

## AMERICAN SHORT STORY

Engl-UA 240-001

Kristen Doyle Highland  
[Kdh253@nyu.edu](mailto:Kdh253@nyu.edu)  
Mailbox in English Dept, 244 Greene St.

M-W 1:00-3:10  
7 East 12<sup>th</sup> St. Rm 131  
Office Hours: Wed, 3:30-5pm

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores American literature and culture through what has been called our uniquely national art form, the short story. Writer Ann Patchett likens reading short stories to the experience of a swarm of bees, “blocking out sound and sun and becoming the only thing you can think about.” We’ll be doing a lot of thinking about the short story—as a literary art form, as a social and historical record, and as a reflection of the cultural values that shape our ideas of who we are. From the ghosts and fantasies that haunted the nineteenth-century short story to the casual cruelties and everyday redemptions in twentieth-century stories to today’s experimental fictions, the short story represents diverse visions of American identity and experience. We will thus roam widely to construct methods for thinking about and a critical vocabulary for discussing and writing about the short story.

Students will examine the genre, learning about its formal structures and strategies, as well as its place among various historical literary movements, including realism, naturalism, modernism, and postmodernism. Special attention will be paid to the material conditions of short story writing and publishing—the 19<sup>th</sup> century rise of the literary magazine, the Little Magazines and anthology collections of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the possibilities for the short story in today’s digital environment. We will read individual stories from a wide range of American authors as well as a contemporary short story collection.

As an English course, we will also devote energy to critical writing skills. Written assignments will be designed to help students gain expertise in a variety of academic writing modes including the formal essay, concise close-readings, and the critical review. Students may choose to do a final project in lieu of the traditional essay.

### OBJECTIVES

Over the term of the course, students will:

- Expand their knowledge of literary elements and techniques such as point of view, plot, and narrative in their understanding of the short story as craft
- Develop interpretive and analytical skills by engaging with the rhetorical elements of the short story
- Construct a methodology and critical vocabulary for reading stories
- Be able to position texts in relation to major historical literary movements
- Develop an understanding of the short story within the context of literary and socio-cultural history
- Develop expertise in formulating critical readings and expressing themselves clearly and concisely in a variety of written forms.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Both texts available at **Shakespeare & Company Bookstore**, 716 Broadway. Additional stories and readings available as PDFs in the course site on NYU Classes. Please print these out for class meetings.

*The Oxford Book of American Short Stories*, Second Edition. Joyce Carol Oates, ed.

Lorrie Moore, *Birds of America*. 1999.

## POLICIES

**Attendance and Participation:** *Your attendance in class is required.* The most significant aspect of your learning in this course requires attentive and engaged listening and active participation in a discursive community. Therefore, *if you miss more than two classes, you will be asked to drop the course.* All electronic devices [cell phones, laptops, iPods, etc.] should be turned off and put away during class. Bring all readings to class with you.

### Academic Integrity:

*(Adapted from NYU Liberal Studies Guide: [gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity](http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity))*

By its very nature, writing involves both individual and collaborative activity. Even when a piece of writing has only one author, that author employs a language system that is shared by others and draws upon ideas and values that are not his or hers alone. Indeed, one of the most important parts of becoming a writer within the academic community is learning how to balance the obligations of individuality and collaboration.

As a college writer, you are expected to use writing to develop and assert your own ideas and beliefs - to think for yourself. But at the same time, you are expected to engage the thinking of others, to place your own writing within the context of academic discourse by using and criticizing arguments from that discourse. This double obligation provides a framework in which to discuss plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged and inappropriate use of the ideas or wording of another writer. Because plagiarism corrupts values to which the university community is fundamentally committed - among them the pursuit of knowledge and intellectual honesty - plagiarism is considered a grave violation of academic integrity and the sanctions against it are correspondingly severe. Plagiarism can be characterized as "academic theft."

Plagiarism is:

- The submission of material authored by another person but represented as the student's own work, whether that material is copied in verbatim or near-verbatim form or paraphrased. **Plagiarism is a matter of fact, not intent;** whether or not there was an intent to deceive, the undocumented use of sources (that is, of any work authored by another person) constitutes plagiarism.
- The submission of material authored by another person constitutes plagiarism even if it is subjected to editorial revision (to cover up the dishonesty) that results in substantive changes in content or major alteration of writing style.
- Improperly acknowledging or failing to acknowledge sources from the Internet, as well as from textual essays, papers, or presentations.

