Professor Kathleen Ann Goonan

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Skiles 306

Office Hours T 3-4 pm, Th 11-12 am and by appointment

**LCC 3234-N Creative Writing**

**Prerequisite:** English 1102

**Core Attributes**

Core Area/Attribute fulfilled by this class

Humanities/ Fine Arts

**Course Description**: Students will write and submit two stories to the class for critique, and each student will orally critique, in a class setting, two stories written by other students.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students will learn how to write a successful short story and advance their understanding of what constitutes a readable, interesting, and dynamic piece of fiction. They will learn skills such as pacing, plot, and writing dialogue, and how to use point of view. They will learn to critically consider characterization, and improve the process of transferring the characters in their mind to the page. Through critiquing the work of other writers, they will experience growth in their own writing skills.

Interpretive Frameworks: Students will become familiar with a variety of approaches to writing narrative fiction and use these approaches to enhance their own writing. Through hearing the differing emphasis each classmate places on various aspects of the students’ own fiction and on the fiction of others that they have also read and critiqued, students will learn that there are many modes of interpreting fiction, and that there are as many ways to write a good story as there are stories.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to see the weaknesses and strengths in one’s own writing. This type of oral feedback, when experienced in real time as a member of a functioning critique group, shows the writer what other people think they have written. This is not always what the writer thinks she has written. The writer can then rewrite with an eye to more effectively shaping her narrative.

Communication Skills: Students will learn how to participate in a group critique setting.

Ethical Analysis: Students will be exposed to the ethical framework of other students and gain an appreciation of alternate philosophies and approaches to life and to fiction.

**Course Overview**

In this class you, the writer, will concentrate on refining the skills required to write good narrative fiction. This is a lifelong process.

**Required Text**

You must buy one book, which is About Writing by Samuel Delaney. You can find it at Engineer’s, online, and probably at Barnes and Noble. Delaney’s discussions are wide-ranging and exceedingly thoughtful. From time to time I will assign readings from this book if I think they will be particularly useful. I recommend that you keep it as a handbook. As every writer is different, and every writer is different at different stages of their career, I may recommend other sourcebooks as the class unfolds. I have a number of them in my office which you may review and on occasion borrow to see if you might want to invest in a copy of your own. As we proceed, I will post ancillary articles and readings on T-Square in Resources which we will use to discuss finer points of craft.

**Graded Assignments**

You must turn in two well-thought-out short pieces of narrative fiction. You must also thoroughly critique two stories of your fellow classmates either on the page, in handwriting, or by using word processing editing tools. You must share these critiques with all other students and turn in copies of these critiques. You must read all critiques of both stories.

How long is a short story? Technically, a short story is a maximum of 7500 words. You may find that the stories you choose to pursue may be a bit shorter or a bit longer, but don’t expect your classmates to read anything longer than 7500 words, or about 30 pages. Words of around 5,000 words or less have the best chance of getting a fulsome critique, but the class will apply their critiquing expertise equally to stories shorter and longer.

I know that each of you wants to be in the class because of the huge number of sample submissions I receive and evaluate. Therefore, I assume that you will put forth your best effort in the three arenas of the class: writing, your oral critiques, and your critique submissions. Thus far, I have not been disappointed: the structure of the class brings out everyone’s best efforts. However, your grade is yours to lose. You have no more than three absences; use them wisely. Likewise, put forth your best analytic effort each time out. Try to see to the heart of a story. The way to do that is to read carefully and to pay attention to details.

I will not grade on whether or not a story is “good.” I assume that most of you are starting out as writers; therefore, it is simply necessary to produce a story with a beginning, middle, and end. This is not as easy as it may sound, and is the only way to start writing stories.

Your stories must be properly formatted. I include formatting directions below. I have one inexorable rule: Name/Title/Page # as a right-justified header on each page. I will take off points if this is omitted. The group cannot properly critique a story in class if we are puzzling over which page is being discussed.

Because your fellow writers will all be reading your work, I know that you will submit the best work you are capable of producing.

I will grade on whether it is submitted. If either of your two stories are not submitted on the due date , you will fail the class.

