OVERVIEW

COURSE GOALS

Writing workshops are at ease with considerations of and deliberations over ways to start stories, as evidenced by the many prompts designed to encourage writers to jump into new material. Less relaxed are discussions about ways of finishing stories. This is due, in no small part, to our wise reluctance to commit to a definition of a good story. We recoil from definitions that are constructed from the weak scaffolding of exclusion; we abhor definitions that foreclose the possibilities of the unanticipated or unimagined. But far too often these obstacles becomes pretexts for leaving stories incomplete. This semester, however, rather than struggling over how to or why we feel the need to define what makes a good story, we will focus on crafting complete stories that satisfy each author’s intentions, whatever they might be. The goal will be for each writer to produce two stories that s/he believes are, indeed, complete (or in striking range of completion – i.e.: the author knows what else needs to be done and is committed to the time required to do so).

The only assumption with which will approach this work – a fair one, given that the course description indicates as much – is that each workshop member has some experience writing stories and is familiar with the basic elements of fictional craft – plot, characterization, voice, setting, point-of-view, etc.

Throughout the semester it will be essential to remember our purpose: this is a creative writing workshop, not an editorial board or a publishing house where market values or other unfixed dynamics result in publication. There are no correct or incorrect answers in this writing workshop, or ironclad rules to memorize and abide by. Success, instead, will be the measure of how hard you work. Success will mean that you’ve invested yourself in becoming a more knowledgeable writer than you were when you entered this class whatever the outcome on the page, be it a polished piece of prose or a story that still feels just beyond your reach. Success will mean demonstrating an investment in the class itself by acknowledging that the writing life of your classmates is as important as your own.

• Explore the creative process through writing
• Examine individual goals as a writer
• Expand and refine vocabulary and style resources
• Achieve fluency in the conventions of craft
• Learn about varied techniques of fiction
• Learn how to constructively critique and be critiqued
• Establish skills for revising language, plot, and ideas

Spring 2015
CLASS STRUCTURE

Class time will be devoted to student work, with occasional in-class writing exercises thrown into the mix in order to juice up the creative flow. Master stories will be assigned from current magazines and websites, and elsewhere. You will have the opportunity to read some of these stories in early versions and later revisions. There will be little time in class to discuss these stories, however you are required to read them and refer to them when critiquing your classmates’ manuscripts. Speak with me if there is a master story that you think will help the class better understand your work. I will consider substituting your selection for a reading that I’ve assigned.

Active, thoughtful, and serious participation by all students is fundamental to your learning process and to the success of these discussions. The quality of this participation will represent a significant portion of your final grade. This does not mean that you must speak at great length; rather, you should comment on specific aspects of your classmates’ stories in order to help them to identify what you believe are their strengths as well as specific opportunities for further development.

WRITING REQUIREMENTS

Stories-In-Progress

You are required to produce two stories this semester. You will be writing 4 versions of each story, for a total of 8 required submissions. One version of each story will be presented in class; the other two versions will be handed in to me. You will also be sharing each story in a small group setting (2-3 students in each group). You will work on your first story until spring break. You will work on your second story for the balance of the term. I will be assigning personal due dates to each of you for your own stories.

Workshop Manuscripts (must be distributed to the entire class in printed form—no emailing except by my request)

Each student will present longer, original manuscripts twice in class for workshop discussion. You are free to write about anything you choose. These manuscripts should run somewhere between 8-12 pages, doubled-spaced, 12-point font. They should be thoroughly proof read and corrected prior to distribution. Discussions about manuscripts containing recurrent grammar and punctuation errors often get sidelined by grumbling about mechanics rather than focusing, as they should for the sake of the writer, on the story being told. Spell Check and Grammar Check highlight many errors, but there is no better method for finding errors than reading your own work aloud. (Make certain that your Spell Check is set to Formal.)

