

## Fiction Writing

CRW 2100 (2269), Spring 2014  
 University Honors Program  
 MAT 151, Tuesdays, 9-11

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:55-3:40pm, and by appointment

### Required Texts

Franz Kafka (Author), Michael Hofmann (Translator), *Metamorphosis and Other Stories* (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, 2008)

Jerome Stern, *Making Shdely Fiction* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1991)

Course Pack (available @ Book iT, 1250 W University Ave., Unit 2.)

**Course Objectives:** that you leave it writing better fiction than when you entered it. This course is a thorough introduction to fiction writing and, since careful and reflective reading is the best way to learn how to write, a thorough introduction to literature. We will write and read bearing in mind how each story "works"—structurally, stylistically, and thematically. We will ask ourselves (over and over) while writing and reading: So what?

The first half of the semester will be devoted to a discussion of the basic 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.

Our aim is to "do" what writer (and UF Professor) Padgett Powell urges: "In a workshop we should spot that which keeps us from wanting to keep reading. One need go no further than that ... If your writing is lively and interesting, we can address ourselves to its faults in form. This is the zone of the question Can writing be taught? that may be answered Yes. Then it will be up to you to say something new: to put to paper things not said before that surprise us. This is the zone of the question that must be answered No. We cannot legislate interest, surprise, new utterance. We can but pray."

(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>.)

## Course Format

Reading : short stories, poems, interviews, and essays from Kafka's *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, Stern's *Making Shapely Fiction (MSF)* , the Course Pack, or digital handouts.

Writing : in-class exercises, ten critical reading responses, four stories, and a final portfolio of revised work.

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

## GRADED ASSIGNMENTS AND OTHER COURSE COMPONENTS

### Class Participation: 45% (450 points)

Each week we will discuss 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 in class will result in a participation grade of **zero** for the day.

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 written response to it. I urge you to read the piece once, without marking it, before writing your marginal notes during the second read. I will check to see that you are writing adequate comments throughout the semester.

In-class discussion, preparedness (including timely response to all class emails), and (especially) your 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 and feelings--the participation of those who fail to respect their peers' thoughts and feelings will be graded accordingly.

This course requires you to have a journal. This journal--it can be a composition book, a notebook, a sketchbook, whatever you prefer--will be collected at the end of semester and will be graded out of **150 points**. You will record your in-class writing exercises in your journal. These exercises will be evaluated based on effort, creativity, and correct style and usage. I encourage you to take in-class notes in your journal as well as any reflections or ideas you might have for stories; keeping a notebook at hand is very helpful for many writers.

### Reading Responses/Stories: 35% (350 points)

1. *Ten 600-word responses to the reading* (published work): the structure and content of the reading responses (**worth 15 points each**) will be taught in class, both explicitly and organically as a result of our classroom discussions about the stories we read. The responses will be evaluated based on the following criteria: critical thinking, close reading, depth of analysis, and discussion of craft. 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.

2. *Four short stories*: a 100-word story, a 500-word story, a 1,000-word story, and a 1,500-word story (**worth 50 points each**; an optional 2,000-

word story is offered for a possible **20 points of extra credit**) 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 delivered to the class **the week before** they are to be workshopped. There is no late delivery. There is no switching and no last-minute writing. If you are unable to turn in your story on time, an entire letter grade will be deducted from your final grade. **Please bring enough copies for everyone.**

### ***Rubric of Evaluation for Reading Responses***

**A-Response:** 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-Response:** 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-Response:** 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-Response:** 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-Response:** lacks analysis of the text, and, therefore, fails to demonstrate reading and/or comprehension.

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

You will rewrite/revise your reading responses and stories, based on my comments and those of your peers. Your revisions will be turned in as your final portfolio. This portfolio should be polished and **THOROUGHLY** proofread.

### **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. You are responsible for printing enough copies of your workshopped stories for everyone in the class. Failure to follow the formatting directions will result in the loss of a full letter grade of that assignment. There is no late delivery (i.e. **tardy assignments will receive a 0**). **AVOID** last-minute

writing.

