

English S143

Introduction to Writing Fiction and Creative Nonfiction:

A Writing Workshop

Session B

Marian Thurm

Summer 2017

Syllabus

All narrative shares central elements—plot, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends, along with narrative drive that propels the story forward. More important, all narrative presents similar challenges for writers as they begin to construct a piece, as they work toward completion, and as they revise. This course will invite students to work on one or more genres of their choice as they address these concerns common to all writing. The course will also, however, illuminate for students the central differences between working in fiction and working in the particular sort of nonfiction that reflects and explores the narrative of their own lives. As is fitting for a workshop, significant class time will be devoted to in-depth analysis and critiquing of student manuscripts.

Writing Assignments and Final Portfolio:

Students will have submitted final drafts of two short stories or creative nonfiction pieces of approximately 10-15 pages each, by the end of the course. On the first day of class, each student will choose two dates on which his or her writing will be discussed. Each student will email this work to the entire class; manuscripts must be ready to be emailed one class prior to the discussion date. It is absolutely essential that work be handed in on time. In addition, each student will be required to provide two copies of a written critique of the manuscripts under discussion during each class—one for the author and one for the instructor. Critiques are meant to be helpful and encouraging and should always be offered with this in mind. Students are expected to read their classmates' manuscripts with great care in order to ensure the success of the workshop process for each and every member of the class. While the quality of your manuscripts is of primary importance, written critiques and enthusiastic participation in the workshop discussions will also be considered in determining the grade for the course.

Each class will begin with a discussion of the reading assignment---contemporary American fiction and creative nonfiction pieces chosen for their emotional power, resonance, and technique. All but one of the readings will be in your coursepack, which can be picked up at **Docuprinting & Imaging, 27 Whitney Avenue**, several days before the class begins.

Reading due FOR THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS, Tuesday, July 4th:

“Lawns” by Mona Simpson (short story)

“Visitor” by Michael W. Cox (nonfiction)

Weekly discussion topic: how to plot and shape a story in ways that will sustain dramatic tension and a reader’s interest.

CLASS #2 July 6th

“Boys” by Rick Moody (short story)

“The Love of My Life” by Cheryl Strayed (nonfiction)

Following the second class--and for each subsequent class--students will read and write critiques of the student stories/pieces to be discussed during the next workshop. Critiques are due the day of discussion.

CLASS #3 July 11th

“The Love of My Life” by T.C. Boyle (short story)

“A Matter of Life and Death” by Marjorie Williams (nonfiction)

Weekly discussion topic: voice and point of view; how a story “sounds.”

CLASS #4 July 13th

“The Fourth State of Matter” by Jo Ann Beard (nonfiction)

CLASS #5 July 18th

“Son of the Wolfman” by Michael Chabon (short story)

“Apollo” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (short story)

Weekly discussion topic: developing vivid characters that spring to life.

CLASS #6 July 20th

“Serenade” by Daphne Kalotay (short story)

“I like Guys” by David Sedaris (nonfiction)

CLASS #7 July 25th

“White Angel” by Michael Cunningham (short story)

“Willy” by Phillip Lopate (nonfiction)

Weekly discussion topic: what storytelling elements need to be taken into account in order to end on the perfect, resonant note.

CLASS #8 July 27th

“Last Night” by James Salter (short story)

“Kosta” by Marian Thurm (short story)

CLASS #9 August 1st

“The Other Widow” by Marly Swick (short story)

“The Liars’ Club” by Mary Karr (excerpt from memoir)

Weekly discussion topic: methods of revision—rounding out of characters, expanding or shortening scenes, clarifying meaning

LAST CLASS August 3rd

The Good Life (novel which will be available at the Yale Bookstore)

I will talk about the provenance of my newest novel, and other details related to the writing of *The Good Life*. (I am the author of seven novels and four short story collections, and during the weeks of the course will discuss my experiences working with editors and agents.)

Students will have one last opportunity to raise questions about anything at all regarding the writing process that they would like answered more fully.

In addition to the course work outlined above, there will be short writing assignments, to be completed both in-class and out, that are intended to stimulate the imagination and to give students the opportunity to work on various elements essential to effective storytelling.

Students should keep an informal journal of their reading, with brief notes about what interests them in the stories and pieces they’ve read.

I would be happy to recommend various short story and creative nonfiction collections for anyone who wishes to read further, and, in fact, urge all of you to continue reading

on your own. A voracious appetite for the works of other writers is one of the very best ways to develop as a writer yourself.

Please make every effort to arrive punctually. Regular attendance at each workshop is vital and is a requirement for the course. Remember that Yale Summer Programs' attendance policy allows no absence without penalty.

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, times to be announced.

email: **thurm14@aol.com**

I will check my email several times every day, the last time around 2 a.m. Feel free to send email as often as you like.

I look forward to a lively class and a productive summer for all