Writing the Other:  WRTNG-UG 1215:
W 6:20-9:00 pm
Tisch, Room LC2
September 5 – December 5
Instructor: Aaron Hamburger
aih204@nyu.edu/aaronhamburger@gmail.com/www.aaronhamburger.com
OFFICE HOURS: W 5:00-6:00 and by appointment/1 Wash Place, Room 516

“I always write about my own experiences, whether I’ve had them or not.” — Ron Carlson

In this fiction workshop, we’ll explore how to tackle the perspective of someone whose identity is different from yours. We’ll examine identity in terms of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, class, age, body type, gluten tolerance, nerdiness, and many more categories. How can we learn to recognize our own blind spots that prevent us from seeing the people and the world around us in full color rather than in black and white? And how can we confront and overcome our fears of causing offense in our attempts to get inside someone whose life experience we don’t share?

During the course, we’ll examine how categories of “Same” and “Other” can shift wildly not only from person to person, but within each person. We’ll also look at how the process of choosing or rejecting various identity labels intersects with issues of characterization. Finally, we’ll also think about how the possible dangers of erasing or distorting the Other during writing process.

COURSE GRADING REQUIREMENTS AT A GLANCE:

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<th>33%: Two Short Stories (Fiction)</th>
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<td>• STORY ONE (10-15 pages): A story from the perspective of a character who shares your identity looking at another character whose identity is different from yours. 1st or 3rd person POV is fine. First draft due date TBD individually. <strong>FINAL REWRITE DUE NOV. 28th, NO EXTENSIONS</strong></td>
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<td>• STORY TWO (10-15 pages): A story from the perspective of a character whose identity is different from yours. 1st or 3rd person POV is fine. First draft due date due date TBD individually. <strong>FINAL REWRITE DUE DEC. 10TH, NO EXTENSIONS</strong></td>
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<th>33%: Two Research Narratives (Non-Fiction)</th>
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<td>• (5-7 pages) For each of the two stories above, you’ll research the identity of your “Other” character. Research will involve interviews with at least three people, as well as at least five published articles or essays about that identity. Your research narrative can be in a traditional or semi-creative format, but it must be accompanied by an MLA-style Works Cited page identifying your sources. Research Narrative for STORY ONE due Sep. 19th. Research Narrative for STORY TWO due Oct. 17th. <strong>NO EXTENSIONS</strong></td>
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<th>33%: Class Participation:</th>
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<td>• Meeting assignment deadlines. (Late work earns a maximum grade of C.)</td>
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<td>• Thoughtful completion of <strong>creative writing exercises</strong>.</td>
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<td>• Thoughtful completion of the reading responses and pop quizzes.</td>
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<td>• Read a “wrong” book and write a 1-2 p. reflection on the experience. DUE.</td>
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<td>• Written critiques of fellow students’ work.</td>
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<td>• Regular attendance in class.</td>
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<td>• Active and respectful contributions to in-class discussions.</td>
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ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

GRADING NOTE:
Grades on student projects and writing are based on a rubric of criteria that will be handed out with each assignment. Class participation grades are determined entirely by student effort at fulfilling criteria listed above.

Grades are as follows: A (excellent effort and work); A- (excellent effort, promising work); B+ (good effort, promising work); B (good effort, above average work); B- (above average work and effort); C (fair work and effort); D (poor, but passing); F (failure)

REQUIRED READING:
Students will receive copies of various short stories and excerpts that relate to the course topic.

WORKSHOP FORMAT:
• At the beginning of the semester, you will sign up for two critique dates. One full class before your scheduled critique date, bring in typed, double-spaced, paginated copies of a short story (fiction). All workshop submissions are due at the beginning of class.
• Please provide enough copies for everyone in class and two copies for me.
• Email submissions will not be discussed in workshop.
• I urge you to print your work at least a day before class, so that computer/printer troubles don’t interfere, or so that if you’re sick, you can ask a friend drop off your work to class for you.
• You are required to back up all work for class on-line so you don’t have to worry about computers crashing, printers running out of ink, NYU computer rooms moving, disappearing, or being mysteriously locked, computers being stolen from your residence, dogs viciously attacking your laptop, or other computer problems.

