

In Search of Obsession: A Creative Writing Introduction to Poetry and Fiction

CRWRI-UA.815 Section 13

Fall 2017

Instructor: Yuxi Lin

Class Times: TR 8:00 AM - 9:15 AM

Contact: yl4066@nyu.edu

Office Hours: TBD

OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of this course is to develop your skills as creative writers and mindful readers. We will study and discuss works in fiction and poetry by established writers and more importantly, you and your peers. You will identify and apply various techniques to your own work. The theme of the course is obsession because one of my main goals is to help you explore what excites you as a writer. Each week, we will focus a new topic of obsession and discuss how different writers approach it. The purpose of the structure is to help you experiment with a diverse set of forms, styles, and subject matters.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Citizen by Claudia Rankine

Other selected readings will be available online through NYU Classes. Please print out hard copies for class.

CLASS STRUCTURE:

The class will be divided into two parts: Craft Discussions and Workshops.

1. CRAFT TUESDAYS

- On Tuesdays, we will discuss the assigned readings to analyze the strategies and techniques used by established authors.
- The purpose of craft discussions is to provide you with ideas for experimentation and tools for pushing the boundaries of your own writing.
- You are expected to read the assigned poems and stories before class and come prepared for discussion with 3 questions or observations to add to our conversation.
- On two occasions during the semester, you will be required to hand in a prompt exercise.
- Some class time will also be given to in-class writing exercises.

2. WORKSHOP THURSDAYS

- Workshops will be devoted to giving full attention to your own work and the work of your peers.

- The class will be divided into three groups to workshop on alternating Thursdays. This means you will have an opportunity to workshop your piece *once every three weeks*.
- You must approach each other's work respectfully. The purpose is not to re-write your peers' work. We will observe what choices the writer has made and how those choices impact the piece. We will create an environment for reflection and feedback that is safe, generous, and fun.
- Out of respect for your peers, everyone must participate during these workshops! You have a responsibility to your writer community to be present and attentive during workshops.
- **Your piece should be uploaded to the NYU Classes Message Forum by Thursday at 11:59 PM preceding your workshop date.**
- **Each Thursday, you must bring a printed copy of each workshop piece and 2 hard copies of your feedback on your peers' work (one for the instructor and one for the classmate).** These responses can be either hand-written or typed.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Participation

This includes: attendance, contribution to in-class discussions and preparation of discussion questions and observations, workshop discussion, pop quizzes on the assigned reading, and one office hours conference with me. Participation is a big part of your grade and all you have to do is show up, do the reading, and participate!

Each student is required to meet with me individually during office hours **at least once** during the first half of the semester (before November). I will email a Google sign-up sheet to the class. If the given times do not work for you, please contact me so we can schedule something else.

Reading & Discussion Questions

Each week, to ensure a productive discussion of the readings, you must come to class having read all of the assigned reading. Read carefully and thoughtfully: Take notes. Mark up the page. Ask questions. Come to class Tuesdays with at least three questions or observations about the reading. These should go beyond what you liked and disliked about the reading and should incorporate ideas on the elements of craft we've discussed or techniques you want to explore.

Workshop Submissions

Pieces submitted for workshop must be e-mailed to the class **by Thursday at 11:59 PM of the week before your scheduled workshop**. Poems should be no longer than 2 pages. Stories should be no longer than 5-12 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman, 1-inch margins. These short fiction pieces can be stand-alone shorts or part of something that will develop into a longer story. It is your choice whether you want to submit fiction or poetry on a given week but you *must* write in each genre at least once.

Please include your name, the date, and which workshop group you are in at the top of each submission.

Grading of creative pieces is based on timeliness and effort, so please submit your workshop pieces and workshop responses on time. You are not submitting final drafts, and the point of our class is to practice and learn; however, that does not mean you should bring in a brain dump. You should have at least read over and revised the piece once on your own, and it should be free of glaring mistakes such as obvious spelling and grammatical errors. Pieces that show lack of care and effort will receive a lower grade.

