English 461.090 - Advanced Fiction Workshop
Friday 1:00 – 3:30
Ferguson 177

Professor: Michael Sheehan
Email: sheehanmj@sfasu.edu
Office: LAN 258
Office Hours: MWF 12-1 pm, TTh 11-12:00 pm, & by appt.

“The story is not some ossified, cerebral thing: it is entertainment, active entertainment, of the highest variety. All of those things I’ve been learning about in class, those bone-chilling abstractions *theme, plot*, and *symbol*…are simply tools with which to make your audience feel more deeply—methods of creating higher-order meaning…. literature is a form of fondness-for-life. It is love for life taking verbal form.” – George Saunders

Required texts:
What you’ll have to buy:
• James Wood, *How Fiction Works*
• A discounted subscription to *Tin House*
  ○ Go to the CLMP Literary Magazine Adoption Program web site:
    http://www.clmp.org/adoption
  ○ Log-in Information:
    Code: 81638870032821844759
  ○ OR go to the following URL:
    http://www.clmp.org/adoption/students/manage81638870032821844759
  ○ If you have questions, contact adoptions@clmp.org

I’ll provide all other stories and readings for you on D2L.
A good style guide and a dictionary are recommended.

Class description (from General Bulletin):
Classroom analysis and discussion of student writing. Prerequisites: 12 hours of English including ENG 261 and ENG 361 or consent of instructor.

Program Learning Outcomes:
1. The student will demonstrate close reading skills and recognize strategies used by professional creative writers.
2. The student will employ techniques and strategies for crafting carefully composed, competent creative works of fiction.
3. The student will articulate useful, critical editorial advice for peer writers.
4. The student will demonstrate strategic revision on completed creative work.
5. The student will compose and sustain a complete, polished manuscript of substance in the focus-genre.

Class format:
In this class, you will be working independently, writing and submitting stories that demonstrate your abilities and personal aesthetic. Course readings and discussions will focus on blurring the line between literary and genre (science fiction, horror, fantasy, fairy tale, etc.) fiction.

You are welcome to come to my office anytime to talk about your writing or what we’re reading or anything related to writing or this class. This includes asking specific questions about your work-in-progress. **However, I will not read and give feedback on your stories before they are turned in.**
Grading:

Your final grade will be composed of the following percentages:

- Art of the Sentence (1 & 2) – 10%
- Discovery craft analysis – 15%
- Critiques – 15%
- Fiction – 40%
- Participation – 20%

Assignments:

**Short fiction**

You will each write and turn in two complete works of fiction. I expect these to be approximately 10-15 pages (roughly 3,000 to 5,000 words) each. If your work is outside that range, please come talk to me.

A note: you will all turn in stories on fixed (rather than rolling) deadlines. Meaning? **You will upload story no. 1 on Feb 12th** (Lincoln’s birthday) and **story no. 2 on Apr 1st** (no fooling). **You will upload your stories to D2L.**

**Art of the Sentence**

The fine art of creative writing requires—as both the most basic and the most essential element (think atomic-level necessity)—artful sentences. We will be working—starting Day One—on writing effective, intentional, lyrical, musical, inventive, grammatical, beautiful sentences. In support of this work, you will also select two sentences from a delimited section of our class reading and a) perform an aesthetic autopsy on or b) pen an encomium of them. Each of these will be 1-3 pages (350-750 words). I will give you further guidelines and examples in class.

**Discovery craft analysis (plus annotated bibliography)**

During the course of this semester, you must read a minimum of three stories beyond those we will be discussing in class. (I suggest you search the archive of *Electric Literature’s Recommended Reading*—handy address: http://recommendedreading.tumblr.com/archives—and discover these three stories; however, you can discover these three stories from anywhere. You should be, as above, actively reading on your own to discover what you like, what inspires you.) You will write up very brief (approximately 200 word) annotations for two of these stories; for the third, you must write a 1-3 page craft analysis. You can do this by focusing on one aspect of craft (image, voice, character, story, setting) or multiple. This is not a summary of what you read or why you liked it; this is a substantive critical analysis of the particulars of a story you’ve discovered. The analysis plus the two annotations will be due at the end of the semester; however, I will be asking you along the way what stories/writers you’re discovering and enjoying.

**Critiques**

You will be responsible for reading and annotating the works of your peers. You must have your (printed, annotated) copy in front of you when we begin discussing that story. You are expected to write line edits/marginalia on each story as well as a typed, summative (approximately one-page) critical letter to the writer. I will be collecting these, so please bring two copies to class: one for me and one for the writer.
Participation
The style of the workshop is discursive, meaning conversational. A dialog. A symposium. I understand not everyone likes to speak or finds doing so natural or comfortable. However, the ideal workshop is one in which all members participate (verbally). If you are not comfortable speaking in class, let me know. Your participation grade includes more than just whether you speak and how often; it includes also the quality of your comments, written and verbal, as well as your overall role in the class.

