

ENGLISH 205.02
WRITING FICTION
Spring 2011
Carr Hall 203/TTH 11 – 12:15

Professor Elise Levine
Odd Fellows 215/ x 4329/elevine@allegheny.edu
MW 11 – 1, TH 10 – 11, F 11 - 12

COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

This course is an introduction to crafting literary fiction. We will consider the key components of fiction writing — point of view, style and voice, characterization, dialogue, setting, structure and plot — and how you may use these to create fresh, memorable characters and taut narratives. We will also closely examine a number of works covering a range of aesthetic concerns written by contemporary practitioners of the art of fiction. Rather than offering prescriptions — a series of how-to, do-and-don't formulas — this class will instead attempt to spark ideas, provide a sense of fiction as a rigorous discipline steeped in various literary traditions, and encourage the urge to write. Please be aware that we will not be taking under consideration works — yours or assigned readings — of genre fiction, that is, stories that fall under the categories of speculative fiction, fantasy, romance, mystery, thrillers, or westerns. While a large part of this course will consist of intensive discussions of assigned readings and your exercises, the core of our time together will consist of workshopping. The workshop — in which we discuss in depth fiction manuscripts written by you and your peers — yields a supportive focus that crystallizes issues for you to consider during the revision process. By the end of the course you will have:

- crafted a number of short exercises tackling the fundamental techniques of fiction writing, including point of view, style and voice, characterization, dialogue, setting, structure and plot;
- closely read and participated in discussions of contemporary short fiction covering a broad aesthetic range;
- written a first and a revised draft of a short story;
- carefully read, participated in discussions of, and composed written reports critically analyzing stories by your peers;
- conducted an oral presentation in which you analyze a short story in terms of the foundational techniques of literary fiction writing.

REQUIRED READINGS

Burroway, Janet and Elizabeth Stuckey-French, Ned Stuckey-French. *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2010. 8th Edition. **(B)**

Handouts/Course reserves on Sakai — you must print these out and bring them to class on days when assigned readings are being discussed. **(H)/(S)**

Workshop stories — you must supply a hard copy of your story to each member of the class.

RECOMMENDED READING

Gardner, John. *The Art of Fiction*. New York: Vintage, 1983.

Great annual anthologies: *Best American Short Stories*, *PEN/O. Henry Prize Stories*, *Pushcart Prize*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- one short story, 8 - 12 double-spaced pgs. in length, which will be workshopped by your peers (workshop etiquette, logistics to be discussed in class)
- a revised draft of your story
- two written workshop responses, each roughly 2 typed, double-spaced pgs. in length, critically analyzing your peers' stories (logistics to be discussed in class)
- four brief writing exercises, each roughly 1 – 2 pgs., either stand-alone pieces or pulled from your story-in-progress (your choice)
- one oral presentation (presented in duos or trios), in which you lead the class in discussion
- class participation; this includes a few in-class writing exercises that are read aloud and discussed
- attendance at the three *Single Voice Reading Series* events this semester; for each reading, a 1-page, typed, double-spaced response (three total); schedule of readings and due dates tba.

GRADING

- one short story (workshop draft) — 20%
- one revised story — 15%
- two written workshop responses — 20% (10% each)
- four writing exercises — 20% (5% each)
- one oral presentation — 5%
- class participation — 15%
- attendance at reading series events and three written responses — 5%

SOME NOTES ABOUT GRADING

You will receive handouts from me containing guidelines for all assignments. The following are some general guidelines.

Your Fiction:

- A Story or exercise demonstrates not only your awareness of the fundamentals of fiction-writing techniques but also possesses originality and even mastery. Story also demonstrates impeccable spelling and grammar (unless style- and voice-appropriate uses for departing from the conventions are knowingly embraced).
- B With minor editing, story or exercise could earn an A.
- C Work in need of significant rewriting to repair traits such as inconsistent character motivation, unintentional shifts in point of view, incoherent structure, careless spelling and grammar.
- D Story or exercise exhibits your inattention to the fundamentals of the craft of fiction and to the conventions of spelling and grammar.
- F Story or exercise contains plagiarized material, or has missed the deadline.

Responses, Presentations: Thorough, specific analyses — invoking an acute awareness of the craft of writing fiction, and employing pristine grammar, spelling, and logic — will earn top marks.

Participation: Aim for spirited, analytical, constructive participation. Cogently discussing why something works rather than over-elucidating minor or obvious flaws is a skill worth mastering. Participation includes marking your peers' manuscripts with your brief comments and returning them to the authors following workshopping. Also includes in-class writing exercises, to be read aloud and discussed.

PLEASE NOTE: UNLESS YOU FURNISH ME WITH APPROPRIATE DOCUMENTATION, I WILL NOT ACCEPT LATE WORK. I WILL ALSO NOT ACCEPT ASSIGNMENTS ONLINE.

ATTENDANCE AND OTHER POLICES

After two absences, you will lose a full letter grade for each absence, unless you are able to provide me with medical or otherwise-appropriate documentation.

