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English 618

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Ethel Morgan Smith, ENGL 618, Spring 2004, Graduate Fiction Writing Workshop

Spring 2004

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY
Department of English .

Professor Ethel Morgan Smith

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Office Hours: Mon 4-5 and by appointment

English 618-c

The purpose of all art is to lay bare the questions which are hidden in the answers—James Baldwin

This course is designed for advanced creative writers, which will allow you to share your writing in a workshop setting. You

will write two-four stories. If you are working on a novel, be prepared to submit your first few chapters with an outline of the rest of the book. Student manuscripts will be critiqued with the goal of isolating manuscripts' strengths and weaknesses, and with an eye on revision. The elements of fiction—setting, plot, theme, structure, point of view, and character will be studied from a working writer's perspective, that is, with emphasis on practical questions on craft. In conjunction with the analysis of student manuscripts, the class will read and analyze exemplary writings by a variety of authors, both as a way to discuss technique and to examine what's currently popular in literary fiction.

Attendance is crucial in order to build workshop camaraderie and skills in editing/critiquing. Attendance is further crucial in that careful reading of your peers' work and thoughtful critique of their manuscripts is the core of the course. There is also a lot of reading that will, of course, enhance your life and enrich your writing, so organize to do it. You will be expected to keep an informal reading response journal on all of your reading.

We will be looking at a different short story each week. Each of you must choose one, on which you will present to the class a discussion topic/question. Each will be required to have a typed one-page response paper on the readings in which question/s of your own can be posted. Presenters on the short story collections can allow the class to know which story they're presenting.

It is very important to me that you have time for your own writing and for every class there are stories to critique for each class. Professional manuscript set-up, ready to go out into the

world if need be—that includes word count and running head with pagination. This will be a traditional workshop with manuscripts written on and signed so the writer can contact you later for further discussion if necessary. I don't need to see these since I'll see them in the final portfolio at the end of the semester. However, if you are receiving manuscripts back without cogent comments, please let me know. Part of the workshop experience is to be a good reader/editor. You might prefer to type your comments separately for the work shopped story. The writer of the story remains respectfully mute, and can respond at the end of the discussion. Try to pinpoint one good element about the work and perhaps start with this and then move on. Please do not flinch from saying the hard thing that needs to be said, but try always to give the criticism with a suggestion for how it can be improved. We should be beyond the point where I have to call on people to give comments. Every workshop dynamic is different.

You will also be expected to attend the department's literary events. I consider this to be a very important aspect of the course and your experience as a graduate student.

Grades depend on the writing that you do! Judgment is necessarily subjective but many things determine a final grade: attendance, (this is a must). Since we only meet once weekly if you miss twice, you're heading for a drop in your grade. Getting work read and being prepared to discuss the stories both the handouts and your peers. The careful reading you give to your colleagues' work will not only develop your critical skills but they will strengthen your own writing.

Literary Events

Feb 12 Jim Harms' reading-7:30 p.m., Gold Ballroom

Feb 21 12th Annual Literature Symposium for Undergraduates,
10:00a.m.-4:00p.m., Mountainlair

March 3 Pizza Party for English Majors, 11:30 a.m.- 2:30 p.m.
346 Stansbury Hall

March 24 Faculty Reading: Gail Adams and Kevin Oderman,
7:30 p.m., Robinson Reading Room, Wise Library

March 26 Deadline for submissions for Department's Writing
Contests

April 1/2 Graduate Student Colloquium

April 14 Calliope Reading, 7:30 p.m., Elizabeth Moore Hall

April 21 Awards Luncheon, 11:30 a.m., Gold Ballroom

April 22 Poetry Reading-Terrance Hayes

Literary Works for Discussion

"Sonny's Blues" and "Previous Condition" by James Baldwin

"Lost in the City" by Edward P. Jones

"Clarence and the Dead" by Randall Kenan

"Everyday Use" and "1955" by Alice Walker

"Drinking Coffee Elsewhere" by ZZ Packer

"The Story of a Dead Man" and "The Problem with Art" by
James Alan McPherson

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