Introduction

The goal of this class is to provide students with the fundamental tools to tackle the long narrative form of the novel, and help them develop a resilient creative practice that will sustain the effort required.

Though there are no “rules” for writing fiction, this class will cover the basic principles—used by published, successful writers—identifying them in the novels we will read. The writing exercises are designed to understand these principles by allowing students to see how they work when put at the service of concrete narrative needs. In general, we will focus on the strong connection between technique and meaning.

To help students develop their own resilient creative practice, this class will provide concrete assignments, as well as in-class exercises that will show them the two modes of writing necessary to create fiction. Special emphasis will be placed on a creative process that consistently taps into the subconscious. In addition, we will discuss how some of these practices are used by successful writers and artists.

This class is primarily conceived for novel writing, but it can also be extremely useful for short story writers planning a book (although, less so for flash fiction writers). Students will be required to actively participate in every meeting, prepare a presentation on one of the suggested novels, write a weekly response, and, most importantly, produce a manuscript of at least forty-five pages (≈12,000–14,000 words), submitted in three installments, which ideally should be the part of a novel. Students writing a short story collection will need to submit three short stories of around ten pages each (≈2,800–3,200 words each).
Course Goals

- Provide students with a working set of tools to tackle the form of the novel
- Help students create a resilient creative practice
- Help them develop a habit of reading as a writer
- Support students in the process of dreamstorming a novel and writing at least 45 pages of it

Required Texts

The following texts are required to complete the class assignments and to participate in our discussions. Make sure that you have access to the required texts.

Fiction


On Fiction Writing


Optional


Communication Channels

Most of the interaction in this class will happen in our weekly meetings. However, should you have questions about the class, the readings or the assignments, consider the following options:

- **Office hours:** Tuesdays 3:00 – 5:00 PM @ educ 906. This is the best option. If these hours conflict with other classes, contact me.
- **Email:** jdepierola@utep.edu. I reply to emails once a day, starting at 5 PM, and in the order in which they were received. If you send an email after 5 PM, I will reply to it the following day.
- If everything else fails, and you need to reach me, call the Creative Writing Department at (915)747-5713 during business hours.

Suggested Novels

- Alessandro Baricco: *Silk*
- Donald Barthelme: *Snow White*
- Julie Otsuka: *The Buddha in the Attic*
- J.M. Coetzee: *The Master of Petersburg*
- Paul Auster: *City of Glass*
- Javier Cercas: *Soldiers of Salamis*
- Roberto Bolaño: *Amulet*
- Cormac McCarthy: *Blood Meridian*
- Francine Prose: *Blue Angel*
- Joyce Carol Oates: *Rape: A Love Story*
- Toni Morrison: *Beloved*
- Tomás Eloy Martínez: *Santa Evita*

“Writing is not a race. No one really wins. The satisfaction is in the effort, and rarely in the consequent rewards, if there are any.”
—Joyce Carol Oates
“The challenge is to lend conviction even to the voices which advocate views I find personally abhorrent, whether they are political Islamists or officers justifying a coup.”
—Orhan Pamuk

Guidelines

• Students are expected to follow basic email etiquette for an academic setting.
• Students are expected to read each week’s selection in advance. We will discuss selections from the books listed under “On Fiction Writing,” but it is assumed that students will have read the whole text before its first discussion in class.
• Students are expected to understand the purpose of the master scene which will be the basis for the response (see “Assignments”).
• Students are expected to attend every class, and arrive on time. IMPORTANT: Students cannot miss more than 3 classes, unless there are provable impediments, and these merit special consideration.
• Assignments should be turned in as a PDF file to my email address jdepierola@utep.edu by Tuesday 6:00 PM (the day before class). Name your assignment using the following convention: Week99--LastName. For instance, if your last name is James, your assignment for Week 3 should be named: Week03--James.
• IMPORTANT: Assignments that do not follow this naming convention will be considered late.
• Assignments should be formatted in letter sized paper, with 1 inch margins and in 12 point Georgia, Palatino or Garamond. Assignments longer than two pages should have the following header: Last name / Assignment / Page number. Example: James / Book Review / 9.
• Your manuscript installments should be formatted using the guidelines above, with the exception of the right margin, which should be: 2.5”.
• Students are expected to read the novels under consideration ahead of time, and to prepare a concise commentary about one particular aspect of it and be ready to share it in class.