I will most strongly grade on the degree of your participation in class. I will grade on critiques that show that you have seriously thought about the story you have read. This is “participation.” Accordingly, your grade will drop if I think you are not paying attention to in-class critiques. If you are playing with your phone, surfing the web, or seem otherwise engaged, I will assume that you are not paying attention.

If you are uncertain about your grade at any point, please schedule a conference—which may be as short as five minutes or as long as an hour—with me. Likewise, if you would like to talk about any aspect of writing or your own work or aspirations, feel free to drop by my office during my office hours or schedule some time outside of my office hours. I am happy to talk about writing at any time, in person or via email.

**Attendance Policy**

You may miss three classes for personal reasons without explanation, although I appreciate them. If you do miss a class, you must still send your story markup and critique to the writer, all of your fellow students, and to me. Other excused absences include job interviews, a death in the family, and documented medical appointments.

**Students with Disabilities** should self-report to the Access Disabled Assistance Program for Tech Students at 220 Student Services BuildingAtlanta, GA 30332-0285 404.894.2564 (voice)/404.894.1664 (voice/TDD)

[www.adapts.gatech.edu/guidebook.html](http://www.adapts.gatech.edu/guidebook.html)

**Scholastic Dishonesty and Academic Misconduct**

All of the writing you submit for this course must be your own. If I suspect you of plagiarizing any part of a project, (passing off someone else’s writing as your own), I will submit your name and the particular project to the Dean of Students, who will then take the appropriate disciplinary action. The Georgia Tech honor code (at www.honor.gatech.edu/honorcode/honorcode.html)defines academic misconduct as:

Possessing, using, or exchanging improperly acquired written or verbal information in the preparation of any essay, laboratory report, examination, or other assignment included in an academic course;

Unauthorized collaboration with a student in the commission of academic requirements;

False claims of performance or work that has been submitted by the claimant;

Forgery, alteration, or misuse of any institute document relating to the academic status of a student.

Plagiarizing is defined by Webster’s as “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own use (another's production) without crediting the source. If caught plagiarizing, you will be dealt with according to the GT Academic Honor Code. Do not cut and paste any of your paper, or otherwise use sentences from any author other than yourself without proper citation. Such use will be considered plagiarism. You may not use another’s words without attribution, whether the text has been previously published or has never been published; all work must be your own. For any questions involving these or any other Academic Honor Code issues, please consult me or [www.honor.gatech.edu](http://www.honor.gatech.edu).

**Week by Week Schedule**

On the first day I will pass around a sign-up sheet for critiquing. **You must turn in your story no later than the class period in which you are originally scheduled to be critiqued, even if that day changes.**

The class is elastic in that when we critique the first story, everyone will have a reasonably long time to speak their critique. This is the period in which we get to know one another and form cohesion as a group. The first stories will get a class-and-a-half, generally, for the critiquing process.

This means that the critique sessions for your second story will run quickly. We will use a strictly timed period of two or three minutes for the second critique, depending on how much time we have left.

We will not meet during exam week.

**The Class**

We will learn and use a peer critique method usually referred to as Milford Style. Read James Patrick Kelly’s explanation of how this works at <http://www.sfwa.org/bulletin/articles/workshop.htm> It was devised by science fiction writers for critiquing science fiction, but it works well for any type of fiction.

When we meet, all of us will have read the work to be critiqued that day. Each reader will have two to three minutes to orally critique any aspect of the narrative that did or didn’t work for them and to explain why. During this time, the author will not respond. It is good to take notes.

The author will choose the direction of the critique, starting with the writer to his right or to his left.

It is fine to say “I liked your story,” but that should be only one brief sentence. The point of the class is to discuss aspects of the story that are muddy, puzzling, too short, too long, unnecessary, or omitted. You may not be vicious. You may also give more fulsome praise if there are specific aspects of the story you found particularly well-done.

The samples I read for class admission include fantasy, science fiction, action-adventure, surrealism—in short, a range of narrative fiction. Please read with a completely open mind. A good work of fiction creates its own parameters, and those parameters are elastic. As you read the work of your fellow writers, your mind will fill with questions. Write these questions in the margins of the text, and when it is your turn to offer criticism, use those remarks. You will also see grammatical and punctuation errors. Correct these in the text using standard proofreading marks. Consider how well the story gets its point across by analyzing pacing, organization, dialogue, plot—in short, any and all of the aspects of the story that catch your eye.

