

Wednesdays 3:30-5:25pm  
Helen C. White 7105  
Section: ENG 203.3  
Semester: Spring 2012

instructor: Oliver Bendorf  
email: [ibendorf@wisc.edu](mailto:ibendorf@wisc.edu)  
office: Helen C. White 6188  
office hrs: Wednesdays 2:30-3:30

## INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING

### REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. Coursepack (available at Bob's Copy Shop, 208 N. Charter St.)
  2. *Making Shapely Fiction*, by Jerome Stern
  3. *Astonish Yourself: 101 Experiments in the Philosophy of Everyday Life*, by Roger-Pol Droit
- The two books are available at A Room of One's Own, 307 W. Johnson St.

### A WORD ABOUT WHAT WE'RE UP TO

Chances are, you are in this course for some combination of the following reasons: you like to write, you want to learn to write creatively, and/or you need to fulfill your Comm-B requirement. I can't tell you exactly what you'll learn; that will depend on what you *want* to learn. But here are some tools I hope you'll come away with: a vocabulary that allows you to discuss contemporary short fiction and poetry, a broader understanding of what those genres can be and do, and tools for specific, idiosyncratic observation and experimentation that will help you craft and revise writing of your own. You will try new things, and you will learn about yourself. Because we meet only once a week, and because we will cover both fiction and poetry during the semester, this class will move quickly. You will be expected to engage vigorously with your own work, your classmates' work, and a variety of published contemporary texts. Expect also to participate in the creation of a writing community. As Lauren Berlant has written, be willing to see our classroom as a collaborative space. I could lecture you via email, but there's a reason classrooms exist. It's our job, together, to pick up where your writing loses its shape, and to help you sustain it beyond what you can do now. In that way we create solidarity. It's not about who you are biographically. It's about what it means to collaborate. Writing is, in many ways, an activity of solitude. But as writers, we are alone together, and that togetherness begins in this classroom. Welcome.

### REQUIREMENTS

#### The short version:

- Class attendance and participation
- One short story (8-12 pages, double-spaced), and its revision
- 7 poems, and revisions of at least 3
- One conference with me
- Reaction journals ("lab reports") to the weekly experiments, posted to course blog
- Attendance at two readings, with a reaction journal entry for each (1 page each)
- A review of an entire collection of poetry (details to come)
- Final portfolio, consisting of drafts, revisions, and a reflective essay (details to come)

The long version (please read carefully):  
Attend and Participate.

The most important part of creating community is showing up. You are allowed **one free absence**, and after that, I reserve the right to significantly lower your grade. **If you are absent three times during the semester, or if you miss your own workshop, you will automatically fail the course. If you are more than 20 minutes late, you take an absence for that day.** Two severe tardies (10 minutes late) amount to one absence as well. If possible, please let me know in advance if you are to be absent so we can work around it (religious holidays, etc.). **If you must miss class, it is your responsibility to e-mail me your assignment no later than the start of class time**, to get information regarding the next assignment, and to email any peer comments directly to your peers by the end of class time, and CC me on them. However, **if you are absent on the day your workshop piece is due for distribution, you must drop off paper copies to me before class** (either in person, or by proxy if you are contagious/out-of-town).

Another thing you must show up for, in addition to our class meetings, is to **one conference** with me. You may do so by either coming to my office hours or scheduling a time to meet. It will be most beneficial for us both if we meet after your first workshop.

Finally, you are expected to go to two literary readings during the semester, and to turn in brief (1-page) responses to them. I will update you on these readings each week.

Read.

If you're not interested in reading as well as writing, this is not the class for you. We'll be reading a lot *as writers* so that you can think about the decisions other writers make, discover what you like and don't like and *why*, and gain a sense of the larger writing community into which you're entering by taking this course. **You should come to class each day having read that day's readings at least twice and be prepared to discuss them. You will also be expected to read and review an entire collection of contemporary poetry (published in last ten years).**

Write.

There will be frequent in-class writing exercises and at-home writing assignments. Your assignments should always be typed. Poetry should be single-spaced; fiction should be double-spaced (or 1.5-spaced). **If assignments are over a page, they should be stapled.** Your assignments should always be proofread, and I reserve the right to lower your grade due to sloppy grammar. Take your work as a writer seriously in this course. Take pride in your writing. If you don't, it will show, and you'll be graded accordingly.

