

ENGLISH 312/001

Professor Mark Brazaitis

Office: 219 Colson Hall

Office telephone: 304-293-9707

Office Hours: Tuesday (2-4) and by appointment

Email: Mark.Brazaitis@mail.wvu.edu

Class Hours: Tuesday, 4-6:50

Class Location: Armstrong 123

Objective: In this class, you will learn how to become a better fiction writer. To become a better fiction writer, you must dedicate yourself to both writing and reading fiction, and this class will allow you to do both.

Requirements: Over the course of the semester, you will read sixteen published short stories and one published novel and write at least two short stories of between five and twenty pages. In addition, you will be required to complete ten short writing exercises. Finally, you will be evaluated on the written feedback you give to your classmates.

Quizzes: Whenever a published short story or novel is assigned, you will be quizzed on it. This brief, objective quiz is designed to give credit to students who do the reading and to encourage everyone to participate in class discussion about the works we read. Although there will be no make-up quizzes, your worst quiz score, including a quiz you might have missed, will be eliminated. If you are unable to attend a class and you would like credit for the quiz, you may email me (as an attachment) a 250-word summary of the reading before class.

Take-Home Exercises: Take-home exercises are given below. They should be at least a page but no more than three pages. You should type all take-home exercises because you will be handing them in. Please hand in the take-home exercises on time, as late exercises will be penalized. (If you are going to miss a class, have a classmate deliver your take-home exercise to me or send it to me as an email attachment before class.)

Texts: *Bad Behavior* (Mary Gaitskill); *20 Under 40: Stories from The New Yorker* (Deborah Treisman, editor); and *Memory* (Donald Westlake).

Grades: Grades in this class will be based on the following: attendance/class participation (10 percent); quizzes (20 percent), take-home exercises (30 percent); feedback given to fellow students (10 percent); short stories (30 percent). Note on absences: Two absences are a problem. Three put you at risk of failing.

Extra credit: You may attend and write a one-page review of any two of the “special events” listed below. A review consists of a summary of the event as well as your opinion of the event. (Please type your review.) Each of the extra credit assignments counts for four extra points on one of your take-home assignments. You are encouraged to attend all the events.

Note on your writing: You are expected to produce quality *literary* writing. Please, no genre writing (science fiction, romance, horror, fantasy). The world you create in your fiction doesn't necessarily have to be realistic but your characters must be human (or anthropomorphic) and complex.

Class Schedule and Day-to-Day Assignments

Tuesday, January 10 Get acquainted.

Tuesday, January 17 Read: "Daisy's Valentine" (page 9) and "A Romantic Weekend" (page 31) in *Bad Behavior*. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: January 18: A reading by poet Ida Stewart and creative nonfiction writer Katie Fallon, Colson Hall room 130, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, January 24 Read: "Something Nice" (page 53) and "An Affair, Edited" (page 74) in *Bad Behavior*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene that begins with either this sentence: "He found her crying one day when he came home from work" or this sentence: "He found her laughing one day when he came home from work." Workshop of stories

Tuesday, January 31 Read: "Connection" (page 85) and "Trying to Be" (page 105) in *Bad Behavior*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which two old friends reunite. Workshop of stories

Tuesday, February 7 Read: "Secretary" (page 131), "Other Factors" (page 148), and "Heaven" (page 173) in *Bad Behavior*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which two people with peculiar tastes (in art, in music, in literature, in ways of relating to other people) begin to fall in love. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: February 8: A reading by Dagoberto Gilb, Mountainlair (Gold Ballroom), 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, February 14 Read: "Birdsong" (page 1) and "The Landlord" (page 405) in *20 Under 40*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene featuring a two-timer. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, February 21 Read: "Second Lives" (page 45) in *20 Under 40*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene featuring a person who discovers something disturbing about the man or woman he/she is dating. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, February 28 Read: "The Pilot" (page 115) in *20 Under 40*. **Due:** Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which an insecure character tries to succeed in a competitive situation. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, March 6 Read: “An Arranged Marriage” (page 145) in *20 Under 40*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which two people are on a blind date. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: March 8: A reading by poet James Harms, Mountainlair (Gold Ballroom), 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, March 13 Read: “The Young Painters” (page 177) in *20 Under 40*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Write a scene in which one character betrays another (but not sexually or romantically). Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, March 20 Read: “Blue Water Djinn” (page 283) in *20 Under 40*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Write a scene featuring a mysterious creature or situation. Workshop of stories.

March 25 to March 31 Spring Recess – Enjoy!

Tuesday, April 3 Read: Pages 1-134 (chapters 1 through 11) of *Memory*. **Due**: Take-home exercise: Revise one of your take-home assignments. Hand in both the first draft and your revision. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: April 3: A reading by poet Matthew Zapruder, Robinson Reading Room, WVU Downtown Library, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 10 Read: Pages 135 to 246 (chapters 12 through 21) of *Memory*. Workshop of stories.

Tuesday, April 17 Read: Pages 247 to the end of *Memory*. Workshop of stories.

Special Event: April 19: Reading by students published in *Calliope*, WVU’s undergraduate literary magazine, 130 Colson Hall, 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, April 24 Workshop of stories.

Special Event: April 26: A reading by students graduating from WVU’s Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing Program, WVU Mountainlair (Rhododendron Room), 7:30 p.m.

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Core Values/Social Justice at West Virginia University

The following core values establish the foundation for Social Justice at West Virginia University.

Every person has intrinsic worth and dignity;

Respect for the law is fundamental;

Freedom from fear is universal;

A climate of opportunity, mutual respect, and understanding engenders a feeling that the future should be shared by all community members;

There is an absence of discrimination and harassment based on age, color, disability, ethnic origin, marital status, pregnancy, race, religious beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, and veteran status; and

The rich diversity of people, their cultures, and the bonds that tie people together are appreciated and celebrated.