Spring 2015
The Short Story – A Workshop in Revising

If your story is much longer than 12 pages, ask yourself if you have included more than you need, if you are unnecessarily repeating material, or if you have gone off topic. If your manuscript is much shorter than 8 pages, ask yourself if your story is fully developed, or if there’s more to add that would enrich the story that you’re looking to tell. There is no magic number of pages that constitute a short story – or a novel, for that matter. I do, however, want you to experience the authority of a fully developed story. Likewise, while many short stories run longer than 12 pages, I want you experience the short story as an art of condensation, as opposed to the novelistic world of elaboration. On a practical note, it isn’t possible to give due diligence to the workshop stories at hand as well devote ample time to writing your own stories when reading long manuscripts in a workshop of this size.

Workshop Story Critiques (post on web board discussion page)

When you are reading the work of your classmates, do so with pen in hand and make succinct and legible notes on the manuscript. Also write a brief, narrative response to the work – a paragraph will suffice – in which you focus on some specific aspect of the story with respect to the manner in which it is crafted. While all authors appreciate complements, be sure to use these critiques as an opportunity to identify what you believe is the point of the story, as well as the way in which the author might enrich their story through the further employment of an element of craft. For example: Is the dialogue moving the forward story, or is it merely filler? Is it possible to distinguish one character from another, or should the author further develop attributes of characterization. Which ones? Try to be as specific as you can and as constructive as possible.

These comments must be posted on the web board discussion page by 9:00 a.m. Monday mornings.

NUTS & BOLTS

Grades

-- Writing exercises, manuscripts, and revisions 50%
-- Class participation 30 %
-- Attendance and comportment 20%

(Here is a link to a grade calculator http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~immer/gradecalc.html)

Earning an excellent grade in this class is simply a matter of working very, very hard. All that I ask is that you work with serious intention (even when writing humorously) on all of your creative writing assignments and critiques; hand in all of your writing assignments on

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time; closely read all of the assigned stories; be an active and purposeful contributor to class discussions and have at least a very good if not perfect attendance record. As pointed out earlier, a writing workshop is not a publishing house. The goal is to learn about story writing by writing stories. In fact, you can earn an excellent grade even if your two stories don’t yet achieve all that you wish for them.

What will make it impossible to get a good grade?

Missing deadlines. You only have eight crucial deadlines for material this semester. These dates are the equivalents of exams. Regrettably, missing a deadline will result in a reduction of your final grade. You must distribute your workshop manuscript in class on the two dates that you are scheduled to do so, unless I have asked that you email them. If you are sick, have a friend hand deliver them. Having an attitude that undermines the esprit d’ corps of the workshop. Please leave all attitude far away from this workshop.

Attendance

We only meet once a week, which does not afford much wiggle space. If you have to miss a class due to illness or an emergency, let me know by email. You will still be responsible for all assigned work, including returning annotated workshop stories to your classmates, along with the narrative commentary that you also email to me. Unfortunately, your grade may be penalized by a full point (A drops to B, B drops to C) if you miss more than two of classes. If you already anticipate needing to miss two classes this semester, you should register for another course.

On a final note, be on time to class. If you arrive late, wait outside in the hallway rather than opening the door and letting yourself in. Don’t wander off, because you will be invited into the room when we reach a natural break in the action, much in the way that theatergoers who arrive late are ushered to their seats between scenes. The workshop environment is glaringly disrupted by latecomers settling into their seats. Two late arrivals to class or late returns from break equal one absence. Speak to me if you have another class that ends right before ours meets and you have to get to our classroom from some distant NYU location. We’ll see if there’s a way to work it out.

Breaks

One break is scheduled at some point during class, obviating the need for anyone to leave the room at other times except for an emergency. Feel free to bring beverages and food with you.

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Cell Phones + Computers + Other Electronics

Regrettably, this bears repeating: Turn off your cell phones, computers, and other electronics during class. If you must be available to receive an emergency call, let me know in advance so that we can anticipate your leaving the room. Text messaging, web surfing, etc. during class, will be treated as an absence (as well as a crime against humanity).

Academic Integrity

Quoted directly from The Gallatin School website. You can read it in full at http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html:

The following are examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School. The list is not exhaustive.

