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YEARLONG IN FICTION 2022-23

Syllabus

Note: the class will be conducted in person, apart from a few sessions that will have to be done remotely by Zoom. There might be more Zoom sessions if, for example, I get sick but not too sick to teach, or whatever, but will endeavor to avoid that.

SCHEDULE: Tuesdays Sept. 27, 2022 – June 6, 2023

ZOOM sessions (link will be shared before class):

December 6
 January 10th

NO CLASS:

November 8 (election day)

November 22 (Thanksgiving week)

November 29 (week after Thanksgiving)

December 20, December 27, and January 3 (winter holiday)

April 11 (SPS Spring Break)

NOTE: It's unlikely, but if we have to miss any additional classes we'll make them up at the end.

Overview

Welcome to the Yearlong in Fiction! I began teaching yearlong classes at Hugo House in 2013 – usually two per year.

The class combines craft lectures, discussion, workshop, and reading, but is predominantly based on a workshop model. Whether you are early in the writing process or already have a rough draft, this course will help you set and achieve clear goals, as well as write and revise with intention.

The class's goal is to building skills as a writer, and familiarity with craft, mainly through peer review, but also reading and responding to assigned texts. Mainly, I aim to replicate some of the benefits of an MFA program without the expense or pretentious nonsense.

The publishing intensive (Zoom) that is slightly connected to this class will take place on May 20th, 2023 (registration is typically about \$300, but if you register now as a member of this class you can get it for \$150). Lineup to be determined, but I always have very senior agents and editors from NY publishing.

Community Agreement:

All participants in this class share a common impulse to create, though we come from different worlds and bring different experiences and values to the table. This class is an opportunity to be generous, kind, vulnerable, and creative in ways that still question and push each other's work to be the best version the artist intended. Respectful disagreements can be pivotal in making our words better.

Sharing your writing with other people is often a frightening experience, it can make a person feel vulnerable. Also, writing for the benefit of your reader is generous, but difficult. For these reasons and others writing classes can be highly charged emotional spaces.

Please let your readers know in advance if your work contains violent or disturbing content that could be upsetting. Not all provocations are intended to cause harm; however, if you feel a piece crosses the line, please tell your instructor.

Also:

- If you come from a background of privilege, be aware of that position and the ways in which it can potentially affect other students.
- Your instructor will endeavor to point out if your writing or your response to someone else's writing has racist or potentially offensive qualities. This is not to shame you or make you feel embarrassed, but to help you better understand how future readers might interpret your words.
- Remain respectful of all writers (and their work) in the classroom.

Mini Groups:

Some years ago, I started using a system that Karen Finneyrock has been using with her YA yearlong for a while, and it works very well. The class will be divided into three mini groups, which will be selected in mid-autumn.

Most of the times we meet will be devoted to workshop, and the way those workshops will work is that the first half of class we will meet with the "big group" and discuss two samples by students, or one sample and something I assign.

The second half of the class you will meet with your mini group, and run a self-directed workshop. I will rotate between the mini groups.

This way you will be able to get more feedback on your work, and you will have a smaller and more rigorous accountability system. You will also be able to develop a closer rapport with your group.

THINGS TO DO:

1. **By October 1**, join the Slack group for my combined yearlongs – I'll send you all invites. Your individual class will have channels within that group that only pertain to you (and later you'll have small groups, as well).
2. Set realistic but ambitious goals for yourself in your writing. Be goal oriented, and process oriented. But if you're struggling to get a draft, it's better to be goal oriented. **Your first creative deadline is for October 25th (there's a Slack channel for this called 1_creativedeadline).**

3. Read a lot, all the time. Assigned work and other pieces that are discussed in class will be posted in the Slack under the channel **#reading**. Read great writing everywhere, and read like a writer. Contemplate the choices that the authors are making on the level of the sentence, on the level of the paragraph, on the level of the chapter. Think about the narrative structure of a piece of writing. How does it work? Does it make you feel emotions? If so, how? How is information given, and what information is withheld, and for how long is it withheld? How much time passes in this story? How many major characters are there? From now on, you're doing forensics on everything you read. Looking at choices that the author is making.
4. Write a lot. Write and write and write. Sculptors buy marble and chip away at it. Nice for them. We can't buy our "marble" as writers . . . we make it by writing. You have to write and write and write, so that you have material that can be edited into shape.

