ENGL [4330.002 (Advanced Contemporary Short Fiction)](http://blog-test.uta.edu/~laurak/4330-advanced-creative-non-fiction/)

**Instructor: Laura Kopchick**

Office: 418 Carlisle, Office Hours: T-TH 3:30-5

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Required Course Texts:

*The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*, Marcus ed.

*The Writer’s Notebook: Craft Essays From Tin House*

*The Half-Known World,* Boswell

(other stories will also be available via web links, through the UTA library catalogue via JSTOR, or as pdfs linked to our course schedule. You MUST have a copy of these stories available to bring to class with you when we discuss them. Preferably a hard copy, with notes written in the margins. However, a reading device is also acceptable).

**Overview**:

This class is designed to be a Literature/Creative Writing hybrid course, focusing on the art of the contemporary short story. We’ll read these short works of fiction not as mere passive readers but rather as architects of language, tearing down the walls and floors of these stories to figure out how they’ve been constructed. We’ll tap against the windows and railings, bang around the pipes in our class discussions. Then, instead of writing an analytical essay about what these stories *mean*, we’ll write our own emulations of these stories. This isn’t plagiarism—this is learning from the writers who have come before us and who have mastered techniques and tropes that we—as fellow writers—will learn to better and complicate our own writing. The idea came from a quote the fiction writer Antonya Nelson gave to *Story Prize Magazine* recently when asked to offer up some writing rules for aspiring writers. Her rule #3 states: “Figure out how to read the work you love in a way that teaches you how to write better. Own the stories you love by committing them to memory, by studying them, by unearthing the care with which they are made. The process of re-reading is not unlike the process of revision: You are mastering the methods behind the artwork, complicating and texturizing and making it, inasmuch as you can, bulletproof.” Since better readers make better writers, we will read several contemporary short stories as well as craft essays, discuss them, then use them as inspiration for our own works.  Our goal is to become better writers, yes, but also to become more confident of our writing strengths and more aware of our weaknesses. This course is NOT designed to be primarily a workshop-based class. Rather, we will spend quite a bit of in class discussion focusing closely on a specific trope of fiction and the many different ways differing writers exploit that particular trope (see schedule below for the tropes we will be exploring). There will be a lot of reading involved in this course, reading that is mandatory and must be done closely. You might now necessarily LIKE every single story or craft essay that you read in this class but you can certainly LEARN from every single assigned piece of reading. Although this is not a workshop-based class, we will, however, do some sharing of our own writing with our peers. In terms of workshopping, everyone will have one story workshopped by the entire class, and the other two stories will be peer evaluated in small groups (for a total of three 8-12 page short stories written during the course of this semester). We will learn that writing is often a collaborative process, which leads me nicely into the policies of this course:

**Policies:**

**\*\***Class attendance is required. This is not a lecture course—this is a seminar that relies on active student discussion and participation. Attendance is, therefore, mandatory, and cutting classes will lower your final course participation grade. If you have a legitimate excuse (medical, with documentation) I will work with you to make up whatever work was missed in class and provide extra assignments to make up for the discussions missed. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to make up the work. You should contact me via e-mail as soon as possible to see what you’ve missed. If you do miss class, I will always leave handouts, workshop essays, etc. in the box on my office door if the assignment is NOT posted on-line on the course schedule. It is your responsibility to pick these up and complete any work before the next class session. Even if you are absent, all assignments are due to me on the assigned date. \*Please note: If you miss more than 3 classes during the semester you will automatically fail the course for the semester.

\*\*I will not accept late papers or assignments unless you have made arrangements with me at least 24 hours in advance.

\*\*All assignments must be typed and double-spaced. Use basic fonts, no larger than 12 pt. Margins should be standard. Titles are mandatory and fun. Be original and inventive. Do not use plastic binders or notebooks to enclose your essays. Staples are best. Always, always keep an extra hard copy of your work.

\*\*Plagiarism will result in immediate failure. You are here to improve your writing. I am here to help you improve your writing. I am usually waiting there, in my office, waiting for you to come by so I can help you improve your writing.