If you are unable to attend class on the day when an assignment is due and would still like to submit work for grading consideration, you must provide me with documentation. Failure to do so will result in your receiving an F for this portion of your final grade. If you are absent for the class during which your story is scheduled to be workshopped, you will receive an F for the workshop-draft portion of your final grade.

Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at 814-332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please do this as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are offences for which serious sanctions will be taken, including at the very least certain failure of this course. Please refer to your student handbook for definitions of these offences and a description of other possible resulting sanctions.

SCHEDULE — SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Weeks 1, 2 — Showing Instead of Telling: Point of View, Concrete Details, Style

- Jan. 20 Intro. to course
 David Foster Wallace, “Everything Is Green” (H)
- Jan. 25 “Everything Is Green”
 Burroway, Chapter 2 (“Seeing Is Believing”)
 The Guardian, “Ten Rules for Writers” (S)
- Jan. 27 **EXERCISE 1 DUE IN CLASS — read aloud, discuss**

Week 3 — Point of View, Style, Characterization

- Feb. 1 Mary Gaitskill, “Tiny, Smiling Daddy” (S)
 Burroway, Chapter 8 (“Call Me Ishmael”)
- Feb. 3 IN-CLASS WRITING — write, read aloud, discuss
 Burroway, Chapter 3 (“Characterization, Part I”); Chapter 4 (“Characterization, Part II”)
 The Guardian, “Ten Rules for Writers” (S)

Week 4 — Characterization, Dialogue, Setting

- Feb. 8 “Tiny, Smiling Daddy”
- Feb. 10 **EXERCISE 2 DUE IN CLASS — read aloud, discuss**

Week 5 — Style and Voice, Characterization, Dialogue, Setting, Plot and Structure

- Feb. 15 Junot Diaz, “No Face” (S)
Burroway, Chapter 5 (“Far, Far Away”); Chapter 6 (“Long Ago”)
- Feb. 17 “No Face”
Burroway, Chapter 7 (“The Tower and the Net”)

Week 6 — Style and Voice, Characterization, Plot and Structure, Pacing, Fictional Time

- Feb. 22 Tina May Hall, “By the Gleam of Her Teeth, She Will Light the Path Before Her” (S); Emily Mitchell, “States” (S)
- Feb. 24 **EXERCISE 3 DUE IN CLASS — read aloud, discuss**

Week 7 — Style and Voice, Characterization, Plot and Structure, Pacing, Fictional Time

- Mar. 1 Rick Moody, “Boys” (S); Michael Martone, “A Bucket of Warm Spit” (S)
- Mar. 3 Hiromi Ito, “I Am Anjuhimeko” (S); Benjamin Percy, “Somebody Is Going to Have to Pay for This” (S)

Week 8 — Presentations

- Mar. 8 **ORAL PRESENTATION** — ZZ Packer, “Every Tongue Shall Confess” (B)
ORAL PRESENTATION — Jim Shepard, “Love and Hydrogen” (B)
- Mar. 10 **EXERCISE 4 DUE IN CLASS — read aloud, discuss**

Week 9 — Presentations

- Mar. 15 **ORAL PRESENTATION** — Sherman Alexie, “What You Pawn I Will Redeem” (B)
ORAL PRESENTATION — Karen Russell, “The Dredgeman’s Revenge” (S)
ORAL PRESENTATION — Sarah Shun-lien Bynum, “The Erlking” (S)
- Mar. 17 **ORAL PRESENTATION** — Tobias Wolff, “Bullet in the Brain” (B)

Week 10 — Spring Break

- Mar. 22, 24 No classes

Week 11 — Rules, Tools

- Mar. 29 *The Guardian*, “Ten Rules for Writers” (S)
WORKSHOP DRAFTS OF STORIES DUE IN CLASS
- Mar. 31 Receive workshop/reader response schedule from me
IN-CLASS WRITING — write, read aloud, discuss

Week 12 — Workshops...

- Apr. 5 **WORKSHOPPING**
READER RESPONSES DUE IN CLASS
- Apr. 7 **WORKSHOPPING**
READER RESPONSES DUE IN CLASS

Week 13 — More Workshops...

Apr. 12 **WORKSHOPPING**
 READER RESPONSES DUE IN CLASS

Apr. 14 **WORKSHOPPING**
 READER RESPONSES DUE IN CLASS

Week 14 — Even More...

Apr. 19 **WORKSHOPPING**
 READER RESPONSES DUE IN CLASS

Apr. 21 **WORKSHOPPING**
 READER RESPONSES DUE IN CLASS

Week 15 — Our Last Workshops

Apr. 26 **WORKSHOPPING**
 READER RESPONSES DUE IN CLASS

Apr. 28 **WORKSHOPPING**
 READER RESPONSES DUE IN CLASS
 IN-CLASS WRITING — write, read aloud, discuss

Week 16 — The Writing Life

May 3 Keeping going: reading, writing, more training, more training — publishing
 REVISED STORIES DUE IN CLASS

NO FINAL EXAMINATION FOR THIS COURSE