### **Attendance**

You are allowed one absence without explanation, but **do not miss the day of your scheduled workshop**. Skipping your workshop will result in a **failing grade (0)** for that story. Each absence after the first will lower your final grade by a full letter grade (an A becomes a B, a B becomes a C, etc.). If you arrive 5 or more minutes late to class, you will be marked tardy. Two tardies will count as an absence.

### **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 letting me know if you have any questions.* If I send you an email, you **NEED** to read it.

**CELL PHONES AND LAPTOPS ARE NOT PERMITTED IN CLASS.** You will be politely asked to leave class if I see you using either device, and you will subsequently be marked absent.

You **MUST** come to each class fully prepared (with hard-copies of each assignment, the readings, your journal, and pen/pencil and paper to take notes). (This syllabus is subject to change.)

### **Final Grade Appeals**

Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant to the Director of Creative Writing. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

### **UF Requirement for Writing**

This course can satisfy 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 students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>.

### **Harassment**

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/sexual/>.

### Academic Honesty

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>.

### Grade Point Equivalencies

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>.

### Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at

<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

### CRW 2100 (2269). Schedule:

- Jan. 7      **First Day:** "Darius & The Clouds," Sandra Cisneros; "The Behavior of Mirrors on Easter Island," Julio Cortázar; "Happiest Moment," Lydia Davis; "The Fall of the Star High School Running Back," The Mountain Goats (John Darnielle)
- Jan. 14      **Stories Can Be Small:** "What This Book Does and Why," "Beginnings," "Cliché," "Didacticism," "Fable," "Parable," "Title," *MSF*, "The Stranger," "The Eyes of the Poor," "Beat Up the Poor," Charles Baudelaire; "End of the World of the End," Julio Cortázar; *Contemplation*, Franz Kafka; "A Historical Breakfast," "Erasing Amyloo," "The Fight in the Meadow," "The Reason Why the Closet-Man Is Never Sad," "The Taxi," Russell Edson  
**100-word story due**  
**Reading Response #1 due**
- Jan. 21      **Showing and Telling the Significant Detail:** "Accuracy," "Ambiguity," "Atmosphere," "Epiphany," "Metaphor and Simile," "Realism," "Snapshot," "Specimen," "Trauma," *MSF*, "The Student," Anton Chekhov; excerpt from *The Pure and the Impure*, Colette; "In a Tub," Amy Hempel; "Boat Trip," "The Chinese Woman, the Chinaman," "Two Stories," Robert Walser  
**Reading Response #2 due**
- Jan. 28      **Characterization:** "Character," "Coincidence," "Narrator," *MSF*,

"Mauricio ('The Eye') Silva," Roberto Bolaño; "Work," Denis Johnson; "Macario," Juan Rulfo

**500-word story due**  
**Reading Response #3 due**

Feb. 4

**Point of View/Dialogue:** "Anti-Hero," "Dialect," "Dialogue," "Diction," "Immediacy," "Interior Monologue," "Irony," "Point of View," "Psychic Distance," "Stream of Consciousness," *MSF*; "First Love," Samuel Beckett; "On The Quai At Smyrna," Ernest Hemingway; "A Report to an Academy," Franz Kafka; "Spectacle," Susan Steinberg

**Reading Response #4 due**

Feb. 11

**Plot and Structure:** "Cliff-hanger," "Grotesque," "Local Color," "Melodrama," "Plot," "Scene," "Structure," "Tension," "Transitions," *MSF*; "Old Boys, Old Girls," Edward P. Jones; "Greenleaf" Flannery O'Connor

**1,000-word story due**

Feb. 18

**Fictional Place:** "The Yard Boy," Joy Williams; "A Distant Episode," Paul Bowles; "Josephine, the Singer, or The Mouse People," Franz Kafka

**Reading Response #5 due**

Feb. 25

**Theme:** "Allusion," "Allegory," "Flashback," "Premise," "Stories within Stories," "Theme," *MSF*; "A Country Doctor," Franz Kafka; "Silence," Alice Munro; "Debts," Grace Paley