THINGS TO AVOID IN WORKSHOP:

- "Defending" your writing from critique. Sometimes it is difficult to hear people say critical things about our writing. Usually it is. You might disagree with what is being said, or want to contextualize things. But if the writing did not provide the context itself, then that's an issue. That said, if you'd like to interject to clarify some fundamental misunderstanding, so we don't get stuck on that issue, that's okay. Use your best judgement. But bear in mind that you will not be able to contextualize your work to individual readers after it's published.
If you think this is painful, try getting ripped on Goodreads, or in the New York Times' book section. This is a rehearsal. That said, in this and everywhere else, take the comments with a grain of salt. No one's writing is loved by everyone.
- Along with defending your writing, try to avoid any statement that has anything to do with the idea of "but it really happened!" If it seems implausible, it seems implausible...again, real world readers won't have this information, so the issue is with the text itself.
- You might dislike a certain kind of writing, or a certain kind of worldview, but you have imagine yourself into the mind of the intended audience for this piece of writing (assuming the audience isn't people who like offensive writing...if a piece is offensive, it is our responsibility as the author's peers to let the author know so that they can address that issue). We're here to help each other survive a more brutal readership out beyond the safety of our class. Put your biases on the shelf, or at least acknowledge them up front when you are formulating a critique.
- Please don't sign with an agent because they happened to be at a conference that you also happened to be at. It's not a good way of meeting agents. There are many of them out there, and most have websites. Getting an agent is not your "goal." Getting published (and well) is your goal. Believe it or not, most agents are clueless and will be of little to no help.

FIRST TASK FOR STUDENTS:

I want you each to formulate a realistic, but ambitious writing plan for the next nine months. Book writing is a lot like marathon running (or so I'm guessing, I've never run a marathon): basically, some days are terrible, some days are great, a lot of days are neither. You usually don't feel like you're getting anywhere, but you are.

If you keep working consistently, the book will take shape. As Lorrie Moore wrote about whether writers get discouraged: "Sometimes they do, and sometimes they do. It's a lot like having polio."

Anyway, you'll be making up deadlines for yourself that will be spaced out over the year. Think about where you want to be with the book by Thanksgiving. What about March 7th? We're going to try to hold you to these.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Fall Quarter (meet 9 times)

Class #1 -- September 27: Intros, etc.

Class #2 – October 4: Craft class with assigned reading.

Class #3 – October 11: Short workshops: Review samples of prose from half of class.

Class #4 – October 18: Short workshops: Review samples from half of class.

Class #5 – October 25: Craft class #2 with assigned reading: **tension, et al.**

Class #6 – November 1: Synopses or mini workshops

SKIP A WEEK FOR ELECTION DAY

Class #7 – November 15: Synopses or mini workshops

SKIP TWO WEEKS FOR THANKSGIVING

Class #8 **[BY ZOOM]** – December 6th: Craft class #3 with assigned reading

Class #9 – December 13: Workshop #1 (Peter is not with any specific group, but will visit them all briefly)

SKIP THREE WEEKS FOR WINTER BREAK

Winter Quarter (meet 13 times)

Class #10 **[BY ZOOM]** – January 10: Workshop #2 (Peter is with group 1)

Class #11 – January 17: Workshop #3 (group 2)

Class #12 – January 24: Workshop #4 (group 3)

Class #13 – January 31: Workshop #5 (group 1)

Class #14 – February 7: Workshop #6 (group 2)

Class #15 – February 14: Workshop #7 (group 1)

Class #16 – February 21: Workshop #8 (group 2)

Class #17 – February 28: Craft class and reading (group 3)

Class #18 – March 7: Workshop #9 (group 3)

Class #19 – March 14: Workshop #10 (group 1)

Class #20 – March 21: Workshop #11 (group 2)

Class #21 – March 28: Craft class and reading (group 3)

Class #22 – April 4: Workshop #12 (group 1)

SKIP ONE WEEK FOR SPRING BREAK

Spring Quarter (meet 8 times)

Class #23 – April 18: Workshop #13 (group 2)

Class #24 – April 25: Workshop #14 (group 3)

Class #25 – May 2: Workshop #15 (group 1)

Class #26 – May 9: Craft class and reading (group 2)

Class #27 – May 16: Workshop #16 (group 3)

NOTE: PUBLISHING INTENSIVE IS MAY 20th

Class #28 – May 23: Reading and craft class (group 1)

Class #29 – May 30: Workshop #17 (group 2)

Class #30 – June 6: Workshop #18 (Peter visits all groups)