

*“I wish I could say that a kindly lion had set me straight, or an innocent child, or the strains of distant music from some church, but it was no more than the rain on my head—the smell of it flying up to my nose—that showed me the extent of my freedom from the bones in Fontainebleau and the works of a thief. There were ways out of my trouble if I cared to make use of them. I was not trapped. I was here on earth because I chose to be.”*

–John Cheever from *“The Housebreaker of Shady Hill”*

## **CRW 2100: Fiction Writing: Section 1337, Spring 2015**

DAU Room 342; Monday, Period 9-11 (4:05pm–7:05pm)

Instructor: Alex Pickett

Email: [rapickett@ufl.edu](mailto:rapickett@ufl.edu)

Office hours: Tuesday, Period 9, Creative Writing Suite, Turlington 4<sup>th</sup> Floor (Please make appointment)

### **Required Texts:**

*Textbooks:*

Jerome Stern, *Making Shapely Fiction*

Francine Prose, *Reading Like A Writer*

*Texts:*

Course Packet

### **Suggested Texts:**

*Handbook:*

Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition*

### **Course Objectives:**

That you leave it writing better than when you entered it. This course provides intermediate instruction in fiction writing and, since careful and reflective reading is the best way to learn how to write, an introductory approach to the study of literature. We will write and read with attention to how stories work – structurally, stylistically, and thematically.

The first half of the semester will be devoted to a discussion of the elements of fiction. The second half will be a traditional fiction workshop, the requirements of which will be discussed in detail later on, but which can be described in general as a format in which we apply the same critical skills to our own work that we've learned to apply to the assigned readings.

This is a General Education course providing student learning outcomes listed in the Undergraduate Catalog. For more information, see:

<http://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx#learning>

**Beware:** this course is reading intensive and writing intensive. Do not fall prey to the pandemic impression that creative courses are easy. You are not trapped. You are here because you choose to be.

### **Course Format:**

**Reading:** Short stories and other fiction readings from the course pack, chapters from the textbook, and essays addressing various aspects of craft.

**Writing:** In-class exercises, four (4) 1,500-word reading responses and two (2) six-page stories.

**Critiquing:** Of both the published stories and the work of your peers.

### **Graded Assignments and Other Course Components:**

#### **Class Participation: 20% (200 points)**

Each week we will discuss both the textbooks (Francine Prose's *Reading Like A Writer* and Jerome Stern's *Making Shapely Fiction*) and published fiction/poetry. Doing the reading is only half the assignment. In-class discussion of the material is the other half. Not having your books and printed stories in class will result in a participation grade of zero for the day. I do not need to remind you of this method of grading; if you do not bring your materials I will grade you accordingly. Since you are adults I won't hound you to bring in these required materials. I will also periodically give reading quizzes, and a failing grade will earn a participation grade of zero for that day. Also, each week you must type a response of 250 words for EACH story we read and have those responses **printed** and with you in class on the day we discuss the story. These responses, once revised, will accumulate into your Critical Analyses. Failure to have these printed responses with you in class on the day we discuss the story will result in a participation grade of zero for the day AND will drop your Critical Analysis paper by one letter grade.

On workshop days it is expected that you will come to class having read each piece carefully *at least once*, and that you have spent time formulating a **typed** response to it. I urge you to read the piece once, without marking it, before writing your marginal notes during the second read. In addition to your marginal comments in ink or pencil, attach your typed response to the author's piece with a staple. In addition, provide me with a copy of your typed responses at the end of the semester. These typed responses will form part of your participation grade.

(In-class discussion, preparedness (including timely response to all class emails), and (especially) engagement/attitude are all parts of participation. A writing workshop should be a safe place where everyone should feel encouraged and welcome to share their thoughts/feelings—the participation of those who fail to respect their peers' thoughts/feelings will be graded accordingly.)

#### **Critical Analyses: 60% (600 points)**

Four 1,500-word responses to the reading: The structure and content of the critical analyses (worth 150 points each) will be taught in class, both explicitly and organically as a result of our classroom discussions about the stories we read. The analyses will be evaluated based on the following criteria: demonstrated reading of the stories/chapters; critical thinking; depth of analysis; engagement with the discussion of craft. This is not a summary of the story for the week. Your analytical and critical skills are expected to improve over the course of the semester, both through practice and in response to my written feedback.

My goal is that your analyses achieve the following:

1. Make a claim about our reading based on Stern's ideas or those we discussed in class.

2. Provide textual support for your claim from the story being discussed. Point to the specific words in the text of the stories that made you think what you thought and that support and prove your point.
3. Provide analysis of your claim and the text. Answer the question "so what?" What does this mean within the context of the work as a whole? How does this section contribute to the author's overall intent?

