

Advanced Fiction Writing: The Episodic Novel

CRW 5366/ CRN 27955

Spring 2019

I. Professor's Information

Professor: Sylvia Aguilar-Zéleny, MFA

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Phone: 915-747-5237

Office Hours: 10:00-12:00 pm, Tuesdays and Wednesdays and by appointment

II. Texts & Materials

- Millet, Lydia. *Fight No More*, Norton, NY: 2018.

III. Course Description

The episodic novel is a narrative composed of loosely connected incidents, each one more or less self-contained that plunge the reader into the life of a character or characters.

The very first episodic novel was the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, published in 1554, but some more contemporary examples are given in *The Martian Chronicles* by Ray Bradbury, *Winesburg, Ohio* by Sherwood Anderson, *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan, *Florida* by Lauren Groff, among others.

In this course, students will learn about this genre, as well as play with the possibilities of fiction and form, and work on the production and editing of an episodic novel. Stories will be based on a specific setting or group of characters for an axis to the book as a whole.

IV. Course Requirements

1. Discussion Boards. I will post questions regarding selected topics based on our understanding of fiction, your project, and Lydia Millet's short-story collection. Follow the guidelines for your posts and comments to your classmate's responses.

2. Original Stories. You will write four short-stories this semester, three of them will be workshopped. For each one of them you will create an outline (which most likely will be betrayed as you write, but that is always expected!). Although outlines will not be graded, this material will be useful when writing your preface. To secure the quality of your work, you will first submit your story for workshop with your classmates, then will have a few days to work on your revision and submit the final

version for your professor's evaluation. Make sure you read the final project instructions included at the end of this document before you start drafting.

3. Preface. Using your outlines and the notes on your process will help you in the writing of your preface, to be included in your final submission. This document should discuss the challenges, achievements, as well as twists and findings while writing your episodic novel.

4. Quizzes. To make sure you are all reading Millet's book and take the most out of it, you will have three quizzes, a calendar will be available on Blackboard.

5. Workshops. You are required to provide a summary with your general comments to the author, visible to the rest of the group, as well as in-text comments on the margin of the story using the Review tool of Word.

Grading Breakdown:

Your grades will be determined by your completion of:

- 20% -- Participation on our discussion boards/workshops.
- 15% -- Quizzes (based on the novel and/or the textbook)
- 30% -- Original stories for workshop (10 pts. each)
- 35% -- Episodic novel (including preface and a fourth story)

V. Instructor's Policies

Grading, Assignments, & Deadlines: All assignments, announcements, and posts will be **sent and received via Blackboard**; it is your responsibility to check the page regularly. Also, it is the responsibility of each student to turn in all assignments by the due dates. Late work is not accepted.

Preparing for Class: Students should at least work on their course 3 to 4 hours a week for. This means logging on to read the instructions for the module/week, participate on discussion boards, read the material, and submit work. Instructions or formats for discussion boards, exercises, workshops and final projects will be posted in the Guidelines folder in Blackboard.

Email Protocol, Office Hours & Online Contact:

UTEP email is the best possible way to contact me (8am-4pm, M-F) and has the added bonus of recording our conversations, but please first read the module instructions or this syllabus, sometimes the answers to your questions are already there. When emailing me, please consider it a formal communication: include your name, your course, your question/comment.

If you have an extended question or dilemma that cannot be answered by our online communication, we can schedule a phone appointment to be held during my office hours.

VI. Policies

Academic Dishonesty: Dishonesty in any form is not tolerated in this course. Even one instance will result, at the least, in a failing grade for the assignment. Academic dishonesty is taken very seriously and may result in failure of the course and suspension. The following are brief descriptions of certain types of academic dishonesty. If you have further questions, please speak to the instructor for clarification.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is submitting or using someone else's writing as your own. This is not tolerated. You may wish to use a short quote from another source as part of an essay. You may do this only if the source is properly documented.

