group discussion about the piece. During workshop, the student whose work is being discussed will remain silent until the end, at which time they will be able to ask questions (note: not provide explanations). Though we will be forthright in the criticism of our peers' work, all members of the workshop should strive to make their criticism *generous* and *constructive*. Comments during workshop should aspire not only to improve the work but to better situate it within a student's larger project as a writer. Rather than nitpicking about small issues, I will always be more interested in the bigger ideas at stake and the specific matters of craft and form in a student's writing, so please be aware of this and always be respectful of your peers.

## **Learning Outcomes**

In addition to the basic skills of literary and narrative analysis, students in this course will: 1) learn to identify conventional creative writing techniques; 2) learn to read as writers and use this knowledge to more successfully write and discuss fiction; and 3) learn to produce stories that demonstrate an understanding of literary and formal conventions while also articulating a personal artistic vision.

## **Other Course Requirements and Assignments**

*Texts*—As this course is structured around the knowledge that becoming a strong, careful reader of fiction is essential for developing as a writer, students will be required to have read and be prepared to discuss the assigned texts for each class meeting, including the writing of your peers. This also entails that students bring the texts to class, whether the book, *printouts* of the .pdfs from D2L, or copies of your peers' work. Additional readings for the course (see below) can be found under the "Readings" section of D2L. Please do not let the nature of this class fool you, as students sometimes assume that little reading is involved with creative writing courses. On the contrary, this course asks students to read quite a bit and *very* carefully. Our meetings and discussions will depend upon the rigorous, intelligent, and frequent involvement of each and every participant of the class, and this involvement is simply not possible if students do not come to class prepared. All students must obtain the edition of the texts specified above. Unless individual arrangements are made with the instructor, electronic versions of the texts will not be permitted. Students should expect to read between 100 and 150 pages per week.

*Portfolio*—Submitted during the week of final exams, the portfolio will represent the culmination of your work throughout this semester and will make up the most significant portion of your grade. Your portfolio should include all the original stories you wrote with my comments on them and two newly revised stories. The writing in the portfolio should consist of what you feel best represents the work you did in this course. The two revised stories should display an awareness of the various issues that were discussed in class, should be thoughtfully revised based on comments provided during workshop and in written feedback, and the final drafts should be polished, finished writing. The writing submitted in your portfolio should also display a firm grasp of the conventions and craft of fiction writing discussed throughout the semester. More details about the expectations for your portfolio will be provided later in the semester.

*Individual Short Story Assignments*—You will write four short stories during the semester. These will not be graded, though they will be returned to you with my comments after each of your workshops. For logistical reasons, stories will not be accepted late. Failure to turn in a story will cost a student 25% of their final portfolio grade. The due dates for stories are below and assignments will follow. All stories *must* be handed in as hard copies in class to me and each of your peers; they must also be uploaded to D2L (that way, if you have to miss class, you will still receive credit for turning in your assignment on time and they will be available digitally to your peers). On D2L, there will be a link under "Discussion" to upload your stories.

*D2L Uploads*—To make it easier to find someone's writing on D2L, save all files in the following format: Last Name, First Name--Story ##. For example: Fest, Bradley J--Story 01.

*Weekly Reading Responses*—Each week you will have a Reading Response due that discusses a passage from that day’s reading assignment and that demonstrates you have done the assigned reading. Responses will be a minimum of 250 words, will be posted on D2L, will receive full, half, or no credit, and will not be accepted late. I will drop the lowest two grades. More information is available on the “Weekly Reading Responses Assignment” handout.

*Responses to Your Peers’ Work*—All members of the course will be responsible for writing marginal comments on their peers’ work, and must write a brief paragraph about what they thought each piece was doing well, along with their thoughts on how to improve it. Make sure to read and comment on your peers’ work prior to coming to class. Though I will not be formally checking on the comments that you provide to your peers, if it is clear that students are failing to provide comments on everyone’s work, every class, their participation grade will be negatively affected. If necessary, I will begin collecting these comments.

In addition to comments on your peers’ work, each member of this class will be a primary reader for another member of the class. Primary readers should write notes and comments on each piece of writing from this student, along with writing a 1–2-page reflection on that student’s writing each time they are workshopped. These responses will be collected for credit. Please consult the handout, “Primary Reader Assignment,” for further details.