- Submitting the same paper for two different classes, either in the same semester or in a different semester, without the express consent of **both** instructors.

For the consequences of academic integrity violations, consult the College of Arts & Science guide at [cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity](http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity).

## ASSESSMENT

Response (1-2pp)	... 5%
Close Reading (2-3pp)	...10%
Mid-term paper (5-7pp)	...25%
Anthology review (3pp)	...15%
Magazine reflection (1-2pp)	... 5%
Final	...25%
Discussion Lead	...10%
Participation	... 5%

## WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

### 1. Response, due Wed 7/10 in class

Select one of the Poe or Hawthorne stories to address in a one to two page response. Responses offer you the opportunity to engage with an aspect of the text (or two) that sincerely interests you. You might select an idea, a pattern, or a stylistic or structural element of the text and explore the role(s) and implication(s) of this element in the text. Alternatively, you may select a paragraph (or even a line) for a detailed exploration. Though the tone of the response may be casual, the ideas included should be thoughtful and insightful. You do not need a specific thesis or a conclusive argument (though you do need a focused topic); rather, the papers should reflect the development of your thinking—probing an idea, questioning assumptions, and exploring implications. If you end up with more questions than answers, you've written a strong response.

### 2. Close Reading, due Thurs 7/18 by 2pm

Apply the principles of a literary term we have discussed (e.g. plot, character, point of view, etc) to a *short* passage from one of the short stories we've read. Your reading (2-3pp) should chronicle and describe the specific deployment of the literary element and move from observation of details to a conclusion or interpretation. What does your close reading of this particular paragraph or section reveal about the work as a whole?

### 3. Mid-term Paper, due Fri 7/26 by 5pm

In consultation with me, you will define a topic and develop an original argument in relation to course material. Your paper must be a *literary argument*, that is, it should begin with a hypothesis about your chosen topic or texts, and then develop that hypothesis through close reading analysis. Papers may examine one or more short stories and define a topic based on subject, author, or archival materials. The submitted paper (5-7pp) should demonstrate mastery in embedding and analyzing textual evidence, devising an appropriate organization, and developing a well-

supported and clearly stated argument. Additional details and examples of promising topics will be discussed in class.

**4. Anthology Review, due Mon 8/5 in class**

This assignment asks you to write a critical review of a selected short story anthology. Using an anthology of your choice, your review (3pp) should present the details of the work, including editor and contents, as well as its principles of inclusion. In addition, a review asks that you evaluate the merits and contributions of the book. Does your anthology have historical significance? Does it attempt to (and succeed in?) illuminating a neglected aspect of short story writing or subject? Using specific details and examples from the text, develop and support an argument about the cultural, historical, or literary work the anthology attempts.

Anthologies can be borrowed from the library or bought cheap at used bookstores or on Amazon. **Taking into account delivery time and the high number of off-site books at Bobst, you should select an anthology in the first couple weeks of class.**

**5. Magazine Reflection, due Mon 8/12 in class**

**6. Discussion Lead**

Each student will be responsible for facilitating discussion on one short story. On the designated class meeting, the student should bring a brief outline (which should be emailed to me and posted in the Forums page of our class site by 10am) with one or two short passages of interest transcribed, brief thoughts on *why* each is of interest/worthy of further discussion, and one or two questions that we might use to enrich our conversation. Principles of effective discussion questions will be discussed.

**7. Final Project, due Thurs 8/15 by 5pm**

You may select one of the following options as a final project. More details about and requirements for each option will be discussed in class.

- Write a critical essay about one or more of the primary texts
- Write a critical essay about one of the themes discussed in the course, using textual analysis from two or three primary texts
- Design a short story collection—compile texts, write a scholarly introduction and short descriptions of the stories.
- Create a literary magazine (either print or digital form)—define its theme, outline types of contributions and include contents, and write an editorial introduction.

**READING SCHEDULE**

OX: Oxford Book of American Short Stories

NYUCL: NYU Classes online folder. Please print for class.

