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Office Hours: Taper Hall 439 TTh 330-450 and by appt.

English 302
Section 32868D
Fall 2015, W 2:00-4:20 PM
Taper Hall 109

Writing Narrative

In this class, we write two kinds of narrative: fiction and literary non-fiction. We practice techniques that are common to both, such as dramatization, point-of-view, and characterization, and we experiment with the techniques and genres that are specific to each. For fiction, we create short stories, short-shorts, and part (a very small part) of a novel, and for creative non-fiction, we experience memoir, the essay, and travel writing, science writing, and food writing, among others. We wander into the quagmire that lies between fiction and non-fiction, as thorny and fertile on the page as it is in real life. (What happens when a novel is based on truth? What happens when a memoir lies?) To strengthen our own writing, we read published works of fiction and non-fiction, so that we may understand how and why they fail or succeed. We also submit our original work to the class workshop, so that we may experience readers in the flesh and understand what works and what does not. As we critique our peers' work, we fortify our own craft. Our goal is to deepen our understanding of narrative pleasure and to strengthen our ability to create such pleasure. We aim to do this as a community of writers who enjoy and grow from sharing their work.

This class is reserved for students in the Narrative Studies major (NARS) and in the Narrative Structure minor; D-Clearance must be granted by the Department of English.

Required Texts

Janet Burroway et al, *Writing Fiction*. Be sure to get the 9th edition. Pearson 9780321923165
Truman Capote, *Music for Chameleons*. Vintage 9780679745662
Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux 9780374528586
Students will also need to access various texts via Blackboard.

Please note that computers are not allowed in class, so you will need physical copies of the texts. ISBNs are available on the schedule of classes. Some material will be available on Blackboard, and students should print out these texts.

Course Requirements

-Original writing. Students will be required to write at least two complete narratives, as well as exercises. At semester's end, students will submit a final portfolio of writing exercises that includes a revision and a self-analysis.

-Workshop. Each student will have a narrative workshopped at least twice during the semester. You must have two workshops, or you will not pass the class.

-Critiques and responses. Students will write written critiques of student work and responses to published work.

-Class attendance and participation. The workshop mandates attendance and the timely submission of assignments.

Please note that adjustments may be made over the course of the semester to allow for the specific needs of the class. If so, they will be announced.

Course Requirements, in depth

Original writing

Students will be required to write two complete narratives, one fiction and one non-fiction. Together, they should equal approximately 25 pages. Any additional writing necessary to make up the 25 pages will be turned in as a portfolio at the end of the semester.

All work submitted must be written for this class. Any work that has been previously written for or recycled from another class will be considered a failure.

Do not throw away any work that you do for this class—original writing, critiques, or responses—or your grade may be affected.

Workshop. Each student will have a narrative workshopped at least twice during the semester. You must have two workshops, or you will not pass the class.

When it is your turn to be workshopped, you will bring copies of your narrative for all the students in class. Distributing exercises in class is required, and the failure to do either will be reflected in your grade. While you may have an excuse to miss class, your narratives do not. Narratives that are not distributed in class will not be workshopped.

Those who are absent are responsible for getting copies of the story to be read next week; I will try to put any extra copies of the stories in my mailbox, but if they are gone, you will need to contact the author. We will make up a phone/e-mail list for this purpose.

We will make up a workshop schedule presently. You should expect some of the workshops to spill over into the next class.

Exercises. Students will write brief exercises in fiction. Some will be written in class. Those written at home will either be brought to the next class or posted on Blackboard. I prefer a pdf, but a doc is fine. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to find and complete the exercise.

Format. Both exercises and stories must be typed and double-spaced. They should include your name and the due date; I need this information for grading. Please do not forget page numbers, as these help us reference your work in class.

I would appreciate your reading that bit about format again, as you may forget it.

Competence. Our purposes require competence in English grammar and spelling. Any mistakes should be intentional.

Critique

Students will prepare two kinds of critique: reading responses to published work and student critiques to student work. Both should be about a page long, and both should be formatted as specified above. For critiques of student work, you should make or print two copies of critiques: one for the author, and one for me. You must print out both copies to get credit.

Especially at the start of the semester, do not worry if you are somewhat at sea while writing critiques. Our goal is to enable you to critique creative work from the perspective of a writer. You are expected to develop as this kind of critic, and not to know how to critique before the class begins.

Both kinds of critique should a) be specific (what exactly did you like/dislike? And, specifically, why?) and b) address the formal characteristics of creative work that we have covered in class. You will find that specificity will help you organize your thoughts.

At the same time that students should recognize and honor their own taste and reactions to writing, they should also make an attempt to distinguish between what is being portrayed in the writing at hand and how it is portrayed. In other words, students are not helpful when they tell another student that they did not like her story about the prom because they hate proms. How does that help her? By contrast, comments about how the student conveyed the prom are very much to the point.

With student work, please keep in mind that this course is meant to foster a community of writers offering each other constructive criticism. The goal is to help each writer improve, and not just to vote up or down on the manuscript. Good/Bad is not the issue; instead, think about how writers might move forward in their development.