Your oral critique must be neither too short nor too long. A too-short critique indicates to me that you have not thoroughly considered the work of your fellow writers, and will result in a drop in your grade for lack of participation. However, an overlong in-class critique that echoes what others have already said will not necessarily improve your grade. If you want to echo what someone else has said, just say “I ditto Jonathan about having the fire start at two a.m.,” or whatever your point may be. I understand that if you are the last person to critique a story, all of your points may have been used up, but we understand that. You can always think of something unique to contribute. I will see in your submitted critique what you noticed in your reading.

When giving your critique, orient us as to page and place on that page you are discussing. “On page six, near the bottom, Anya kills two dragons at once. I found this implausible.” When listening to a critique, go to that page. You may find that you would like to add another comment in your own text. **Following the in-class critique in this manner is an important aspect of your participation grade.**

Do not shy from honestly discussing stories that seem personal. If an author submits a story to the class, assume that the author wants your honest reaction to the narrative **as a story.** Likewise, do not submit a story that you do not want to have critiqued honestly.

Participation means being respectful of others’ critiques. Do not become impatient at what another critique is pointing out, nor their mode of doing so. Do not sigh, shift your feet, roll your eyes, or otherwise indicate impatience. Doing so will result in a lowering of your grade. Every critique is valuable. Each critiquer is unique. That is what is important about this class. I will not tolerate disrespect for anyone’s critiquing style.

There will be no cross-talk during critiques. You will have an opportunity to discuss the story as a class after the author concludes her reaction to the critique.

After each reader has contributed a critique, the writer may respond with a “Thank you,” or ask detailed questions of the readers. Either is acceptable. When listening to a critique, your mind will fill with defenses. “But I said that on the third page!” You may have said that, but if the reader does not catch it, you need to consider how to rewrite to make what you thought you said stand out. That is the point of receiving a valuable critique.

Each day’s session will probably raise issues that I will comment on. From time to time I will give a longer talk on various aspects of writing, most of which will be elicited by your own work or by your questions. We may engage in more abstract “writing exercises” which will be tailored to your needs. It may be that a few in-class writing exercises will be not only fun but useful. It is good to stretch. It is good to surprise yourself. From time to time we will discuss the way other writers have handled the challenges of writing, not only through reading and discussing their fiction, but by reading interviews and criticism or screening related media.

I anticipate that each of you will write, revise, and produce a polished copy of two short stories during this semester. Some of you may produce more. Two stories may sound easy, at this point, and while I certainly encourage you to write more, I believe that it is a challenge to produce a polished short story and that two polished peer-reviewed stories will be a very satisfying outcome. We will devote some time to market research, and each of you will submit one or more of your stories to a journal or a commercial venue at or near the end of the course, and you will turn in your publication-ready short story to me on or by the last day of class. This will be your best work in polished, complete form.

**Formatting**

Please submit your work in the following format. This is the format used when submitting your fiction to most professional venues. It is as long as it is so that you can see a line of dialogue, which is a long time coming. In short, though:

In your header, insert your name, title, and page #. The header should be about the second line from the top of the page. It should not appear on the first page, but should be on all the rest of the pages.

Place contact information in the upper left corner of the first page.

Place final word count in the right upper corner of the first page.

Place the title in the center of the page.

Double space the entire story.

Intent five spaces for each paragraph. Most dialogue is treated as a new paragraph, although this is not a hard and fast rule.

**HEADER: On every page, upper right corner, name, title, page #** Goonan/Memory Dog/Page #

**CONTACT INFORMATION: Upper left corner WORD COUNT**

Kathleen Ann Goonan 10,616 words

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404.894.1022

MEMORY DOG

She is always busy and today the temperature is dropping. So she splits wood and I lie next to her, paws outstretched, belly on cold ground, panting breath outflowing; white. Memory huge and bleeding, not keeping to one track, mammalian but skipping, skipping.