WRTNG-UG 1537-001: CRAFTING SHORT FICTION FROM THE SENTENCE UP
Fall, 2014 Tuesdays, 6:20-9 194 Mercer Street, Room 303
Steven Rinehart, sir7@nyu.edu Office Hours: Tues 5-6 Location: Gallatin 431

Description

This class explores the craft of writing, starting with the sentence and ending with the scene. Half of each class is devoted to craft exercises and the remaining half to a traditional workshop approach to discussing student submissions. By the end of the semester we'll be able to talk intelligently about some of the "micro" parts of a short story or novel, giving the students some practical tools for editing those parts.

Course Objectives/Learning Goals

We will cover some very technical aspects of fiction writing (effective dialogue, writing scenes, etc.) as well as provide a critical forum for student stories. We will address each of the following with the goal of giving students practical techniques for editing and improving their writing:

- Improving sentences: 3 things to look for
- How sentence groups work
- How dialogue differs from speech
- Dialogue mechanics: grammar, effect, style, and dialect
- Combining narrative and dialogue
- Beginning and ending scenes

Reading

There is no required text; outside reading will be assigned from literary websites and online magazines.

Assignments:

Writing Tasks: Most weeks I'll assign a short task related to the discussion for that week: a short piece of dialogue, etc. All are mandatory and submitted via email.

Original Fiction: Each student must turn in at least 22 pages of original short fiction during the course of the semester, consisting of no less than 2 separate stories or chapters. These are printed and photocopied to be distributed in class. No revisions will count toward this requirement. I will read and return, in addition to this requirement, one revision of a piece submitted to the class.

Grading/Attendance/Participation:

This class is a workshop--participation is essential for a passing grade. Every student is expected to offer commentary in the workshop setting on every piece of student work discussed, as well as actively participating in the small group discussions. I will be monitoring participation closely.

Grading weight:

- Weekly tasks completed: 25%
- Workshop participation: 50%
- Quality of original work: 25%
The student's grade will be weighted as shown above, then any unexcused absences will be deducted from the participation portion. Unexcused absences include any absence without prior notification, if possible. If you are ill, do not come to class, just remember that missing one class means missing a week of class. Students missing class for any reason are responsible for gathering the materials required for the subsequent class.

**Conferences:**

I strongly urge every student to meet with me once during the semester, and I can generally accommodate times outside my office hours with advance notice. There is no requirement for a conference, unless a student submits a revised piece, in which case we'll discuss the piece in conference.

**Schedule:**

This class builds from the sentence level to the scene level. The following is the order of topics, which may change as the class progresses:

- **Week 1:** *Introductions, Expectations:* Homework assignment.
- **Week 2:** *What is a good sentence?* Group discussion and reading assignment from homework.
- **Week 3:** *How to improve sentences.* Group discussion and reading assignment from homework.
  - First workshop of student work.
- **Week 4:** *Improving sentences, cont’d.* Group discussion and reading assignment from homework.
  - Workshop.
- **Week 5:** *Sentence groups.* Group discussion and reading assignment from homework. Workshop.
- **Week 6:** *Sentence groups, cont’d.* Group discussion and reading assignment from homework.
  - Workshop.
- **Week 7:** Fall recess. Reading assignment: “Care,” Julie Orringer.
- **Week 8:** *Dialogue.* Reading assignment: “Sea Oak,” George Saunders. Workshop.
- **Week 9:** Handout: *Dialogue mechanics.* Workshop.
- **Week 10:** *Combining dialogue and narrative.* Group discussion and reading assignment from homework. Workshop.
- **Week 11:** Tightening a scene. Reading assignment: “Adina, Astrid, Chipewee, Jasmine,” Matthew Klam. Workshop.
- **Week 13:** Concluding a scene. Group discussion and reading assignment from homework.
  - Workshop.
- **Week 14-Final:** Makeup, final stories.

**Electronic devices:**

No cellphones are permitted, and I discourage the use of laptop computers during discussions unless they are used to type up group responses.

**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 (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)