Final Portfolio

At the end of the semester, each student will submit a final portfolio with these contents:

The two (or three, in some cases) workshopped narratives.

A revision of one of these narratives should be attached to the original.

The three strongest critiques that you wrote during the semester. These may be of other students' work, or of published stories. You may revise these; if so, attach the revision to the original.

An introduction that details the merits and demerits of your work, your improvement as a writer, and what you've learned (or confirmed) about your personal aesthetic. You also may include notes about revisions. This should be at least four pages long.

A table of contents. If I have not turned back work to you, please note that in the table of contents. Note that you will need to give page numbers to your portfolio for the table of contents to work.

You do not need to print out new copies if the old ones will suit.

Policies and Procedures

Attendance and Absence

A workshop cannot function if its members do not attend and participate. Students are expected to attend all classes on time, and absences and tardiness will be factored into semester grades. As we only meet once a week, missing one class is equivalent to missing a full week of classes. If you suspect that you may need to miss more than one class during the semester, I suggest that you take this class at another time. Absences due to religious holidays or illness are excused only if I am notified in advance. Please notify me by e-mail. An exception will also be made for students who join the class late or otherwise miss the first class.

Two unexcused absences is cause for failing the class, as are three excused absences. This is also true for students who are taking the class pass/fail. Note that three absences is the equivalent of missing six classes in a course that meets twice a week: Three absences are a full fifth of our class. Excessive lateness is equivalent to absence, as is consistently not bringing required books and texts to class.

In all cases, students are responsible for all missed work. I require a physical copy of all critiques one week after the absence, and another must be given to the student author. Please do not send us emails.

Electronic Devices

Computers, phones, and other electronic devices may not be used in lecture. Class texts may not be read off of laptops or phones. This rule will be strictly enforced. Those who require their computers for reasons of disability may find directions below.

Extra Credit

There is none.

Grades

Grades will be based on your growth and productivity as a writer and critic, and your participation in class and in the workshop. One thousand possible points may be earned in this class, distributed as follows:

Final Portfolio: 300 points

Critique: 300 points

Reading and Writing Assignments, including reading responses: 200 points

Participation: 200 points

If at any point you are anxious about your grade, please see me in office hours. If I see a particular problem, I will seek you out.

Office Hours

My office hours are posted on the first page of the course outline. I hope that you will come by with any general or particular questions about the class. Please feel free. You may make an appointment by email if you want to reserve a specific time, but this is not necessary. If your schedule conflicts with my office hours, we will make other arrangements.

Participation

Class participation is a full fifth of your grade, and you should not expect to do well in class if you do not speak, regardless of the grade you receive on other assignments. Students should expect to speak regularly in class. I will keep track of participation.

Students should expect to share at least one specific observation from the stories assigned for any particular day; on occasion, they will be asked to write the page number of their observation on the board before class. I will keep track both of informal participation and of students' presentation of these quotes.

If class participation fills you with dread, please come see me. I sympathize. Nonetheless, class participation is an essential skill, and I do require it.

Policies and Procedures for the University at Large

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the Department of Public Safety <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/departments-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible.

Student Behavior: Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students’ ability to learn and an instructor’s ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

- 9.16 Point of View II/Revision workshop 3, 4
WF Ch 9
Karen Russell, "St Lucy's Home for Girls Raised by Wolves"
(Chapter 5, 172-184)
Lorrie Moore, "You're Ugly, Too" 207-223
Exercise discussed.
- 9.23 Plot and Structure I workshop 5, 6
WF Ch 7
Flannery O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge"
Geoffrey Forsyth, "Mud"
- 9.30 No class today, as I will be giving a lecture at SDSU.
- 10.7 Plot and Structure II workshop 7, 8, 9
Initial Discussion of Non-Fiction
MC "Mojave"
"Dazzle"
- 10.14 Characterization and Dialogue workshop 10, 11, 12
WF Ch 3, 4
Story: Junot Diaz, "Fiesta 1980"
MC "A Day's Work"
- Nonfiction
- 10.21 Literary Persona workshop 1, 2
SS 3-26
HO Truman Capote, "La Cote Basque"
HO Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice (excerpt)
Exercise for 10.28 assigned (Life Is Complicated). You must post this exercise on
Blackboard twenty-four hours before class.
- 10.28 Memoir and Artifice workshop 3, 4
SS 27-85
MC "Nocturnal Turnings"
"Mr. Jones"
- 11.4 Portraits and Interviews workshop 5, 6
SS 87-156
MC "A Beautiful Child"
"Hello, Stranger"
Exercise for 11.11 assigned (It's Alive!). You must post this exercise on
Blackboard twenty-four hours before class.

- 11.11 Adventure, Travel, Science, and Nature Writing workshop 7, 8
HO Mary Roach, "A Head Is A Terrible Thing To Waste"
HO Barry Lopez, "The Raven"
- 11.18 Food and Other Sensory Delights workshop 9, 10
HO Ann Hodgman, "No Wonder They Call Me A Bitch"
HO Harry Matthews, "Country Cooking from Central France"
- 11.25 Thanksgiving Break
- 12.2 Portfolios due workshop 11, 12
Reading response due on one of CNF readings