CRITIQUE GUIDELINES:
When you receive a fellow student’s work-in-progress, read and make suggestions directly onto the work for the writer. Then type a response (aim for at least half a page, though feel free to write more) summing up choices you felt were effective as well as constructive advice for next steps the writer could take. Go beyond “I liked it” or “I didn’t like it,” or even less helpful, “I could really relate to this.” What was clear in the work? What did you want to know more about? Where was the energy in the piece? Where did you feel the energy lagging?

Staple one copy of your written response to the critiqued story and give it to the writer. Then give one copy of your typed response to me to take into account in determining your final grade. Class participation points are awarded for constructive, thorough criticism. “WTF?” or “This is boring, so I didn’t read it” are not examples of constructive, thorough criticism. One good way to avoid overly snarky criticism is to avoid the word “you” and instead discuss “the story.”

_I hate two kinds of sentences you hear in workshops, the ones beginning "I really like ..." and the ones beginning "My problem with this story is ..."_ — Denis Johnson
OTHER TIPS FOR SUCCESS:

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE
Any electronic device that must be shut off when a plane is about to take off must also be turned off while you are in class. This means that you should turn off cell phones when entering the classroom. Also, text messaging is not allowed during class time.

The theme of this class is respect. I will treat you with respect and I and your classmates expect the same treatment from you. In addition, I ask that you also be respectful of each other’s efforts as we discuss each other’s work. Any students who feel they cannot be respectful may be asked to leave the class. Classroom etiquette will be taken into account in determining your class participation grade.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:
This class has no excused (or unexcused) absences. The policy is simple: missing more than one full class period affects your class participation grade. Three tardies and/or early exits = one absence. One excessively late arrival/early exit = one full absence. Excessive absences jeopardize your chances of passing the class, regardless of work turned in. If possible, let me know before class if you must be absent. Also, find out from your “study buddy” what you’ve missed.

NYU policy states that any student who requests a grade of Incomplete must do so from the instructor before the final grades are due; if the written request is not made, the instructor will submit a final grade based on work completed to that point. Students who receive a grade of Incomplete are automatically ineligible for the Dean’s List in that semester and may be in danger of losing financial aid. Please see the NYU website for further information.

PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:
As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

WRITING CENTER:
Basic grammar and syntax skills are essential for the work we’re doing in class. I strongly urge you to go to the Writing Center in Room 423 in the Gallatin Building in order to make sure your skills are in order. Appointments can be made online at:
http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/undergraduate/writing/writingcenterappointments.html

“Write from what you know into what you don’t know.” — Grace Paley
SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

INTRODUCTION TO CORE ISSUES
Sep. 5: Introductions. Identification & Description. Division & Classification. Characterization
Homework due next class: Read “Lady of the Lake” by Bernard Malamud. Grocery Store Spies
Exercise. List of research interview questions.

Homework due next class: Read “How to be a Writer” by Lorrie Moore and create your own
“How-to” as a creative exercise. Read and critique three student stories for workshop.

WORKSHOP OF STORY ONE: LOOKING AT THE OTHER
Sep. 19: Workshop/Research Narrative One due.
Homework due next class: Read “Drown” by Junot Diaz. Read and critique student stories.

Sep. 26: Workshop
Homework due next class: Read “The Bridegroom” by Ha Jin. Read/critique student stories

Oct. 3: Workshop
Homework due next class: Read two stories by Manuel Munoz. Read/critique student stories

Oct. 10: Workshop
Homework due next class: Read “The Wig” by Nathan Englander. Read/critique student stories

Homework due next class: Read “Water Child” by Edwidge Danticat. Read/critique student stories

WORKSHOP OF STORY TWO: LOOKING FROM THE OTHER’S PERSPECTIVE
Oct. 24: Workshop
Homework due next class: Read Jhumpa Lahiri. Read/critique student stories

Oct. 31: Workshop
Homework due next class: Read “A Letter to Harvey Milk” by Leslea Newman. Read/critique student stories

Nov. 7: WRONG BOOK REFLECTION DUE Workshop/Homework due next class: Read
“Water Child” by Edwidge Danticat. Read/critique student stories

Nov. 14: Workshop/Homework due next class: Read/critique student stories

Nov. 21: TBD

Nov. 28: REVISION 1 Due Workshop/Homework due next class: Read/critique student stories

Dec. 5: Final Day

Dec. 10th: REVISION 2 Due