**1,500-word story due**

**Reading Response #6 due**

Mar. 4 **NO CLASS:** spring break

Mar. 11

Workshops 1, 2, 3

**Postmodernism:** "Avant-garde," "Comedy," "Metafiction," "Parody," "Satire," *MSF*; "Cortés and Montezuma," "The Emerald," "The School," "Views of My Father Weeping," Donald Barthelme

**Reading Response #7 due**

Mar. 18

Workshops 4, 5, 6

**The Desperate:** "Farce," *MSF*; "Bartelby the Scrivener," Herman Melville; "A Tomb for Boris Davidovich," Danilo Kis

**Reading Response #8 due**

Mar. 25

Workshops 7, 8, 9

**The Fantastic:** "Science Fiction," *MSF* "The Rememberer," Aimee Bender; "The Immortal," "The Library of Babel," Jorge Luis Borges; "Kaleidoscope," "Night Meeting," Ray Bradbury; "Visitation," Bruno Schulz

**(Optional) 2,000-word story due**

Apr. 1 Workshops 10, 11, 12

**Horror/Supernatural:** "Documents/Diaries/Letters," "Genre," *MSF*; "The Summer People," Shirley Jackson; "In the Penal Colony," Franz Kafka; "The Facts of the Case of M. Valdemar," Edgar Allan Poe

**Reading Response #9 due**

Apr. 8

Workshops 13, 14, 15

**The Sublime:** "Epigram," *MSF*; "My First Goose," "The Life of Matvey Rodionovich Pavlichenko," "Salt," "Sashka Christ," Isaac Babel; "First Sorrow," "The Hunger Artist," Franz Kafka; excerpt from *Crow With No Mouth*, Ikkyū

**Reading Response #10 due**

Apr. 15 Workshops 16, 17, 18

**The Enigmatic:** *Metamorphosis*, Franz Kafka

Apr. 22

**FINAL DAY OF CLASS**

**The Frontier:** "Break It Down," "Cockroaches in Autumn," "Idea for a Short Documentary Film," "Jury Duty," "Mother's Reaction to My Travel Plans," Lydia Davis; excerpt from *The Interrogative Mood*, Padgett Powell

**FINAL PORTFOLIO/REVISIONS DUE**

**NOTE:** if readings are not found in the Course Pack, they will be found in Kafka's *Metamorphosis and Other Stories* or Stern's *Making Shapely Fiction (MSF)* .

## Writing/Reading Considerations:

1) My best stories come out of nowhere, with no concern for form at all.

--Barry Hannah

2) I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.

--James Baldwin

3) There is at the back of every artist's mind something like a pattern or a type of architecture. The original quality in any man of imagination is imagery. It is a thing like the landscape of his dreams; the sort of world he would like to make or in which he would wish to wander; the strange flora and fauna of his own secret planet; the sort of thing he likes to think about. This general atmosphere, and pattern or structure of growth, governs all his creations, however varied.

--G. K. Chesterton

4) Let the writer take up surgery or bricklaying if he is interested in technique. There is no mechanical way to get the writing done, no shortcut. The young writer would be a fool to follow a theory. Teach yourself by your own mistakes; people learn only by error. The good artist believes that nobody is good enough to give him advice. He has supreme vanity. No matter how much he admires the old writer, he wants to beat him.

--William Faulkner, *Pdl's Review*, "The Art of Fiction No. 12"

5) Did it happen? Could it happen? Should it happen? You do not want the first answer to be yes. The second should be a strained maybe. \_\_\_\_\_ The third answer should be a resounding Yes ! Fiction is implausibility rendered plausible by an accuracy of sentiment conveyed by precision of utterance. Fiction must be a doozie, and it must be a gratifying doozie. You must at all cost forestall "So what?"

--Padgett Powell

6) A good story is the author's private idea of what makes a very good day. It chronicles a heightened moment of his or her dreams.

--Padgett Powell

7) I was trying to write then and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced . . . but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to get it.

--Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*

8) Whatever the case, the important thing is to keep reading . . . That's more important than writing . . . don't you think? The truth is, reading is always more important than writing.

--Roberto Bolaño, Interview, 2002

9) Keep them people, people, people, and don't let them get to be symbols.

--Ernest Hemingway to John Dos Passos, 1932

10) I am very much taken with your books and their wonderful imaginative energy. The more fantastic the action the more precise the writing and this is the way it ought to be.

--Flannery O'Connor to John Hawkes, *Habit of Being*

11) Nobody really knows or understands and nobody has ever said the secret. The secret is that it is poetry written into prose and it is the hardest of all things to do.

--Ernest Hemingway in *How It Was*

12) Interviewer: In your non-commercial novels you feel no need to make

concessions of any sort?

Simenon: I never do that, never, never, never. Otherwise I wouldn't write. It's too painful to do it if it's not to go to the end.

--Georges Simenon, *Paris Review*, "The Art of Fiction No. 9"

13) . . . everybody's . . . offering true accounts of the activity of the mind.

--Donald Barthelme, Interview

14) There are four legends about Prometheus. According to the first, because he had betrayed the gods to men he was chained to a rock in the Caucasus and the gods sent eagles that devoured his perpetually renewed liver.

According to the second, Prometheus in his agony, as the beaks hacked into him, pressed deeper and deeper into the rock until he became one with it.

According to the third, in the course of thousands of years his treachery was forgotten, the gods forgot, the eagles forgot, he himself forgot.

According to the fourth, everyone grew weary of what had become meaningless. The gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily.

What remained was the inexplicable range of mountains. Legend tries to explain the inexplicable, since it arises out of a foundation of truth, it must end in the realm of the inexplicable

--Franz Kafka, "Prometheus"

15) What the fuck? Fuck shit up.

--Chuck Dukowski, Black Flag

16) What is desired in a man is / kindness.

--Proverbs, 19:2

17) Twain was always prepared to die. That's the only way to understand his humor.

--Roberto Bolaño, "Our Guide to the Abyss" (Preface to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*)

18) It's possible to have many homelands, it occurs to me now, but only one passport, and that passport is obviously the quality of one's writing. Which doesn't mean writing well, because anyone can do that, but writing incredibly well, and not even that, because anyone can write incredibly well. So what is top-notch writing? The same thing it's always been: the ability to peer into the darkness, to leap into the void, to know that literature is basically a dangerous undertaking.

--Roberto Bolaño, "Caracas Address"

19) And, I wondered, would *Pride and Prejudice* have been a better novel if Jane Austen had not thought it necessary to hide her manuscript from visitors? I read a page or two to see; but I could not find any signs that her circumstances had harmed her work in the slightest. That,

perhaps, was the chief miracle about it. Here was a woman about the year 1800 writing without hate, without bitterness, without fear, without protest, without preaching. That was how Shakespeare wrote, I thought, looking at *Antony and Cleopatra*; and when people compare Shakespeare and Jane Austen, they may mean that the minds of both had consumed all impediments; and for that reason we do not know Jane Austen and we do not know Shakespeare, and for that reason Jane Austen pervades every word that she wrote, and so does Shakespeare. If Jane Austen suffered in any way from her circumstances it was in the narrowness of life that was imposed upon her. It was impossible for a woman to go about alone. She never travelled; she never drove through London in an omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself. But perhaps it was the nature of Jane Austen not to want what she had not. Her gift and her circumstances matched each other completely."

-Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

20) Be truthful, one would say, and the result is bound to be amazingly interesting.

-Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

21) What is meant by 'reality'? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable--now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now in a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech - and there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates. Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality. It is his business to find it and collect it and communicate it to the rest of us. So at least I infer from reading *Lear* or *Emma* or *La Recherche du Temps Perdu*. For the reading of these books seems to perform a curious couching operation on the senses; one seems more intensely afterwards; the world seems bared of its covering and given an intenser life. Those are the enviable people who live at enmity with unreality; and those are the pitiable who are knocked on the head by the thing done without knowing or caring. So that when I ask you to earn money and have a room of your own, I am asking you to live in the presence of reality, an invigorating life, it would appear, whether one can impart it or not.

-Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

22) When one ceases to feel, I am of the opinion one should keep quiet.  
--André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism"

23) What is admirable about the fantastic is that there is no longer anything fantastic: there is only the real.

--André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism"

24) Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything.

--André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism"

25) Recently I did formulate a kind of theory of fiction which can be expressed in few words. It seems to me that fiction should achieve revenge for all the indignities of our childhood; it should be an act of rebellion against all the constraints of the conventional pedestrian mentality around us. Surely it should destroy conventional morality. I suppose all this is to say that to me the act of writing is criminal. Obviously I think that this so-called criminal act is essential to our survival.

--John Hawkes, Interview

26) For me, writing something down was the only road out.

--Anne Tyler, *The Writer on Her Work*

27) Indeed, from the viewpoint of the Revolution, everything must directly contribute to the final goal: the liberation of the proletariat . . . Everything, including literature, painting, etc. But for the artist, on the contrary, and despite his firmest political convictions—even despite his good will as a militant revolutionary—art cannot be reduced to the status of a means in the service of a cause which transcends it, even if this cause were the most deserving, the most exalting; the artist puts nothing above his work, and he soon comes to realize that he can create only *for nothing*; the least external directive paralyzes him, the least concern for didacticism, or even for signification, is an insupportable constraint; whatever his attachment to his party or to generous ideas, the moment of creation can only bring him back to the problems of his art, and to them alone.

--Alain Robbe-Grillet, "On Several Obsolete Notions"

28) Now, on the contrary, if there is one thing of which an unprejudiced reading convinces us it is the absolute reality of the things Kafka describes. The visible world of his novels is certainly for him the real world, and what is behind (if there *is* something) seems without value, faced with the manifest nature of objects, gestures, words, etc. The hallucinatory effect derives from their extraordinary clarity and not from mystery or mist. Nothing is more fantastic, ultimately, than precision. Perhaps Kafka's staircases lead *elsewhere*, but they are *there*, and we look at them, step by step, following the detail of the banisters and the risers. Perhaps his gray walls hide something, but it is on them that the memory lingers, on their cracked whitewash, their crevices. Even what the hero is searching for vanishes before the obstinacy of his pursuit, his trajectories, his movements; they alone are made apparent, they alone are made real. In the whole of Kafka's work, man's relation with the world, far from having a symbolic character, is constantly direct and immediate.

--Alain Robbe-Grillet, "From Realism to Reality" (1955 and 1963)

29) Imagination applied to the whole world is vapid in comparison to imagination applied to a detail.

--Wallace Stevens

30) . . . literary activity, in its specific aspect as a mental discipline, cannot have any other justification than to illuminate certain matters for oneself at the same time as one makes them communicable to others, and that one of the highest goals . . . to restore by means of words certain intense states, concretely experienced and become significant, to be thus put into words.

--Michel Leiris

31) In general I would say that his work lacks ambition. The control of the elements is too tight. Nowhere do you get a feeling a writer deforming his medium in order to say what has never been said before, which is to me the mark of great writing. Too cool, too neat, I would say. Too lacking in passion. That's all.

-j.M. Coetzee, *Summertime*

32) Yes, but we are all a little desperate, that is life. If you are strong you conquer the despair. That is why I ask: how can you be a great writer if you are just an ordinary little man? Surely you must have a certain flame in you that sets you apart from the people in the street. Maybe in his books, if you read them, you can see that flame. But, for me, in the times I was with him I never felt any fire. On the contrary, he seemed to me--how shall I express it?--tepid.

-j.M. Coetzee, *Summertime*

33) I just look into my own imagination. I don't have a secret way.

--James Tate

34) When you start putting words on the page, an associative process takes over. And, all of a sudden, there are surprises. All of a sudden you say to yourself, "My God, how did this come into your head? Why is this on the page?" I just simply go where it takes me.

--Charles Simic