Workshop Responses

You will be expected to write a short critique for each of the workshop pieces. The style of this response does not need to be particularly formal—you may choose to compose it as a letter to your peer—but it is important that the content be thoughtful, in-depth, and critically engaged with the topics we've been discussing in class. In these responses you may want to point out what works for you, what could be improved (and why), and anything that you found confusing. These responses should be about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 page long. Please bring **two copies of each response** (one for me and one for your classmate) to class on **Thursday**.

Workshop responses must show thought and care. These will be graded on how well they demonstrate an understanding of the concepts discussed in class as applied to your peers' work.

Prompt Exercises

You will write two pieces in response to prompts of your choosing. You can choose to write either a poem (must be longer than 13 lines) or a short story (5 - 12 pages), following the same guidelines as workshop submissions. The purpose of these exercises is to help you experiment with techniques and apply strategies we discuss in craft talks. Make sure to state which prompt you choose for your piece.

These exercises will be graded on timeliness, effort, and adherence to the prompt.

Final Portfolio

This is your chance to bring together everything you've learned and written over the course of the semester. Your final portfolio will include the following:

1. Cover Page
2. Table of Contents
3. Reflection/Revision Narrative—the purpose of this is to reflect on your experience this semester, what you've learned, how your writing has changed, how you've changed as a reader, and how what you've learned in this class influenced your revision decisions (2 pages double spaced).
4. Revised copies of your poems and stories, accompanied by the first draft of each. This should include your workshop and your prompt exercise pieces.

GRADING:

Participation: 25%

Workshop Submissions: 20%

Prompt Exercises: 10%

Workshop Responses: 20%

Final Portfolio: 25%

Extra credit: Go to a reading and write a response (2 pages double spaced). Look up the schedule of readings on campus through this link: <http://cwp.as.nyu.edu/page/readingseries>

CLASS POLICIES:

Attendance

Class begins promptly at 8 AM. Participation is a major part of your grade. Please email me ASAP if you know you cannot attend class. Missed work must be handed in by the following class. You are allowed only 2 unexcused absences, after that your grade will drop by a half letter grade for each unexcused absence. Two late arrivals are equivalent to one unexcused absence.

Deadlines and Late Work

Due to the communal nature of the workshop environment, it's important that you send your workshop submissions to me and bring your workshop responses to class by the proper deadlines. Assignments turned in late will receive a letter grade deduction per day.

Technology & Electronics

Use of electronics in class will not be permitted. Please do not use phones, tablets, or laptops unless instructed. For reading materials, please bring hard copies.

Plagiarism

NYU's policy on academic integrity will be strictly enforced. Please consult the link: <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity>

Respect

In order for our workshop to be a safe and productive experience for everyone, it is important that you approach your peers and their work with generosity and respect. Behavior that is inappropriate or disrespectful will not be tolerated.

Subject Matter & Student Wellness

The last thing I want is to misinterpret a cry for help: submit any writing which exhibits specific, potential dangers—like murder, depression, or suicide—and you may expect a brief note or email from me to make sure you are doing okay. If you wish to avoid this, I would not mind a quick email to alert me that your work is a reflection on your creativity, and not your current state of mind.

SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS (subject to change):

