Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry

Make it New

CRWRI-UA-815 061
Tues/Thurs 1:30PM-4:40PM
July 3, 2017-August 13, 2017

Instructor: Tess Gunty
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Office Hours: By appointment at The Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House (58 W 10th Street)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The objective of this course is to explore the art of creative writing—nonfiction, fiction, poetry, and hybrid genres—by engaging with texts and also by creating your own. Craft lessons will be taught on Tuesdays, and workshop will be conducted on Thursdays. For the craft component of this course, we will read and discuss a selection of texts, most of which are contemporary, and all of which challenge convention in some way. For workshop, we will read and discuss student writing. It is my hope that you emerge from this course with a better understanding of the craft of writing, and a more developed awareness of your own taste, voice, and creative concerns. This is an introductory class, so most importantly we are here to learn, explore, and enjoy the art of writing.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Craft Tuesdays:
Readings and video/audio assignments (selections of poetry, stories, essays, readings, clips, etc.) will serve as the craft materials of this course. The assignments can be found on the course website. It is your responsibility to print/read/watch/listen to the assignment material before class, and to bring a printed copy of the reading with you for the discussion. We will analyze the techniques, structures, styles, strengths, and weaknesses of each work we study, and discuss how to apply these lessons to your own writing. We will devote special attention to the innovative aspects of each text, and the varying success of the artist’s choices. You are required to complete all assignments, and you must hand in a Reading Response that addresses some aspect of the craft lesson every Tuesday. You will also have in-class writing prompts on Tuesdays that are meant to help you synthesize what you have learned and generate new writing.

Workshop Thursdays:
Every week, a few students will submit their own creative writing for class discussion. We will determine the schedule on the first day of class. You must print hard copies of your work for each member of the class and distribute exactly one week before you are workshoped. That means that if we’re discussing your work on July 27, you should distribute copies to everyone in class on July 20.

The workshop provides an opportunity for you to experiment with form and language in a creative, safe space. Your work does not have to perfect, but it should showcase effort and engagement. We will have a class about workshop etiquette, but as a general rule, be respectful of one another’s work. Be generous with
your feedback, beginning with what works in a piece, before moving onto criticisms/suggestions. Be specific: what’s working/not working and why. Most importantly, let’s encourage each other to keep writing!

Each student is required to workshop at least 5 times over the course of the session (about 3 poems and 2 short stories). For a given workshop you can submit either fiction or poetry, but must try your hand at both throughout the session. You will sign up to be a part of either Workshop Group A, B, or C. We will read pieces before the workshop, mark them up, and provide written feedback to each student.

ASSIGNMENTS

Reading Responses:
Craft reading responses will be due every Tuesday, and their purpose is to help you synthesize the reading/audio/visual assignments before class discussion. Some weeks, I will ask you to address a specific question. Otherwise, use the reading response as an opportunity to interact with the assigned text in a way that seems instructive to you. You can note what aspects of the material moved you, what didn’t, and why. You can describe what you might learn from the material and how you could apply those lessons to your own writing. You can position the material in dialogue with previous craft lessons, or offer an interpretation of the piece at hand. The reading responses are flexible, but they must remain germane and intellectually engaged; if you wish to discuss your emotional reaction to the assignment, you are welcome to do so, but you should write it in a critically rigorous way. Avoid statements such as “I liked” or “I didn't like.” Identify the cause of your reaction, and use examples from the material to support your claim. The reading response can include a creative element if you feel compelled, but a short critical explanation should accompany it. Responses should be at least 1 page in length, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt font, 1 inch margins. Include a single-spaced heading with your name, the date, and the assignment on the top left corner of the page.

Workshop Submissions:
Poetry- No shorter than 10 lines, no longer than 3 pages. Font, size, and margins are variable.
Fiction- Between 5-10 pages. Times New Roman, double-spaced, 12pt font, 1 inch margins.

All submissions be titled. Submissions of more than one page must include page numbers.

*If you would like to submit a piece that does not fit within these requirements, discuss the matter with me at least 1 week before you submit (2 weeks before you are workshopped). Some exceptions may be made.

Workshop Feedback:
It is part of your grade to read and provide written feedback on all of the workshop submissions before class. It is your responsibility to provide written notes (edits, suggestions, reactions) on the piece itself and also provide detailed written feedback in a letter to the writer (at least 1 page, double-spaced, 12 pt-Times New Roman). I will check these letters at the beginning of each Wednesday class. I will distribute Workshop Etiquette guidelines on the first day of class; please refer to these in order to properly respond to peer work.