\*\*You are not allowed, under any circumstances, to reuse papers from prior classes in this course.  Reusing papers does not demonstrate any advance in knowledge or skill, and so would not be helpful for you either in terms of your learning this semester, or for me in terms of assessing this learning.  If you feel your situation constitutes a clear or significant exception to this rule, you must discuss this with me prior to the due date of the first draft. **Your work is to be your own, and it is to be prepared originally for this course and section. It is considered Academic Dishonesty to present any portion of work prepared by someone else and to claim it as your own. It is also unacceptable to submit work or portions of work you have written for another class or section. This includes work prepared for high school and college courses you have taken or in which you are currently enrolled and any previous sections of this course.**

**\*\*Class No-No’s**

1. No laptop use unless there is a documented need for it from the Office of Disabilities or if you are using it as a reading device in class on days when we are discussing a downloadable story.
2. No cellphone use or texting in class!  (This is my big rule–cellphone use in class is disruptive and disrespectful to everyone else in the classroom.  I’ll be tempted to throw a shoe at you should you take out your phone and start tapping away. If there is an emergency situation, or if you are expecting an important phone call, put your phone on vibrate and go quietly into the hall).
3. You **MUST** bring your text(s) to each class session. Come to class prepared and ready with your textbook or a copy of the assigned reading in front of you. **If you have not done the class preparation there is really no point coming to class discussion and you should take an absence. If it is obvious that you have not come to class prepared then there is a good chance you will be asked to leave and will be assigned an absence for that day.**
4. Do not be disrespectful to your fellow class members, especially during workshop. Keep comments objective and constructive. We are all here to help each other!

**Grades: A rough breakdown of how your final course grade will be given is**:

**Final Story #1: 20% (A-F)**

**Final Story #2: 20% (A-F)**

**Final Story #3: 20% (A-F)**

**Takehome Assignments: 10% (5x 5 points each)**

**Full Class Workshop Evaluation Comments: 10% (approximately 5 spot checks x 5 points each)**

**Small Workshop Group Letters: 10% (3 x 10 points each)**

**Attendance: 10%**

1. **absences=A**
2. **absence=A-**
3. **absences=B**
4. **absences=C**
5. **or more absences will result in a failing grade for this course (see note in policy section above).**

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE: (Please NOTE: This is a brand new class. Although I have an overall vision for what I want us to accomplish this semester I’m still culling our pool of readings for the semester. That means that I am appropriating an adaptable reading syllabus and so many of the stories will be chosen as the semester progresses, based on the needs/desires of the class.  Please check here OFTEN to see updated readings, assignments, etc.)**

**Section I : Narrative Point of View (The Extremes: the *intimate*, unreliable 1st Person VERSUS the *distanced* limited 3rd person/ or omniscient narrator)**

1/20  Discussion of the course and the syllabus. In-class student introduction game (two truths/one lie!). Discuss intimate/distanced graph on board for 1st/3rd person. Watch video clip (Robert Boswell at Imprint on Youtube). Listen to Character discussion on TinHouse CD.

 1/27  Discussion of “The Beauty Treatment” by Richter (JSTOR), “Where I Work,” Cummins (Anchor, p. 371), “Home” by Saunders (pdf HERE). In-Class creation of a character with a distinct voice—what do we know about this character just by the way he or she speaks? Due Next Class: 2-pg takehome assignment on 1st person POV (HERE). Also: 3 volunteers to bring a story for workshop (handout on 2/3 to be workshopped 2/10).

2/3  Discussion of “Head Down, Palm Up” by Jackson (p. 207 Harper 40 Stories pdf HERE), “The Paperhanger” by Gay (Anchor, p. ), Read out loud some 1st person POV takehome assignments (then hand in to me). 3 people to hand in workshop stories.

2/10 Workshop 3 stories. Rough Draft of story #1 due today.

2/17 Workshop 3 stories. Small Group Workshops. (Note: Please remember that small group workshop evaluation letters MUST be typed and a full page to receive credit. They are due on the day the story is workshopped. If you are being workshopped by the entire class, the others who are being workshopped are considered your small group).

**Section II : The Importance of Setting (Setting as Character/World Building)**

2/24 Discussion of “Pastoralia” by Saunders (pdf HERE), “What Have You Done” by Marcus (HERE)

3/3 Discussion of “Home” by Saunders (pdf HERE),

3/10 Spring Break!

3/17  3 people to hand in workshop stories.

3/24 Workshop 3 stories. Rough Draft of story #2 due today.

3/31  Workshop 3 stories. Small Group Workshops.

**Section III : Breaking the Rules (Experimentalism/Letting a Specific Trope Rise to the Surface)**

4/7 Discussion of “Glossolalia” by Minor (p. 159 Harper 40 Stories pdf HERE), “Eighty-Six Ways to Cross One Desert” by Lumans (p. 125 Harper 40 Stories pdf HERE),

4/14 3 people to hand in workshop stories.

4/21 3 Workshop 3 stories. Rough Draft of story #3 due today.

4/28 Workshop 3 stories. Small Group Workshops.

5/5 Last Day of class. In class reading and celebration! **Final drafts of story #3 due.**