Each of our discussions will begin with an opening question. I will be passing these opening questions around, meaning I will call on one of you to start the conversation. I will not give you a heads-up as to when you will be called upon to start the conversation. You must all be ready to ask the opening question on all materials every class.

Class policies
Attendance / Tardiness
This class only meets once a week, so it is important you attend every class. If you are unable to make it to class for a legitimate reason, you must tell me at least 24 hours in advance. It is up to you to be responsible for all work and assignments you miss. If you do not give me notice and you do not take responsibility for all work due, covered, and assigned, your grade will suffer.
Absences will negatively impact your overall grade in the course. If you are absent more than three times (the equivalent of three weeks of class) I will fail you. If you are more than ten minutes late twice, that counts as an absence. If you show up to class without the text, without your work, or without being prepared for class discussion, that counts as an absence. This includes in-class naps, texting, disruption, etc.

Late work
You will turn in your work for your peers to read and workshop. This means your work must be on time. Short stories that are not turned in on time for the workshop will be reduced a letter grade a day. I will fail work that is not turned in for the workshop at all. We’ll cover details of the workshop itself in class.

Some Official Stuff
Acceptable Student Behavior
A recent policy from the Provost’s Office states, “Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.”

Academic Integrity (A-9.1)
Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.
**Definition of Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

**If you are caught plagiarizing in this class you will fail not just the assignment but the course.** Please read the complete policy at [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp)

**Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A-54)**

Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

**Students with Disabilities**

To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).

**Course Schedule:**

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<th>Readings (date = when reading will be discussed)</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1/22</td>
<td>Syllabus &amp; Introductions</td>
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<td>⇒ What is Genre? What is Literary?</td>
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<td>Ben Marcus, <em>New American Stories</em></td>
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<td><strong>Tin House, Art of the Sentence:</strong></td>
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<td>Virginia Woolf, John Cheever, Denis Johnson, Nikolai Gogol</td>
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<td><strong>Stories:</strong> David Foster Wallace,</td>
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| 2    | 1/29 | **Tin House, Art of the Sentence:** Franz Kafka, George Saunders, James Salter, Angela Carter  
*Stories:* Julia Elliott, “LIMBS”  
Ryan Harty, “Why the Sky turns Red when the Sun goes Down”  
**James Wood - Narrating** | **Art of the Sentence #1 due** |
| 3    | 2/5  | **Tin House, Art of the Sentence:** Flannery O'Connor, Raymond Chandler, Lorrie Moore, Jamaica Kincaid  
*Stories:* Karen Russell, “St. Lucy’s Home for Girls Raised by Wolves”  
Wells Tower, “Raw Water”  
**James Wood - Detail** | **Art of the Sentence #2 due** |
| 4    | 2/12 | *Stories:* George Saunders, “The Semplica Girl Diaries”  
Aimee Bender, “End of the Line”  
**James Wood - Character** | **First Stories due** |
| 5    | 2/19 | David Foster Wallace, “The Soul is Not a Smithy”  
**James Wood – Sympathy & Complexity** | **Workshop** |
| 6    | 2/26 | Dan Chaon, “The Bees”  
**James Wood – Language** | **Workshop** |
| 7    | 3/4  | Robert Coover, “The Return of the Dark Children”  
**James Wood - Dialogue** | **Workshop** |
| 8    | 3/11 | Donald Barthelme, “The Balloon”  
Kevin Brockmeier, “The Ceiling”  
**James Wood – Truth, Convention, Realism** | **Workshop** |
|      | 3/18 | **SPRING BREAK** | |
| 9    | 3/25 | **EASTER BREAK** | |
| 10   | 4/1  | Claire Vaye Watkins, “The Amargosa Dune Sea” | **Workshop** |
| 11   | 4/8  | Aria Beth Sloss, “North” | **Workshop** |
| 12   | 4/15 | Adam Johnson, “Interesting Facts” | **Workshop** |
| 13   | 4/22 | *Tin House, first 1/2* | **Workshop** |
| 14   | 4/29 | *Tin House, second 1/2* | **Workshop** |
| 15   | 5/6  | Lincoln Michel, “On Publishing…” | **Workshop** |
| 16   | by   | by  
5/13 | **Discovery Craft Anno Bib and Analysis due** |