*Participation*—As we will frequently be engaged with critically reading texts and discussing each other’s work, a crucial part of this class is student participation. Though I will occasionally lecture, the class is conceived as a collective inquiry into the subject matter and class time will primarily be based around discussions that privilege students’ thinking and writing. I am quite excited to delve into the material, as it is both challenging and, in all honesty, quite fun. But this class will be a two-way street and will require the input of all its participants. I know that some students may be more vocal than others, but if I see a student consistently attempting to add to the discussion, I will take this into consideration. I have a habit of rambling a bit, so please help me with this by asking questions of me if you are unclear. Asking questions can be an excellent way of participating. Since this class will rely heavily on student participation, your attendance is a necessity. *More than three absences will negatively affect your overall grade and can be grounds for failure, in which case you may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances.*

### **Grading**

Participation: 20%

Primary Reader Responses: 5%

Weekly Reading Responses: 25%

Portfolio: 50%

## **Classroom Etiquette**

To ensure a positive learning environment for all participants, and to ensure that everyone's work is given the respectful and thoughtful attention it deserves, students should adhere to the following guidelines for classroom etiquette. Failure to do so may result in being marked absent or in penalties applied to a student's overall grade.

*Texts*—Students who do not have their text in class, including their peers' writing for workshop, will be marked absent (whether I draw attention to it or not).

*Lateness*—I often give crucial information and reminders about the course at the beginning of class, so being late is not only disruptive but means that students may miss information that is important to their success. Any student who is more than five minutes late will be marked absent.

*Notes*—Students are expected to take notes during class meetings and should have the materials to do so every day. After nearly fifteen years of teaching, I have found that students who take notes in class perform better than students who do not. A student who fails to have a pen or pencil and notebook out for each class meeting—and most importantly, fails to visibly be taking notes when appropriate—will result in an absence (whether I draw attention to it or not).

*Laptops, Phones, Tablets*—Anyone observed using their mobile phone or another digital device during class, whether I draw attention to it or not, will be marked absent for the day.<sup>3</sup> Phones will not be tolerated in this class, and the use of laptops or tablets in this course will not be permitted unless special arrangements are made with the instructor.

*Leaving Class*—Ideally, students will not have to leave class, as we will have a 5–7 minute break each day. But as a variety of things may necessitate leaving class, students should feel free to get up and leave class without my permission as long as they do so quietly and unobtrusively. If, however, individual students make a habit of leaving and returning during class time (especially if they do so close to a break), I will have to have a conversation with that student about disrupting class. If students continue leaving frequently after this conversation, they will be marked absent each time they leave regardless of circumstance (whether I call attention to it or not). If a student has any issue that would cause them to need to get up frequently, please talk with the instructor in the first weeks of class or at any time during the semester.

*Preparation*—A key part of this class involves reading the work of your peers. If it is clear that you have not done the reading or have not read your peers' work in order to be prepared for workshop, you will be marked absent (whether I call attention to it or not).

*Respect*—Sharing your work with others can be often be a bit intimidating, so I urge all class members to be generous, respectful, constructive, and kind to your peers, even when critiquing their work.

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<sup>3</sup> On how students more fully retain information if notes are taken by hand rather than on a computer, see Meyer, Robinson. "To Remember a Lecture Better, Take Notes by Hand." *Atlantic*, 1 May 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/>.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism is a serious and intellectually inexcusable offense, and it will simply not be tolerated. It will result in an immediate zero for the assignment and I will file a formal charge with the Office of Academic Affairs; plagiarism could also result in more serious action, including a student failing the class completely and being suspended from the College. *Plagiarism includes: lack of proper citations when quoting from someone else's work, representing someone else's work as your own, and knowingly allowing one's work to be submitted by someone else.* This should ultimately be a fun and stimulating class, and there is absolutely no reason for you not to take advantage of being able to do your own work and discuss it in an academic environment. Violations of Hartwick's Academic Honesty policy are not limited to plagiarism—for example, cheating and submitting a paper to more than one class would constitute violations—so students should familiarize themselves with Hartwick College's policy on academic honesty at: <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/>.