Assignments

• MORNING ROUTINE: From Week 2, until the end of the semester, students are expected to spend from 15 to 30 minutes every day dreamstorming their novels. IMPORTANT: This is one of the foundations of this class.
• RESPONSE: Due the weeks when we discuss texts on writing (see “Program”), this is a two page (≈600 words) creative response in which you rewrite the master scene focusing on one aspect of technique. Some submissions will be revised and commented in class.
• BOOK ANALYSIS: Due on Weeks 3, 6, 10 and 14. This is a two page (≈600 words) critical assessment of the novel, with emphasis on the narrative devices used, the way in which meaning was conveyed, and the technical problems faced and solved. Well chosen examples are a must.
• PRESENTATION: Due from Week 2 to Week 13. This is a 20 minutes professional presentation on a novel, focusing on form and meaning (See “Suggested Novels”). Students are encouraged to use additional materials and visual aids as needed.
• EDITORIAL REVIEW: Due on each workshop day, this is an assessment of a classmate’s submission. Guidelines will be provided.
• NOVEL MAP: Due with the manuscript submission, using one of the three suggested formats, and based on the current dreamstorming state.
• MANUSCRIPT: Submitted in three installments, due on Weeks 6, 10 and 14. Each one about 15 pages long (≈4,500 words). The manuscript could be a new project, or a new section of a work in progress, but in either case, it must be new material. If you choose to continue a work in progress, you must be willing to accept change as you dreamstorm it. The length of each installment may vary, but your manuscript should add to at least 45 pages total (≈12,000–14,000 words).
Week 1—JAN 18

Week 2—JAN 25

Week 3—FEB 1
• HIGHSMITH: The Talented Mr. Ripley • BOOK Analysis

Week 4—FEB 8

Week 5—FEB 15

Week 6—FEB 22
• SARAMAGO: The Elephant’s Journey • BOOK Analysis

Week 7—MAR 1
• Workshop • EDITORIAL REVIEW

Week 8—MAR 8
• BRANDE: “11. Learning to See Again” • PAMUK: “Words, Pictures, Objects” • SMITH: “12. Mapping Worlds, Moving Cities” • YEARNING, EMOTION • BLACKBOARD—DISCUSSION BOARD

Week 9—MAR 22
• GARDNER: “3. Common Errors” & “6. Technique” • OATES: “The Enigmatic Art of Self-Criticism” • SMITH: “Conclusion: The Ongoing Editor” • DIALOG

Week 10—MAR 29
• OGAWA: The Housekeeper and the Professor • BOOK Analysis

Week 11—APR 5
• Workshop • EDITORIAL Review

Week 12—APR 12
• BRANDE: “9. Reading as a Writer” • OATES: “To a Young Writer,” “My Faith as a Writer” & “Reading as a Writer” • THE ARRESTING OPENING • BLACKBOARD—DISCUSSION BOARD

Week 13—APR 19
• GARDNER: “1. Aesthetic Law and Artistic Mystery” • KUNDERA: “1. The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes” & “5. Somewhere Behind” • SMITH: “POMO f(r)ictions” • TELLING, MEANING

Week 14—APR 26
• KUNDERA: The Unbearable Lightness... • BOOK Analysis

Week 15—MAY 3
• Workshop • EDITORIAL REVIEW

“The only way to know if a novelist has succeeded or failed [...] is to decide whether, through his writing, the fiction lives, liberates itself from its creator and real life, and impresses itself on the reader as an autonomous reality.”

Grading Policy
• Responses .............................. 15%
• Book Analysis .............................. 15%
• Presentation & Participation .......... 20%
• Manuscript & Novel Maps .......... 40%
• Workshop ................................. 10%

University Policy Statements

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY STATEMENT: Cheating is unethical and not acceptable. Plagiarism is using information or original wording in a paper without giving credit to the source of that information or wording, and it is also not acceptable. Do not submit work under your name that you did not do yourself. You may not submit work for this class that you did for another class. If you are found to be cheating or plagiarizing, you will be subject to disciplinary action, per utep catalog policy. Refer to http://www.utep.edu/dao/acadintg.htm for further information.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT: I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. Please, e-mail me during the first two weeks or make an appointment to discuss any special needs you might have. If you have a documented disability and require specific accommodations, you will need to contact the Disable Student Services Office in the East Union Building, Room 106 within the first two weeks of classes. The Disabled Student Services Office can also be reached in the following ways:

Web: http://www.utep.edu/dss
Phone: (915)747-3448 Voice or TTY
Fax: (915)747-8712
Email: dss@utep.edu

“There are no rules and regulations for creative writing. Anyone who is looking for a formula for exciting work will not find it, and writers who rely on formulae usually produce dull results.”