M 7/8: First day of class

T 7/9

Washington Irving, *Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon* (NYUCL): Preface to Revised Edition, “The Author’s Account of Himself,” “Rip Van Winkle” (OX), “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”; “Letter of Geoffrey Crayon to the Editor to the Editor of the *Knickerbocker Magazine*” “Peter Klaus the Goatherd” (NYUCL)

W 7/10 **RESPONSE DUE** (on one of the stories for today)

Edgar Allen Poe, “The Tell-Tale Heart” (OX), “The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale” (NYUCL)

Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Wives of the Dead” (OX), “Young Goodman Brown” (NYUCL)

M 7/15

Herman Melville, “The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids” (OX)  
Samuel Clemens, “Cannibalism in the Cars” (OX), “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” (NYUCL), “Private History of the ‘Jumping Frog’ Story” (NYUCL)

T 7/16 (class to be held in Fales Library, Bobst 3<sup>rd</sup> fl)

Sarah Orne Jewett, “A White Heron” (OX)

Supp: Kate Chopin, “The Storm” (OX)

W 7/17

Willa Cather, “A Death in the Desert” (OX)

Henry James, “The Middle Years” (OX)

Supp: Edith Wharton, “A Journey” (OX), “Roman Fever” (NYUCL)

### **CLOSE READING DUE BY THURSDAY, 7/18 AT 2PM**

M 7/22

Charles Chestnutt, “The Sheriff’s Children” (OX)

Ambrose Bierce, “An Occurance at Owl Creek Bridge” (NYUCL)

Supp: Stephen Crane, “The Open Boat” (NYUCL)

T 7/23

Sherwood Anderson, “Hands” (NYUCL), “Form, Not Plot, in the Short Story” (NYUCL)

William Faulkner, “That Evening Sun” (OX)

Ernest Hemingway, “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” (NYUCL)

Supp: Katherine Anne Porter, “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” (NYUCL),  
Sherwood Anderson, “The Strength of God” (OX)

W 7/24

Flannery O'Connor, "A Late Encounter with the Enemy" (OX), "A Good Man is Hard to Find," (NYUCL), "Writing Short Stories" (NYUCL), "A Reasonable Use of the Unreasonable" (NYUCL), Joyce Carol Oates, "The Parables of Flannery O'Connor" (NYUCL)

Supp: "Everything that Rises Must Converge" (NYUCL)

### **MID-TERM PAPER DUE BY FRIDAY, 7/26 AT 5PM**

M 7/29

John Cheever, "The Swimmer" (NYUCL)

Raymond Carver, "Are These Actual Miles" (OX), "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" (NYUCL)

Supp: Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery" (OX)

T 7/30

James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (OX)

Richard Wright, "The Man Who Was Almost a Man" (OX)

W 7/31

Eudora Welty, "A Worn Path" (NYUCL)

Annie Proulx, "The Mud Below" (OX), "Inspiration? Head Down the Back Road, and Stop for the Yard Sales" (NYUCL)

Supp: Pinckney Benedict, "Mercy" (OX)

### **M 8/5 ANTHOLOGY REVIEW DUE**

Philip Roth, "The Conversion of the Jews" (NYUCL)

Junot Diaz, "Edison, New Jersey" (OX)

Supp: David Foster Wallace "Good People" (OX); Ha Jin, "Children as Enemies" (OX)

T 8/6

Lorrie Moore, *Birds of America*

W 8/7

Lorrie Moore, *Birds of America*

### **M 8/12 MAGAZINE REFLECTION DUE**

Jennifer Egan, "Black Box" (NYUCL)

Articles on digital story form (NYUCL)

T 8/13

Aimee Bender, "The Rememberer" (NYUCL)

George Saunders, "Brad Carrigan, American" (NYUCL)

Joyce Carol Oates, "Heat" (OX)

Supp: Jeffrey Ford, "The Drowned Life" (OX)

W 8/14

Alison Bechdel, "Old Father, Old Artificer" from *Fun Home* (NYUCL)  
Secondary Materials on Graphic Storytelling

**FINAL PROJECT DUE BY THURSDAY, 8/15 AT 5PM**  
**(hard copy in office mailbox)**