**I will not accept late work.** If your peer comments are late, send them anyway to be fair to your classmates. **You will receive a zero on any and all late assignments**, and I will not give you feedback. By "late," I specifically include assignments that you have forgotten/failed to print, and promised to e-mail to me right after class. If you are honestly experiencing printer problems, e-mail them to me before class. Better yet, don't wait until the five minutes before class to print, especially for workshop pieces.

### Experiment.

If you want to write interesting things, you must be willing to take risks. A large component of this course will be centered on a process of experimentation: learning to see everyday things from a new perspective. How this will shake out in terms of our week-to-week activities will be through the required text *Astonish Yourself*. Each week, we'll all do the same experiments from that book. For weeks that have multiple experiments listed, you may choose which one to respond to. **You will write up a weekly response and post it to our class blog, which lives at: <http://cwlab.tumblr.com>.** (You do not need to create an account. At that URL, click on that week's experiment, and post your response as a comment.) **These "lab reports" can be as long or short as you need them to be in order to convey what you did in the experiment, what the results were, and what you learned.** I don't expect these to be fully-formed essays, nor do I expect you to come to some singular "correct" conclusion. You will benefit most if you really apply yourself, even or especially if the experiment seems strange or pointless to you. Having said that, you are responsible for using your judgment re: when and how you carry out the experiments. E.g., "become music," yes, but don't try to tell your physics professor that you couldn't make the midterm because you were becoming music for your creative writing course.

### Workshop.

All of you are taking a risk exposing your writing to the criticism of your peers. The workshop can only function in a culture of mutual respect and friendliness. This means treating not only your classmates with respect, but their work as well. In workshop, you should always provide honest, constructive criticism, which neither denies nor exaggerates the works' shortcomings or accomplishments. **You will write in-depth, on-page feedback for your peers' workshop pieces. For short stories, you will also type up a ½ page response to each story, which you will send to each author and me via email.**

Workshops come up quickly since we only meet once a week. **For our short stories workshop, the week before you are up for workshop, you should arrive to class with eighteen copies of your piece. If you are not prepared with copies of your piece, or if you are absent on the day of your workshop, you will receive a zero for the unit.** If you must be absent the day you are to distribute your piece, drop it off to me early (or by proxy) so that I can distribute it for you. Our workshops of your poems will operate by what is called "cold workshop," meaning that you will *not* distribute your poems the week before.

### Revise.

I don't expect your first drafts to be perfect, and you shouldn't either. I do, however, expect that you will engage vigorously and thoughtfully with them over the course of the semester as we learn new tools. Your final portfolio will be a chance to demonstrate these revisions.

### **GROUPS**

While the entire class is here to provide support and accountability, you will be assigned to a group with a few of your classmates in order to empower you even further to build relationships with each other as writers. In these groups, you will:

- consult each other for information if you have been absent from class,
- serve as “lead responders” when a member of your group is up for workshop,
- work closely on each other’s revisions of short stories and poems,
- and begin two class discussions of assigned readings for a particular day (details to come)

I also encourage you to meet in your groups outside of class for writers’ dates, and to devise ways to collaborate and support each other’s writing beyond the above ways. You might want to jot the names and contact information of your group members below:

## **GRADING**

Your final grade will be determined by your performance in the following:

- participation: attendance, class discussion, attending/responding to a reading.
- weekly assignments: exercises, critiques, lab reports, etc.
- final portfolio: completeness, quality, and originality of written work.

Because writing is a skill that requires patience and tuning, I will not put letter grades on individual assignments, but you will receive written comments on everything you turn in. If you have any questions about grading or about how you are doing in the course, please make an appointment with me and I’ll be glad to discuss it with you.

## **PLAGIARISM**

In this class, we will imitate and borrow from other writers as a learning tool; indeed, there is a long tradition of being influenced by, and directly responding to, the work of other writers. Here, I’ll borrow from Dean Young, who writes in *The Art of Recklessness*, “I always tell my students not to worry about originality; just try to copy the manners and music of the various, the more various the better, poetries you love: your originality will come from your inability to copy well: YOUR GENIUS IS YOUR ERROR.” In other words, we will imitate plenty, but *not* to pass off someone else’s writing as our own; rather, to try new things and then follow our own writing where it diverges. (Most cases of plagiarism can be cleared up by crediting a source; for example, if you write an imitation poem, write “after [author’s name]” below your title; if you borrow a line from another source, say so in a footer note.)

