Instructor: Meera Nair  
Time: 6:20-9.00 Monday  
Office Hours: 5.30 - 6.00 pm or by appointment  
@ Bldg: 1 Washington Place, Room: 401  
Website for the course: https://sites.google.com/a/nyu.edu/writersasshapers/

A piece of fiction can be constructed in an unlimited number of ways. This course seeks to explore the formal possibilities available to us. We will study the choices we can make as writers—of narrative point of view, characterization, beginnings, dialogue, scene, summary, pacing, plot and resolutions. We will isolate and inspect strategies that published authors have used, even as students produce and workshop their own fiction from exercises. In this conversation between student writing and the studied literature we will hopefully get a greater sense of writers as sculptors of the raw material of story.

Course Learning Goals  
By the end of the course students will be able to:  
• demonstrate deeper and higher order understanding of critical craft concepts deployed in fiction;  
• explain how these concepts contribute to a text's literary, aesthetic and emotional effects;  
• develop close reading and annotation skills  
• demonstrate increasing skill with the workshop process of analyses and critical response to their own work and that of their peers;  
• produce 2 pieces of extended original fiction and 2-3 exercises  
• develop solid skills around revision and editing techniques and produce reasoned, perceptive responses to assigned texts.

Attendance and Participation:  
It is your responsibility to create and take advantage of this community of readers, thinkers and writers by coming prepared every day to class having read and thought about the material we are discussing, by having drafts completed on time, contributing to class discussion and being respectful, thoughtful and responsive listeners. I expect you to contribute something relevant and meaningful to class discussion at least three times per class. I will be calling on people randomly to volunteer responses too, but it will be your responsibility to make sure you are contributing weekly, even if you are only asking questions. Failure to participate can significantly lower your grade.

Absences:  
Please count on coming to every single class this semester. If, however, emergencies intervene, know that you will be allowed two absences for any reason (lateness, illness, family emergency, etc.) before I begin marking you down. If you are not in class when I take attendance you are marked absent. Please note that if you leave the classroom for five or more minutes after class has begun, you
will be marked late or absent accordingly. In case of personal and medical emergencies, you should contact me, or the appropriate authority in your department.

1 **excused absence** – **No impact**

**Every additional absences – 3 points lowered off your final grade**

3 or more absences – **You will fail the course.**

**Statement on academic integrity**

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, **doubling or recycling coursework**, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website.

**Texts:**

**Book**

*Making Shapely Fiction, Jerome K. Stern*

**Stories**

(Click on the links. Stories will open on a new page. You may then download the texts)

*Natasha, David Bezmogis* (For Feb 9)

*Tandolfo the Great, Richard Bausch* (Read for Feb 9)

*Who's Irish? Gish Jen* (For Feb 23)

*In other rooms, other wonders, Daniyal Muennuddin* (For Feb 23)

*Tall Tales from the Mekong Delta, Kate Braverman* (March 9)

*Say Yes, Tobias Wolff*

*When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine, Jhumpa Lahiri*

*Where are you going, where have you been? Joyce Carol Oates* (March 9)

*Sarah Cole : A kind of Love Story* (March 2)

*Axolotol, Cortazar* (March 2)

*A Distant Episode, Bolwes* (March 30)

*A Time for Kissing, Robinson* (March 30)

*A small, good thing, Carver* (April 6)

*The Bath, Carver* (April 6)

**Essays - Craft and otherwise**

*Yearning, Robert Olen Butler* (Read for Feb 9)

*Icebergs, Glaciers and Arctic Dreams: Developing Characters, Edwards*

*Counterpointed Characterization, Baxter* (For Feb 9)

*Decoding Point of View, Dave King* (For March 2)

*Incremental Perturbations: how to know if you have a plot or not, John Barth* (For March 9)

*The Scene Beast is Hungry, C.J. Hrijbal*

*On Reading How you are Read: Evaluating Criticism, Ann Pancake*

*Chris Offut on Revision* (For April 6)

*How to Revise your Fiction* (For April 6)
## Course Schedule

Note: Readings are always due the following Monday if assigned over a weekend. Read assigned stories and ALWAYS make or take notes on the stories you read, identifying the key craft elements. Always write down questions you have about the stories, too. All stories/exercises due should be hard-copies, (printed out), and brought to class.