(Please avoid "rating" the stories with remarks of taste, such as "I hated this" or "I liked this." We will work during the semester to develop your ability to talk about fiction, but please keep in mind that these are published, professional writers, meaning whether you enjoyed their writing or not, they have something to teach you about the practice and art of the written word. Which is not to say they are gods! Or infallible! Or that you must worship at the altar of their prose or their ideas!)

### *Rubric of Evaluation for Reading Responses*

**A:** Contains extended analysis of the texts and develops original, sophisticated ideas. Has exceptionally well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), well-supported claims, and appropriate and effective stylistic elements.

**B:** Contains extended analysis of the texts and develops original, sophisticated ideas. Has well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), well-supported claims, and appropriate and effective stylistic elements.

**C:** Contains some analysis of the texts and develops some original ideas about them. Has adequately well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, a persuasive organizational structure (e.g., brief introduction, body, brief conclusion), adequately-supported claims, and some appropriate stylistic elements.

**D:** Contains minimal analysis of the texts. May lack well-crafted paragraphs, a thesis, and/or a persuasive organizational structure. Fails to adequately support its claims and/or use appropriate stylistic elements.

**E:** Lacks analysis of the text, and therefore fails to demonstrate reading and/or comprehension.

### **Short Stories: 20% (200 points)**

Two six-page short stories, 100 points each. Your stories will be evaluated based on the same criteria as your writing exercises. Do not write these stories the night before they are due. I will be able to tell if this is the case, and your grade will be lowered accordingly. Manuscripts must be **printed** and delivered to the class *the week before* they are to be work-shopped. There is no late delivery. There is no switching. No last-minute writing. If you are unable to turn in the story on time, an entire letter grade will be deducted from your **final** grade. You must bring enough copies for everyone.

### **Formatting:**

Each assignment will be submitted at the beginning of class in double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman (Or Calibri or Courier New) font. Pages must be numbered. One staple goes in the upper-left-hand corner. There must be a title, something beyond "First Critical Analysis" (for critical analyses the title must be interesting and informative; for stories, well, do your best). You are responsible for photocopying your workshopped stories. Each formatting failure will result in a 5% deduction on the grade of that assignment.

### **Attendance:**

You are allowed one absence without explanation, but do not miss the day you are going to be workshopped. Reserve the day you don't attend class for a day you really need it. Doctor's notes will not be accepted. Only those absences involving university-sponsored events, such as athletics and band, and religious holidays, are exempted from this policy. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with the instructor prior to the date that will be missed. Skipping your workshop will result in a failing grade for that story. Each absence after the first will lower your final grade a full letter grade. Arriving late twice to class will be counted as an absence.

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

### **Class Policies:**

#### **Classroom Behavior:**

Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diversified student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal – and accordingly absence—from the class.

#### **Cell Phones:**

Cell phones are not allowed in class. You may not text in class. You may not have your phone out on your desk during class. Please put your phone away. If your phone is out on your desk or in your hand during class, you will be marked absent that day (see absence policy above).

#### **Laptops, Etc.:**

Laptops, ipads etc. should not be used in class. If you have a special reason you must use a laptop or an ipad, please see me. If I see you using a laptop or an ipad, and you have not spoken to me about it, I will count you as absent that class.

### **Notes:**

+You are responsible for checking your university emails. I will often give or change assignments via email, as well as make any necessary changes to the schedule. You are responsible for checking your email and approaching me with any questions. If I have sent an email to you, I will assume you have read it.

+I may change anything on this syllabus at any time.

### **Additional Information:**

#### **Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the Student Honor Code. The Honor Code prohibits plagiarism and defines it as follows:

##### **Plagiarism.**

A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

1. Quoting oral or written materials including but not limited to those found on the internet, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution.

2. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.  
(University of Florida, Student Honor Code, 8 July 2011)

Important Tip: You should never copy and paste something from the Internet without providing the exact location from which it came.

All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

**Statement of Composition (C) and Humanities (H) credit:**

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general-education-requirement.aspx>

**Statement of Writing requirement (WR):**

This course can provide 6000 words toward fulfillment of the UF requirement for writing. For more information, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/gordon.aspx>

**UF Reading and Writing Center:**

The Reading and Writing Center at the University of Florida is an excellent resource for improving reading comprehension and writing skills. For more information, see: <http://www.at.ufl.edu/rwcenter/>

**Student Disability Services:**

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

**Harassment:**

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>

**Grading:**

A: 94-100; A-: 90-93  
B+: 87-89; B: 84-86; B-: 80-83  
C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72  
D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62  
E: 0-59

UF has recently instituted minus grades. As a result, letter grades now have different grade point equivalencies. For more information, see: <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

**Schedule of Assignments:**

**1/12: FIRST DAY:** Rosellen Brown: Introduction, Stephanie Vaughn: “Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog”; in-class writing assignment: family; Making Shapely Fiction (MSF)–Section 1