## **PET PEEVES, or, THE “PRETTY PLEASE” SECTION**

I think you’ll find that I am flexible about most things. That said, I do have some pet peeves. Here’s how to avoid them:

- **If I ask for something to be turned in via email, please do so. If I ask for something to be turned in as a hard copy in class, please do so. No printing emergencies, no forgetting.** No dog ears, no paper clips. Yes to staples, yes to page numbers.
- **Please be on time to class.** I almost always collect work and give important announcements in the first few minutes, and it will make your life and mine much easier if you don’t miss this and if I only have to do it once. If you must be late, it is your responsibility to check in with me after class to turn in work, and with your affinity group to see what announcements and information you missed.
- **Please, please don’t look at your phone while we’re in class.** I know it’s hard. I know smartphones make it easy to do this anytime, anywhere. I know *The New York Times* says our brains are adapting to multi-tasking. But becoming a better writer is at least halfway about learning how to pay attention, so let’s agree that we’ll respect the classroom as our learning lab by making it gadget-free. (There may be occasional exceptions where I permit you to use your laptops for in-class writing.)

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Your success in this class is important to me. If you have a disability or particular circumstance that may have an impact on your work in this class, please contact me early in the semester so that we can work together to develop strategies for adapting assignments to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course. The McBurney Disability Resource Center (263-2741) provides resources for students with disabilities. Students need to provide documentation of a disability to this office in order to receive official university services and accommodations. Please don’t hesitate to let me know if you require assistance or accommodations for any reason.

## **ETC.**

*Syllabus subject to change at instructor’s discretion. Students with questions or concerns about the course should contact the instructor or the Director of the Undergraduate Creative Writing Program.*

**WEEKLY SCHEDULE**

*All lab reports listed are based on experiments in the Droit text, "Astonish Yourself."*

Date	In-class. (Assigned readings are listed on the date we'll discuss them.)
Week One Jan. 25	WELCOME.  In-class, discuss <i>Stern</i> : beginnings, cliché, sentimentality, showing and telling, subtlety, trust your material and <i>Coursepack</i> : Vonnegut, "Creative Writing 101"
Week Two Feb. 1	GETTING INTO CHARACTER.  <b>Due: Reread syllabus. Lab report for "Empty a word of its meaning."</b> <i>Stern</i> : anti-hero, archetype, character, hero, names, profanity/obscenity, stereotype. <i>Coursepack</i> : Prose, "Gesture"; Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"
Week Three Feb. 8	EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE.  <b>Due: Character sketches. Lab report for "Inhabit the planet of small gestures" or "Practice make-believe everywhere."</b> <i>Stern</i> : description, local color, places and place names. <i>Coursepack</i> : Barthelme "The School"; Komunyakaa "Hanoi Market"
Week Four Feb. 15	MAKING A SCENE.  <b>Due: Imitation poem. First round of stories. Lab report for "Rediscover your room after a journey" or "Dream of all the places in the world."</b> <i>Stern</i> : bear at the door, exposition, intrigant, plot, position, premise, scene, suspense, tension, transition. <i>Coursepack</i> : O'Connor "Everything That Rises Must Converge"
Week Five Feb. 22	PUTTING WORDS IN THEIR MOUTH.  <b>Due: Bear at the door. Second round of stories. Lab report for "Think about what other people are doing" or "Dread the arrival of the bus."</b> <i>Stern</i> : dialect, dialogue, iceberg, interior monologue, monologue, stream of conscious, voice. <i>Coursepack</i> : Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"; Komunyakaa, "Nude Interrogation"  In-class, we'll workshop the first round of short stories.
Week Six Feb. 29	STORYTELLING AND VOICE.  <b>Due: Iceberg. Third round of stories. Lab report for "Rant for ten minutes" OR "Put up with a chatterbox."</b> <i>Stern</i> : accuracy, façade, realism, texture, voice. <i>Coursepack</i> : Banks, "Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story"; O'Hara, "Lana Turner Has Collapsed!"  In-class, we'll workshop the second round of short stories.
Week Seven March 7	KEEPING TIME.  <b>Due: Façade. Fourth round of stories. Lab report for "Invent lives for</b>