### **Academic Adjustments and/or Modifications**

Students must present me with an updated Academic Plan Letter for the Spring 2019 semester in order to be eligible for academic adjustments. Hartwick College is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic adjustments, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of AccessAbility Services, at [sanfordl@hartwick.edu](mailto:sanfordl@hartwick.edu) or [AccessAbilityServices@hartwic.edu](mailto:AccessAbilityServices@hartwic.edu). AccessAbility Services is located on the fifth floor of Yager Library in the Center for Student Success. Any information regarding a student's disability will remain confidential. Requests for academic adjustments should be made as early as possible.

### **The Writing Center**

Located in Clark Hall 230, the Writing Center offers events, courses, and one-on-one tutorials for students. Tutors can help you with your writing for classes or any writing project, and can teach you strategies for organizing, editing, and revising your writing. You can meet with a tutor once or regularly over the course of the semester; the Writing Center will also respond to queries via email. In some cases, I may send you to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can seek assistance on your own. Their services are free. You can browse the services at <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/writing-center/>, or make an appointment by emailing [wcenter@hartwick.edu](mailto:wcenter@hartwick.edu) or calling (607) 431-4910.

### **E-mail Communication Policy**

Each student is issued a College e-mail address (username@hartwick.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the College for official communication with students. I will also communicate with students via their hartwick.edu address. Students are expected to regularly read e-mail sent to this account. Failure to read and react to communications from either the College or from me in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to communications sent to their Hartwick e-mail address.

### **Special Assistance**

Hartwick offers free counseling for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties. The Counseling Center is located in the Perrella Health Center and offers psychological services and sexual assault services. Appointments can be made Monday to Friday, 9 am – 5 pm, by calling 607-431-4420 or emailing [counselingcenter@hartwick.edu](mailto:counselingcenter@hartwick.edu).

### **Mandatory Reporting**

Faculty at Hartwick College are considered *responsible employees* and are legally required to report to Hartwick's Title IX Coordinator, Traci Perrin (607-431-4293; [perrint@hartwick.edu](mailto:perrint@hartwick.edu)), incidents of sexual harassment or violence that they witness or are advised have occurred. Exceptions to this requirement include when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a university-approved research project. For more information, visit: <https://www.hartwick.edu/about-us/employment/human-resources/title-ix/>.

### **Statement on Classroom Recording**

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion, or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

## Calendar<sup>4</sup>

- 2.5 Syllabus  
Introductions  
David Foster Wallace, “Incarnations of Burned Children”<sup>1</sup>
- 2.7 **Reading Response 1 Due to D2L**  
John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction* (pp. ix–81)
- 2.12 John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction* (pp. 82–164)  
Deb Olin Unferth, “Likable”<sup>2</sup>  
Lucy Corin, “Miracles”<sup>3</sup>  
Hugh Behm-Steinberg, “Taylor Swift”<sup>4</sup>
- 2.14 **Reading Response 2 Due to D2L**  
John Gardner, *The Art of Fiction* (pp. 165–94)  
Raymond Carver, *Cathedral* (pp. 3–46)
- 2.19 **Flash Fiction Due**  
Raymond Carver, *Cathedral* (pp. 47–109)
- 2.21 **Reading Response 3 Due to D2L**  
Raymond Carver, *Cathedral* (pp. 111–56)  
Workshop
- 2.26 Raymond Carver, *Cathedral* (pp. 157–227)  
Workshop
- 2.28 **Reading Response 4 Due to D2L**  
Jamaica Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River* (pp. 3–28)  
Workshop
- 3.5 **Reading Response 5 Due to D2L**  
Jamaica Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River* (pp. 29–52)  
Workshop
- 3.7 **Short Story 1 Due**  
Jamaica Kincaid, *At the Bottom of the River* (pp. 53–82)  
Workshop
- 3.12 **Reading Response 6 Due to D2L**  
Italo Calvino, *Cosmicomics* (stand alone, pp. 3–47; *Complete*, pp. 3–48)  
Workshop
- 3.12 Italo Calvino, *Cosmicomics* (stand alone, pp. 51–93; *Complete*, pp. 49–92)  
Workshop
- 3.19 Italo Calvino, *Cosmicomics* (stand alone, pp. 97–153; *Complete*, pp. 93–151)  
Workshop

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that additional readings or handouts may be assigned when appropriate and that the schedule is subject to change. For ease with citation, bibliographic endnotes to the readings available on D2L (anything with an endnote rather than page numbers) have been provided below in MLA style.

