

Lonely Selves & Mutable Selves: The Short Story's Forensics on Modern Identities

KUPF118

T/R 2:30-3:50

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Office Hours Thursdays 4-6 and by appointment

“A great story is not necessarily short at all, and the conception of the short story as a miniature art is inherently false. Basically the difference between the short story and the novel is not one of length. It is a difference between pure and applied storytelling.”

Frank O'Connor, The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story

“Everything one invents is true, you must be perfectly sure of that. Poetry is as precise as geometry.” Gustave Flaubert

Course Description

This class will focus on twentieth and twenty-first century short fiction framed in its various historical, social, cultural, and existential contexts and contents. The quintessential short story is not conventional; it is an ongoing experiment to document the minute particulars of distinctive consciousness and the quirks of personal identity. Through six contemporary Anglophone short story collections—a narrow yet profuse selection—we will explore numerous themes, characters, and insights into the human condition. By surveying various short stories reflective and refractive of 20th and 21st century realities, we shall examine the function of fiction in securing and dismantling different examples of subjectivity; how the human self is often an isolated agent of wrenching, self-estranging loneliness and paradoxically a vehicle for metamorphosis and self-actualization. Such critical and creative endeavoring will help foster awareness of art/literature as both a formidable expression of the contemporary world and an invaluable instrument for

interpreting history, addressing civic society and cultural memory, and offering alternative views of how to understand diverse personal landscapes. Also crucial is understanding the literary imagination as being a robust and exacting shaper of our interpretation of what being human is and might be. Various literary genres will provide an encompassing dimension of styles and forms to complement these contexts.

In order to facilitate our in-depth orientation to these diverse stories and their formal techniques, it is important to inhabit the craft as a practitioner. Therefore, you will be writing short fiction in this course, no experience necessary. That way, we can merge the creative with the critical, the academic and the artistic, the empirical with the imaginative, the personal and the communal. Be prepared for an exhilarating study of creativity and a literary laboratory in which you become the author-engineer! Welcome!

Requirements

You are expected to keep up with the reading in the texts and complete all assigned exercises. Classroom participation is essential. The seminar format for this course requires discussion, a constellation of active, energetic voices. Participation can also take the shape of various other engagements, including CANVAS forum posts, written commentaries or suggestions, and other input not assigned.

In addition to whatever other weekly assignments, I will ask that you compile a weekly writing journal based on your writing experience, classroom reactions, and any other thoughts related to literature and politics. These journal entries will be submitted along with your final project at the end of the semester and should account for at least 10 out of our 15 weeks-long semester.

(A full 15 points accounts for participation alone so keep this point of order in mind.***)***

Keep in mind that CANVAS will both complement, supplement and, at times, correct the syllabus in terms of timetables, scheduled speakers, field trips and content.

NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity

“Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [NJIT Academic Integrity Code](#).

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.”

Grade Breakdown

Class Participation	25 points
Weekly writings	25 points
(includes JOURNAL)	

Mid-Term Report	25 points
Final Project	25 points
100 Points	

Required Texts

Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber: and Other Stories* (Penguin Classics 978-0143107613)

Denis Johnson, *Jesus' Son: Stories* (Picador 978-0312428747)

John Keene, *Counternarratives* (New Directions 978-0811225526)

Otessa Moshfegh, *Homesick for Another World* (Penguin 978-0399562907)

Robert Stone, *Bear and His Daughter* (Ecco 978-0395901342)

Breece D'J Pancake, *The Stories of Breece D'J Pancake* (Back Bay Books 978-0316715973)

**** (Supplementary Materials will be utilized as well)**

***** The Calendar established below should be considered a reliable template, subject to all the happy contingencies of the academic experience: erratic weather; unpredictable pacing; potential guest speakers; inspirational interventions in the form of innovative suggestions by you; improvisational developments that perfectly align with the methodology of the class, the general communal atmosphere, and the overall schema, format, and established patterns inscribed *here*.**

NOTA BENE:

I am fully aware and understanding of your all your time, school, and work commitments. The scheduled reading assignments are eminently reasonable and you are responsible for all the reading. In other words, you cannot pass through this course without reading all the books. That noted, I can GUARANTEE that you shall find all these stories entrancing, provocative, haunting, memorable, meaningful, and crucial.