	<p><b>yourself.”</b>  <i>Stern</i>: flashback, immediacy, interior monologue, juggling, stream of consciousness, transition. <i>Coursepack</i>: July, “The Man on the Stairs”; Lightman “3 May 1905,” “10 June 1905,” &amp; we’ll continue our discussion of “Sarah Cole”.</p> <p>In-class, we’ll workshop the third round of short stories.</p>
Week Eight March 14	<p>BLURRING GENRES.</p> <p><b>Due: Juggling. First response to a reading due. Lab report for “Remove your watch” or “Wait while doing nothing” or “Make the world last twenty minutes.”</b>  <i>Coursepack</i>: Kincaid, “Girl”; Torres, “We Wanted More”; Otto, “A Very Short Story”; Petrosino, “You Have Made A Career of Not Listening”</p> <p>In-class, we’ll workshop the final round of short stories.</p>
Week Nine March 21	<p>IMAGE AND DETAIL.</p> <p><b>Due: Worst poem ever. Lab report for “Make a wall between your hands.”</b>  <i>Stern</i>: imagery, symbolism. <i>Coursepack</i>: Lightman, “15 May 1905,” Pound, “In a Station of the Metro”; Bishop “The Fish”, Neruda “Ode to my Socks”, William Carlos Williams, “Red Wheelbarrow”</p>
Week Ten March 28	<p>HEARING THINGS.</p> <p><b>Due: Image imitation poem. Lab report for “Turn off the sound on the TV” or “Watch dust in the sun” or “Peel an apple in your head.”</b>  <i>Coursepack</i>: Oliver, “Sound”; Burroway, “Prosody”; Brock-Broido “Am Moor”; Shapcott “Mad Cow Dance”; Hamby, “Mambo Cadillac”; Khalastchi, “Poem: (With it We Bury)”</p>
<b>WEEK ELEVEN - NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK</b>	
Week Twelve April 11	<p>CONNECTIONS AND LEAPS.</p> <p><b>Due: Sound poem. Lab report for “Become music” or “Listen to a recording of your voice.”</b>  <i>Stern</i>: metaphor and simile. <i>Coursepack</i>: Clifton, “forgiving my father”; Atwood, “You Fit Into Me”; Barry, “Nick Drake’s ‘Pink Moon’ as Infatuation”; Hass, “Meditation at Lagunitas”; Hugo, “Writing off the Subject”</p> <p>In-class, we’ll workshop a selection of your sound poems.</p>
Week Thirteen April 18	<p>FINDING OUR FORM.</p> <p><b>Due: Imitation poem. Lab report for “Disconnect the phone” or “Believe in the existence of a smell” or “Fix the ephemeral.”</b>  <i>Coursepack</i>: Bishop “One Art”; Hayes “Ghazal-Head” and “God is an American”; Strand &amp; Boland, “Sonnet”; Doty, “Golden Retrievals”; Young “True/False”; Atwood, “Happy Endings”</p> <p>In-class, we’ll workshop a selection of your connections/leaps poems.</p>

Week Fourteen April 25	<p>“YOU CAN’T TEXT-MESSAGE BREAKUP!” (ENDINGS &amp; TITLES)</p> <p><b>Due: Form poem. Lab report for “Count to a thousand” or “Recite the telephone directory on your knees.”</b></p> <p><i>Stern:</i> cliff-hanger, endings, resolution, title. <i>Coursepack:</i> “Best American Titles of Poems Published in 2008”; O’Hara, “Poem [The eager note on my door said, ‘Call me,]”</p> <p>In-class, we’ll workshop a selection of your form poems.</p>
Week Fifteen May 2	<p>SURREALISM AND IMAGINATION.</p> <p><b>Due: Poem of your choice. Poetry book review. Lab report for “Clean up after the party” or “Descend an interminable staircase.”</b></p> <p><i>Stern:</i> blue moon, fairy tale, imagination, romance, suspension of disbelief, tour de force. <i>Coursepack:</i> Addonizio, “Stop Making Sense”; Schomburg, “Fire Cycle”; Harvey, “Setting the Table”; Tate, “It Happens Like This”</p> <p>In-class, we’ll workshop a selection of your free choice poems.</p>
Week Sixteen May 9	<p>REVISIONS IN GROUPS AND CLASS READING.</p> <p><b>Due: Second response to a reading due. Lab report for “Calligraphize” or “Play the fool.”</b></p> <p><i>Coursepack:</i> Addonizio, “Revision”</p>

**Your final portfolios are due Friday, May 11, by 5pm.**