Final Portfolio:
A revised portfolio of your work is due on the last day of class. The portfolio must include the following:
• **2-5 page artist's statement** (double-spaced, 12 pt-Times New Roman, 1 inch margins). This is an opportunity for you to reflect on what you have learned this session, the process of revision, and your creative process in general. You can discuss the evolution of your own aesthetic/creative values and situate your work in dialogue with the work we studied in Craft. Above all, your artist’s statement should demonstrate engagement with the course.

  - Questions you can address: Which of your pieces do you consider your strongest/weakest? Why? Were there any readings that you found particularly influential? Why? What challenges/successes did you experience during revision? What are your objectives in your writing? Have they changed over the course of the session? If so, how? How and why did you revise the pieces in your portfolio the way you did?

• **Revisions of two poems and one story**, alongside copies of the first draft you submitted to workshop.
• A cover page with your name, the date, and title of your portfolio.

**Office Hours:**
You are required to meet with me at least twice during the session, ideally once before mid-session and then once after. This is an opportunity for you to discuss your writing/the coursework, receive more feedback, and give me a sense of your experience in the class. I am available weekly by appointment. I will circulate a sign up sheet during the first weeks of class. Please feel free to sign up for more than two.

**RULES AND GUIDELINES**

**Attendance Policy:**
This class requires your participation. Class starts at 1:30PM and you are expected to be present at that time. Two tardies equal an absence. If you cannot be in class, please communicate with me ahead of time. An absence will be considered unexcused unless you provide a valid reason. 2 unexcused absences will result in half a letter grade drop (a B becomes a B-) and any subsequent unexcused absence will result in a full dropped letter grade (a B- becomes a C-). Do not miss class when it is your turn to be workshopped unless there is an emergency. Respect your classmates, who have read your work and are prepared to discuss it.

**Late Work:**
I am willing to make some exceptions. In some cases, if you know you will be absent, you may hand in work before a missed class. If you are absent on a Craft Tuesday, email me the reading response before class time for it to be considered prompt, then hand in a hard copy to me by the next class time. If you are absent on a Workshop Thursday, you are expected to hand in your letter/notes to the writer by the following Tuesday.

**Use of Electronics:**
Please print out all the readings before class. All electronic devices should be silent and stowed during class.

**Food in Class:**
Small snacks and beverages are fine, but please do not eat while someone is reading or discussing a sensitive topic. Respect is key.
**Academic Integrity:**
NYU's academic integrity policies will be strictly enforced in this class. If you are unfamiliar with these policies, visit: [http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity](http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity). Violation of one or more of these policies will result in course failure and will subject the violator to further disciplinary action.

**GRADING**
Participation/Attendance/Conferences: 25%
Workshop Submissions: 20%
Workshop Feedback: 20%
Reading Responses: 15%
Final Portfolio: 20%

**EXTRA CREDIT**
Extra credit can be earned up to 3 times. If you attend a literary event during the course of our session (NYU-sponsored or otherwise), write a 1 page response, and attach proof of attendance (flyer, ticket stub, etc.), you can receive extra credit. Each extra credit response is equivalent to 1 craft reading response.

**TENTATIVE READING LIST:**
**On Writing:**
“That Crafty Feeling,” Zadie Smith
*The Poet’s Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry*, Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux
Video clip, Kurt Vonnegut
“How to be a Writer,” Lorrie Moore
*The Art of Subtext*, Charles Baxter
“That Words that Echo… Echo…Echo Through Life” Jamaica Kincaid

**Novels:**
*NW*, Zadie Smith

**Short Stories:**
“Sea Oak,” George Saunders
ZZ Packer, selected stories, *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*
Junot Diaz, selected stories, *This is How You Lose Her*,

**Flash Fiction:**
*100 Apocalypses and Other Apocalypses*, Lucy Corin (selected stories)
*99 Stories of God*, Joy Williams
“Here We Aren’t, So Quickly,” Jonathan Safran Foer
“Girl,” Jamaica Kincaid

**Poetry:**
*The Sobbing School*, Joshua Bennett
*Neon Vernacular*, Yusef Komunyakaa
*Night Sky With Exit Wounds*, Ocean Vuong
*Satan Says*, Sharon Olds
“Howl,” Alan Ginsberg
Gertrude Stein, selected work

**Hybrid:**
*Autobiography of Red*, Anne Carson
*Bluets*, Maggie Nelson
*Citizen*, Claudia Rankine
*Salamandrine: 8 Gothics*, Joyelle McSweeney

**Performance:**
*Under Milkwood*, Dylan Thomas
“How Goes Korea,” Fanny Choi
“Kite,” “The 4AM Mystery,” Rives
“Still Life With Black Death,” Joshua Bennett