

Regional

For Vogrin, creative writing is a way of life

Every time we get caught up in a great novel, or when we watch an engaging movie or television show we owe a debt to the talents of creative writers. But to become such a writer requires not only raw talent and imagination, but lots of training. Valerie Vogrin, an associate professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, works with students every day, helping them to hone their skills in the pursuit of good writing.

"There are students who are sort of naturally gifted or who have a natural ear for languages," Vogrin said. "Usually these are all students who have read quite a bit and have sort of internalized the sound of language and have affinity for that. But there is a certain amount of other things that need to be developed, like empathy, having a desire to be questioned and to be honest with oneself."

Born in Evergreen Park, Ill., Vogrin obtained her bachelor's degree in English and political science at Washington State University and her master's of fine arts in creative writing from the University of Alabama. Her inclination for creative writing began early in her life.

"I read early," she said. "My family read. I wrote my first short story when I was about 5 years old. It was in different colors. It was very artistic, with drawings. My parents had gone to Europe, so I wrote about a bad cat in Paris. I wrote throughout my childhood. I never stopped writing, but I did not necessarily think it would be my career. Thoughts of pairing it with an academic career came along later." While she has continued to write, Vogrin said she has observed the phenomenon among some creative writers that they simply stop writing, with no apparent reason.

"We have a lot of emphasis on production, putting out a new book and keeping writing as a career. Maybe people write more than they should



Professor Valerie Vogrin.

early on. Instead of just waiting to store it up until it has critical mass, they feel like they need to be on a schedule where they write a new book every two years," she explained.

Part of the problem, she added, may be in the commercial pressure placed on writers by publishers that they have to become successful early on.

"I feel kind of compassion for these writers," Vogrin said. "I can think of two

or three people whose early work I really admired and then had like a couple of good middle books. But I can't even bring myself to get through their later work. Few writers do actually anymore make a living off of being a writer."

In addition to this "burnout," after obtaining fame and fortune some authors go into the lecture circuit or other things and are no longer productive.

"If you are a fiction writer, people always know

those few writers who made it big and so there is always this feeling that you should have a career to promote yourself and there is a lot of emphasis on that," said Vogrin. Before they can make it big, beginning writers must jump a big hurdle — finding a publisher. According to Vogrin, however, the Internet might just be changing that.

"There is a huge proliferation online," she said. "There are online journals,

Aldemaro Romero College Talk

books being published electronically and whole new paradigms are developing in print-on-demand and self-publishing. People are doing creative things and some of it is in a response to the market shrinking. Literally, publishers are failing. University presses are closing down. So where are people going to publish their work? Younger writers who are coming up realize that they do not have to wait to be anointed. There are a lot of people out there with independent magazines and processes who can start themselves." What kind of advice does she give to her students interested in becoming professional writers?

"First of all, I say show me your first 100 rejections and then we will talk."

Vogrin said. "Because a lot of times people have not faced up to the fact of what's involved and the kind of the obstacles they will face. You need to develop a thick skin for rejection and I urge them to get them out of the way, find a community of people to support them and who will read their work and urge them when they are done."

Currently Vogrin is finishing a draft of her second novel. "The working title is 'Standing by for Further Instruction' and it is kind of a bigger, darker kind of book, that has plot, things get blown up, people are kidnapped and there is more kind of a suspense," she explained. "It is about violence against women and why we have such difficulties treating each other well in the world. It is a worldlier book."

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@sue.edu.

Photo courtesy of Stacey Lynn Brown