**1/19: MLK JR. DAY: No Class**

**1/26: EDITING:** Raymond Carver: “A Small, Good Thing” and “The Bath,” Jamaica Kincaid: “Girl”; MSF–Section 2; **Story #1 Due (8-9 pages)**

**2/2: FIRST PERSON, THIRD PERSON:** Russel Banks: “Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story,” Padgett Powell: “A Gentleman’s C”; (EC: Watch the film *Rashomon* and write a one-page analysis); writing assignment: pov; Reading Like A Writer (RLAW)–Chapters 1 & 5

**2/9: STORY A/STORY B:** Robert Stone: “Helping,” Edward P. Jones: “A New Man”; writing assignment: A/B Story; RLAW–Chapter 6; **Critical Analysis #1 Due**

**2/16: SUPERNATURAL:** George Saunders: “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline,” Joyce Carol Oates: “Ghost Girls,” writing assignment: ghost story; RLAW–Chapter 7

**2/23: CHEKHOV:** Anton Chekhov: “The Lady with the Dog,” “Enemies,” “A Blunder”; Richard Ford: Introduction; RLAW—Chapter 10

**3/2: SPRING BREAK: no class**

**3/9: HUMOR:** Flannery O’Connor: “A Late Encounter With The Enemy,” Donald Barthelme: “Some Of Us Had Been Threatening Our Friend Colby”; RLAW—Chapter 11; in-class practice workshop; **Critical Analysis #2 Due; Workshop 1, 2 Turn in**

**3/16: WORKSHOP:** James Baldwin: “Sonny’s Blues,” John Cheever: “Reunion”; **Workshop 3, 4, 5 Turn in**

**3/23: WORKSHOP:** Paul Bowles: “A Distant Episode,” Mary Gaitskill: “A Romantic Weekend”; **Workshop 6, 7, 8 Turn in**

**3/30: WORKSHOP:** Alice Walker: “Nineteen Fifty-five,” Grace Paley: “Wants”; **Workshop 9, 10, 11 Turn in; Critical Analysis #3 Due**

**4/6: WORKSHOP:** Junot Diaz: “Fiesta 1980,” Ernest Hemingway: “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place”; **Workshop 12, 13, 14 Turn in**

**4/13: WORKSHOP:** Raymond Carver: “Viewfinder,” Clarice Lispector: “The Smallest Woman in the World,” Donald Barthelme: “The School”; **Workshop 15, 16 Turn in**

**4/20: Last Class:** Final workshop and student readings; **Critical Analysis #4 Due; Final Writing Packet Due**

Stories that missed the cut for various reasons but that you should all read:

Richard Ford: Rock Springs

John Edgar Wideman: Daddy Garbage

Tim O’Brien: The Things They Carried

Raymond Carver: Cathedral

Dorothy Allison: River of Names

Richard Bausch: All The Way In Flagstaff, Arizona

Carol Bly: Talk Of Heroes

Andre Dubus: The Fat Girl

Stuart Dybek: Chopin In Winter

Allan Gurganus: Minor Heroism

Denis Johnson: Emergency

Thom Jones: A White Horse  
Joyce Carol Oates: Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?  
Chris Offutt: Aunt Granny Lith  
Mona Simpson: Lawns  
Stephanie Vaughn: Dog Heaven  
Joy Williams: Train  
Raymond Carver: The Calm  
Stanley Elkin: The Conventional Wisdom  
Ron Hansen: Can I Just Sit Here For A While?  
Leonard Michaels: Murderers  
David Quammen: Walking Out  
Richard Yates: Oh, Joseph, I'm So Tired  
Mark Richard: Strays  
Sherman Alexie: This Is What It Means To Say Phoenix, Arizona  
Richard Bausch: The Man Who Knew Belle Starr  
Robert Olen Butler: A Good Scent From A Strange Mountain  
Edward P. Jones: Marie  
Annie Proulx: Brokeback Mountain  
Anton Chekhov: Gooseberries  
Alice Munro: Labor Day Dinner  
Sherman Alexie: The Toughest Indian In The World  
Andre Dubus: Killings  
Robert Olen Butler: Mr. Green  
Thom Jones: The Pugilist At Rest  
Tobias Wolff: Firelight  
T.C. Boyle: The Miracle At Ballinspittle  
Kevin Canty: Blue Boy  
Jhumpa Lahiri: A Temporary Matter  
Nathan Englander: The Tumblers  
John L'Heureux: Departures  
Mary Robison: Pretty Ice  
ZZ Packer: The Ant Of The Self  
Delmore Schwartz: In Dreams Begin Responsibilities  
William Trevor: The Day We Got Drunk On Cake  
Barry Hannah: Testimony Of Pilot  
Edward P. Jones: First Day  
Ron Hansen: Wickedness  
Tim Gautreaux: Same Place, Same Things