- 3.21 **Reading Response 7 Due to D2L**  
Deborah Eisenberg, *Twilight of the Superheroes* (pp. 1–42)  
Workshop
- 3.26 No Class, Spring Break
- 3.28 No Class, Spring Break
- 4.2 **Short Story 2 Due**  
Deborah Eisenberg, *Twilight of the Superheroes* (pp. 43–126)  
Workshop
- 4.4 Deborah Eisenberg, *Twilight of the Superheroes* (pp. 127–170)  
Workshop
- 4.9 Deborah Eisenberg, *Twilight of the Superheroes* (pp. 171–225)  
Workshop
- 4.11 **Reading Response 8 Due to D2L**  
Roxane Gay, *Difficult Women* (pp. 1–82)  
Workshop
- 4.16 **Short Story 3 Due**  
Roxane Gay, *Difficult Women* (pp. 83–147)  
Workshop
- 4.18 **Reading Response 9 Due to D2L**  
Geoff Peck, “Tough,”<sup>5</sup> “Putin in Stillwater,”<sup>6</sup> “Your Father Devouring His Short Stack,”<sup>7</sup>  
“Timothy McVeigh Snared by Kobe’s Musecage,”<sup>8</sup> and a potential excerpt from a novel<sup>9</sup>  
Workshop
- 4.23 **Reading Response 10 Due to D2L**  
Roxane Gay, *Difficult Women* (pp. 149–213)  
Workshop
- 4.25 Roxane Gay, *Difficult Women* (pp. 215–306)  
Workshop
- 4.30 **Reading Response 11 Due to D2L**  
Lydia Millet, *Fight No More* (pp. 1–48)  
Workshop
- 5.2 Lydia Millet, *Fight No More* (pp. 49–110)  
Workshop
- 5.7 Lydia Millet, *Fight No More* (pp. 111–58)  
Workshop
- 5.9 **Reading Response 12 Due**  
Lydia Millet, *Fight No More* (pp. 159–209)  
Adam Kelly, “Beginning with Postmodernism”<sup>10</sup>
- 5.16 **9:30 – 11:00 am | Final Portfolios Due and Class Wrap-Up: Group Reading**

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Wallace, David Foster. "Incarnations of Burned Children." *Oblivion: Stories*, Little, Brown, 2004, pp. 114–16.

<sup>2</sup> Unferth, Deb Olin. "Likable." *Noon*, no. 12 (2012), <http://muumuuhouse.com/dou.fiction2.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Corin, Lucy. "Miracles." *One Hundred Apocalypses and Other Apocalypses*, McSweeney's, 2013, pp. 114–15.

<sup>4</sup> Behm-Steinberg, Hugh. "Taylor Swift." *Gulf Coast*, vol. 28, no. 2, Fall 2016,

<http://gulfoastmag.org/journal/28.2/2015-barthelme-prize-winner-taylor-swift/>.

<sup>5</sup> Peck, Geoff. "Tough." *Cleaver*, no. 6, 10 June 2014, <https://www.cleavermagazine.com/tough-by-geoff-peck/>.

<sup>6</sup> Peck, Geoff. "Putin in Stillwater." *Corium Magazine*, no. 21, November 2015,

[http://www.coriummagazine.com/?page\\_id=4806](http://www.coriummagazine.com/?page_id=4806).

<sup>7</sup> Peck, Geoff. "Your Father Devouring His Short Stack." *Hobart*, 14 May 2018,

[http://www.hobartpulp.com/web\\_features/your-father-devouring-his-short-stack](http://www.hobartpulp.com/web_features/your-father-devouring-his-short-stack).

<sup>8</sup> Peck, Geoff. "Timothy McVeigh Snared by Kobe's Musecage." *Cartridge Lit*, 14 Feb. 2018,

<https://cartridgelit.com/2018/02/14/timothy-mcveigh-snared-kobes-musecage/>.

<sup>9</sup> It's TBD if we will read this or not. If so, this excerpt will be from a manuscript in progress and will be available on D2L.

<sup>10</sup> Kelly, Adam. "Beginning with Postmodernism." *Twentieth Century Literature*, vol. 57, nos. 3–4, Fall/Winter 2011, pp. 391–422.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jake Wolff for the language used in the "Learning Outcomes" section of this syllabus.