This schedule may change in keeping with the needs of the class.

Our main text is: *Making Shapely Fiction* by Jerome K. Stern (*MSF below)

<table>
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<th>DATES</th>
<th>IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>Homework (to read and write)</th>
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<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
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<td>Nancy Agabian-will teach</td>
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<td>Writing: Revise and type your exercise from class.</td>
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<td>Wk. 3: Feb 16, Mon</td>
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1. Dialogue

2. Diction (pg.120)

Assignment:

Exercise 1. Bring to class: 4 copies (1 for me).

GWK 5: March 2
Field trip, POV Craft lecture. POV in class exercise. Discussion.

Read:
1. Joyce Carol Oates "Where are you going, Where have you been?"
2. Braverman, "Tall Tales from the Mekong Delta."
3. MSF: Premise (195)
4. Barth, "Incremental Perturbations: How to know if you have a plot or not (essay)"

Group 1: stories Due: 1. Banks, Sarah "A Kind of Love" Story 2. Cortazar "Decoding Narrative Distance."

Wk 6: March 9
Plot, Craft lecture.
Workshop: Group 1

Read: Group 2 Stories
Exercise 2 assigned: Bear at the Door (pg.45)

MSF: Crisis (pg.109)

Due: 1. Joyce Carol Oates "Where are you going, Where have you been?"
2. Braverman, "Tall Tales from the Mekong Delta."
3. MSF: Premise (195)
4. Barth, "Incremental Perturbations: How to know if you have a plot or not (essay)"

Letters to group 1.

Wk 7: March 16, Mon. (Spring Break)
| Wk. 8: March 23, Monday | Beginnings, Workshop: Group 2 Reading/writing/discussion | Read: Group 3 stories  
Read: 1. “A Time for Kissing,” Robinson  
2. A Distant Episode, Bowles.  
Due: Assignment 2: Bear at the Door  
Letters to Group 2  
MSF: Crisis (pg.109) |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Wk. 9: March 30, Monday | Emotion: Craft. Workshop Group 3 | Read: 1.Revision Essay, Chris Offut, 2. Small, Good Thing and 3.The Bath (Raymond Carver)  
Due:  
Letters to Group 3  
Reading: A Time for Kissing,” Robinson  
2. A Distant Episode, Bowles. |
| Wk. 10: April 6 | Revision workshop. | Read: Group 1(second Round)  
Write: revise extensively two scenes from Story 1  
Due: 1.Revision Essay, Chris Offut, 2. Small, Good Thing and 3.The Bath (Raymond Carver) |
| Wk. 11: April 13 | Group 1(SR) workshop  
Mini-workshop revised scenes | Read: Group 2 stories  
Write: Revise two descriptions for emotion and detail.  
Due: Writing:  
1.Critique Letters to group 1  
2. Two revised scenes from Story 1 due. 4 copies printed, due in class. Also bring original to compare. |
| Wk 12: April 20 | Group 2 (SR) – workshop  
Mini-workshop revised descriptions | Read: Group 3  
Due: Critique Letters to Group 2  
2. Two revised descriptions for |
FINAL PORTFOLIO GUIDELINES

- Two substantially **revised, cleanely edited** short stories: one at least 8-10 pages long, the other 12-14 pages. You can work on them through out the semester.

- Assessments of 3 literary readings you attend

- A letter (500 words) assessing your progress as a writer and reader of fiction in this class

When I say your story should be “substantially revised” and “edited,” I mean that it should be aggressively and repeatedly rewritten, and brought to the most fully realized form that you can manage by the semester’s end. Apply what you have learned of craft in class to make substantial changes—in point of view, voice, characterization for example--- to your original draft, proof read closely and obsessively. Writing Center visits are strongly advised.

Also include an informal **self-evaluation**, in the form of a letter at least 500 words long, in which you tell me what you learned as a reader and writer during the semester.

Please submit your Final Portfolios bound by a manuscript clip (not a paperclip) or tucked in a soft folder (not a ring binder).