Also, I am completely sympathetic to your pocketbooks, wallets, and Venmo accounts. None of these volumes are pricey but all together they do represent a substantial amount. Feel free to buy or burrow any edition in any format. An audiobook does not serve as a legitimate literary medium.

CALENDAR/COURSE OUTLINE:

(Each week advertises the author and collection under consideration, the assignments related to these works, and due dates for all work. The numbering corresponds to the specific days of each week. Again, CANVAS and email reminders will supplement these notifications).

WEEK ONE (1/21-1/23)

1. Introductory Session
2. Roundtable Discussion: "Literature and You"

Canvas Discussion Posting: "What Stories Are Special to You?"

WEEK TWO (1/28 – 1/30)

1. Lecture, "On Fiction and the Conflicted Contemporary Self"
2. Lecturer, "Building Blocks for Understanding Fiction, Short and Long"

Test-Run, Going Old School to Become New Wave

Read Herman Melville's "Bartelby the Scrivener"

(<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11231/pg11231-images.html>) + be ready to discuss

Also read James Joyce's "The Dead"

(<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2814/2814-h/2814-h.htm#chap15>) + be ready to discuss

WEEK THREE (2/4 – 2/6)

1. Denis Johnson, *Jesus' Son: Stories*

Overview and Introduction

2. Denis Johnson, *Jesus' Son: Stories*

Group Talk

In-class Diagramming

WEEK FOUR (2/11 – 2/13)

1. Denis Johnson, *Jesus' Son: Stories*

Discussion continued

2. Denis Johnson, *Jesus' Son: Stories*

Creative Considerations: Writing Your Way into the Story

WEEK FIVE (2/18 – 2/20)

1. Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber: and Other Stories*

Overview and Introduction

2. Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber: and Other Stories*

Group Talk

In-class Diagramming

WEEK SIX (2/25 – 2/27)

1. Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber: and Other Stories*

Discussion continued

2. Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber: and Other Stories*

Creative Considerations: Writing Your Way into the Story

WEEK SEVEN (3/4 – 3/6)

1. Breece D’J Pancake, *The Stories of Breece D’J Pancake*

Overview and Introduction

2. Breece D’J Pancake, *The Stories of Breece D’J Pancake*

Group Talk

In-class Diagramming

WEEK EIGHT (3/11 – 3/13)

1. Breece D’J Pancake, *The Stories of Breece D’J Pancake*

Discussion continued

2. Midterm Roundtable Discussion

WEEK NINE

****SPRING RECESS March 15th through March 23rd ****

WEEK TEN (3/25 – 3/27)

1. John Keene, *Counternarratives*

Overview and Introduction

2. John Keene, *Counternarratives*

Group Talk

In-class Diagramming

WEEK ELEVEN (4/1) ***No Class on 4/3: Wellness Day at NJIT***

DRAFT DUE OF MIDTERM REPORT IN CLASS 4/1

FINAL DRAFT DUE IN CLASS 4/8

1. John Keene, *Counternarratives*

Discussion continued

WEEK TWELVE (4/8 – 4/10)

1. John Keene, *Counternarratives*

Group Talk

In-class Diagramming

2. Ottessa Moshfegh, *Homesick for Another World*

Overview and Introduction

WEEK THIRTEEN (4/15 – 4/17)

1. Ottessa Moshfegh, *Homesick for Another World*

Group Talk

In-class Diagramming

2. Ottessa Moshfegh, *Homesick for Another World*

Discussion continued

WEEK FOURTEEN (4/22 – 4/24)

1. Robert Stone, *Bear and His Daughter*

Overview and Introduction

2. Robert Stone, *Bear and His Daughter*

Group Talk

In-class Diagramming

WEEK FIFTEEN (4/29 – 5/1)

1. Robert Stone, *Bear and His Daughter*

Discussion continued

2. Robert Stone, *Bear and His Daughter*

Creative Considerations: Writing Your Way into the Story

WEEK SIXTEEN (5/6)

FINAL DISCUSSION, ULTIMATE RECKONINGS, TERMINAL TESTIMONIALS

LAST DAY OF CLASS

FINAL PROJECT DUE BY 5pm on FRIDAY, May 9th at 5pm