Plagiarism – using a phrase, sentence, passage, image, graph, table, sound recording, art work, or any other type of creative or intellectual material from another work without proper citation; paraphrasing words or ideas from another work without attribution; reporting as your own research or knowledge any data or idea gathered, reported, or developed by another person; submitting as your own work anything produced by another. Plagiarism does not only apply to written or recorded work, but also to intellectual property such as computer programs, oral presentations, and artistic work including choreography, stage blocking, and music.

Illicit Collaboration – submitting work done in collaboration with others without the express permission of the instructor or without acknowledging such collaboration.

Doubling or Recycling – submitting the same or substantially similar work in multiple courses, either in the same semester or in a different semester, without the express approval of all instructors.

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**WEEK-BY-WEEK SYLLABUS**

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<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author/Stories/Essays/Poems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>January 26</td>
<td>Marianne Moore&lt;br&gt;“Poetry” (unknown year)&lt;br&gt;“Poetry” (1924)&lt;br&gt;“Poetry” (1967)&lt;br&gt;Taylor S. (student author)&lt;br&gt;“The Burlesque Queen” (September 12)&lt;br&gt;“The Burlesque Queen” (October 29)</td>
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<td>#2</td>
<td>February 2</td>
<td>Raymond Carver&lt;br&gt;“The Bath” (from <em>What We Talk About When We Talk About Love</em>)&lt;br&gt;“A Small Good Thing” (from <em>Cathedral</em>)&lt;br&gt;3 student authors</td>
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<td>#3</td>
<td>February 9</td>
<td>Lydia Davis&lt;br&gt;“A House Besieged” (version 1 &amp; version 2 from <em>The Atlantic</em>)&lt;br&gt;3 student authors</td>
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<td>#4</td>
<td>February 23</td>
<td>Primo Levi&lt;br&gt;“Bare Meat” (from <em>The New Yorker</em>)&lt;br&gt;“Iron” (from <em>The Periodic Table</em>)&lt;br&gt;3 student authors</td>
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<td>#5</td>
<td>March 2</td>
<td>Flannery O’Connor (from <em>The Complete Stories</em>)&lt;br&gt;“The Geranium”&lt;br&gt;“Judgment Day”&lt;br&gt;3 student authors</td>
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<td>#6</td>
<td>March 23</td>
<td>John McPhee (essay)&lt;br&gt;“Draft Number 4” (from <em>The New Yorker</em>)</td>
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Spring 2015
Robert Pinsky (essay)
“Marianne Moore’s Poetry: Why did she keep revising it?”
(from Slate)

All students in cluster workshops (2-3 students per group)

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<td>#7</td>
<td>March 30</td>
<td>Alice Munro</td>
<td>“Wood” (from Too Much Happiness)</td>
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<td>“Wood” (from The New Yorker”)</td>
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<td>“The Tremendous Importance of Ordinary Events: an Interview With Alice Munro On The Two Versions of ‘Wood’ by Lisa Dickler Awano</td>
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<td>All students in cluster workshops (2-3 students per group)</td>
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<td>#8</td>
<td>April 6</td>
<td>Gay Talese (from Esquire)</td>
<td>“The Daisy Discotheque”</td>
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<td>“Frank Sinatra Has A Cold”</td>
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<td>#9</td>
<td>April 13</td>
<td>Eudora Welty</td>
<td>“Where Is The Voice Coming From” (from The New Yorker)</td>
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<td>“Where Is The Voice Coming From” (from The Complete Stories)</td>
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<td>#10</td>
<td>April 20</td>
<td>James Joyce</td>
<td>“The Sisters” (1904)</td>
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<td>“The Sisters” (1914 Dubliners)</td>
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<td>#11</td>
<td>April 27</td>
<td>William Faulkner</td>
<td>“A Return” (from Uncollected Stories)</td>
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<td>“Rose of Lebanon” (from Collected Stories)</td>
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<td>3 student authors</td>
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#12 May 4
Stephen King (from *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*)
“And Futhermore, Part I: Door shut, Door open”
“1408”
3 student authors

#13 May 11
 t.b.a.