Collusion: Collusion is unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing your written work. You may be asked to work with a partner on a specific assignment. Except for those instances, all work must be your own. Getting others to do your work for you is not tolerated.

Students with Disabilities: To promote academic success, UTEP offers a variety of services to persons with documented sensory, mental, physical or temporary disabling conditions. If you have a disability and believe you may need services, please contact the Center for Students with Disabilities to discuss your needs with a counselor. All discussions and documentations are kept confidential.

VII. Creative Project Guidelines

Composed of loosely connected incidents and often linked with a central character or characters, the episodic novel is a way of constructing a plot based on subplots that may or may not work independently and as a whole.

As said before, the very first episodic novel (and as many believe, the very first novel ever written) was *El Lazarillo de Tormes*, in 1554. This is a peculiar example, because this is not only the first episodic novel, it is also the first "picaresque" novel. Picaresque/episodic novels tell the story, often from the first person, of a lowborn character or "rogue" who drifts from place to place and adventure to adventure. This is exactly what the episodic brings: a rich variety of characters and situations.

For this project you will write an episodic novel that links all characters one way or another. Maybe they all live in the same city, but at different time, maybe they are all members of the same family and have yet to discover something about each other. Or perhaps they shared a similar experience a hurricane, a party, a trip... make your episodic novel an entrenched entity in the world of fiction writing and human condition.

Typically, characters change very little over the course of an episodic novel, because what matters is how a relatively simple story may unfold, so explore how your characters interact with the world, and while doing so, discover layer after layer about life.

You will submit three stories for workshop, each one of them should be between 850 to 1350 words (3-5 pages). One last story will be included in your final document revised only by you. By the end of the semester you will have enough material to submit to publications, contests, or perhaps the first draft of a manuscript.

VIII. Format

- Arial 12 pts., double-space, justified text. Include page numbers.
- Submit as a word. doc
- Name your documents with the first letter of your name and your last name, then the number of story, example: **saguilar_story1.doc**
- Review rubric before submitting your first story.
- Each submission should not exceed five pages, but after the editing and revision, your final project can go as long as 20-30 pages.
- Rubric and guidelines for workshop will be uploaded during the first week of classes.

IX. Calendar

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| Week 1 | Introduction to Course Discussion Board 0: Introduce Yourself HW. Start reading first four stories of <i>Fight No More</i> by Lydia Millet Research about Episodic Novel |
| Week 2 | The Episodic Novel Audio/Video on Final Project Disc. Board 1: What is the episodic novel? HW. Draft your project |
| Week 3 | Episodic Films DB 2: To participate, you first need to watch <u>one</u> of the following films (available in Netflix) <i>Babel</i> , <i>Pulp Fiction</i> or one of these (available in Amazon Prime) <i>Amores Perros</i> , <i>Crash</i> , or <i>The Hours</i> . |

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| Week 4 | Your Episodic Novel DB 3: My Episodic Novel, provide feedback, ideas, reading material, music, films to classmates. |
| Week 5 | Writing Week Work on your first outline and write story 1. Quiz 1 H.W. Read following 4 stories by Lydia Millet |
| Week 6 | DB4: Workshop Story 1 |
| Week 7 | Workshop Story 1 |
| Week 8 | Story 1, Revision Submit revision of Story 1 to Professor H.W. Work on Story 2. |
| Week 9 | Spring Break Write, write, write! |
| Week 10 | DB 5: Workshop Story 2 In small groups. Quiz 2 |
| Week 11 | Workshop Story 2 In small groups. |
| Week 12 | Story 2, Revision Submit revision of Story 2 to Professor H.W. Work on Story 3. |
| Week 13 | Writing Week Work on story 3 and 4 |
| Week 14 | DB 6: Workshop Story 3 |
| Week 15 | Workshop Story 3 DB7: How to write a preface Submit revised version of Story 3 to your Professor |
| Week 16 | Revision Week DB 8: <i>Fight No More</i> Quizz 3 Submit Final Project |