Wk	Day	Date	Topic	Assignment Due
1	Tuesday	9/5	Course Overview Habits of a Good Writer	
	Thursday	9/7	Mock Workshop In Class Exercise	Group A Submission
2	Tuesday	9/12	Tell me a story: Making the Mundane Interesting ○ Narrative ○ Motif ○ Sonnet	“What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” (Raymond Carver) “The Fish” (Elizabeth Bishop) “Those Winter Sundays” (Robert Hayden)
	Thursday	9/14	Group A Workshop	Workshop Responses Group B Submission
3	Tuesday	9/19	Growing Pains: Childhood, Puberty, College ○ Voice	“How to date a brown girl (black girl, white girl, or halfie)” (Junot Diaz) “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” (ZZ Packer) “Childhood Stories” (Matthew Rohrer)
	Thursday	9/21	Group B Workshop	Workshop Responses Group C Submission
4	Tuesday	9/26	Playing with Pronouns: You and I ○ Persona poem ○ 2 nd person perspective	Ch. 1 of <i>Bright Lights, Big City</i> (Jay McInerney) “Finished” (Ai) “The Empress Dowager Contemplates Her Lineage” (Tina Chang) “Self-Portrait” (Frank Bidart)
	Thursday	9/28	Group C Workshop	Workshop Responses Group A Submission
5	Tuesday	10/3	Ekphrasis: In-class exercise	Prompt Exercise 1 Due Bring a photo to class
	Thursday	10/5	Group A Workshop	Workshop Responses Group B Submission
6	Tuesday	10/10	Discuss <i>Citizen</i> ○ Word art ○ Lyric	Finish reading <i>Citizen</i>
	Thursday	10/12	Group B Workshop	Workshop Responses Group C Submission
7	Tuesday	10/17	Poetics of Politics & War ○ Poet as witness ○ List poem ○ Experimental poetry	“Waiting for the Barbarians” (C. P. Cavafy) “Inauguration Poem” (Sally Wen Mao) “Poem About My Rights” (June Jordan) “Zong! #1”(M. NourbeSe Philip) “Lie” (Solmaz Sharif) “Re-creating the Scene” (Yusef Komunyakaa) “Beautiful Youth” (Gottfried Benn) “An American Poem” (Eileen Myles)

	Thursday	10/19	Group C Workshop	Workshop Responses Group A Submission
8	Tuesday	10/24	Myth, Fairy Tales, and Talking to God o Magical realism	“A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings” (Gabriel Garcia Marquez) “On His Blindness” (John Milton) “Psalm 150” (Jericho Brown) “Persephone the Wanderer” (Louise Glück) “Cinderella” (Anne Sexton)
	Thursday	10/26	Group A Workshop	Workshop Responses Group B Submission
9	Tuesday	10/31	Heritage & hauntings from the past	“Everything that Rises Must Converge” (Flannery O’Connor) “The Cleaving” (Li-Young Lee) “En Route to Bangladesh, Another Crisis of Faith” (Tarfia Faizullah)
	Thursday	11/2	Group B Workshop	Workshop Responses Group C Submission
10	Tuesday	11/7	All I do is lose, lose, lose, no matter what o Villanelle	“One Art” (Elizabeth Bishop) “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night” (Dylan Thomas) “Grief Work” (Natalie Diaz) “Faint Music” (Robert Hass)
	Thursday	11/9	Group C Workshop	Workshop Responses Group A Submission
11	Tuesday	11/14	Image & Sound	Prompt Exercise 2 Due
	Thursday	11/16	Group A Workshop	Workshop Responses Group B Submission
12	Tuesday	11/21	Sexual Healing (Or not) o Setting o Suspense o Visual poems	“A Rose for Emily” (William Faulkner) “One Night” (C. P. Cavafy) “Ode to Masturbation” (Ocean Vuong) “may i feel said he” (e. e. cummings) “Why Some Girls Love Horses” (Paisley Rekdal)
	Thursday	11/23	THANKSGIVING	
13	Tuesday	11/28	Relationship status: Complicated o Flash fiction o Tone o Prose poem	“The Things We Don’t Do” & “A Terribly Perfect Couple” (Andres Neumann) “What You Left in the Ditch” (Aimee Bender) Excerpt: “The Glass Essay” (Anne Carson) Excerpt: <i>Bluets</i> (Maggie Nelson) “This is Just to Say” (WCW)
	Thursday	11/30	Group B Workshop	Workshop Responses Group C Submission

14	Tuesday	12/5	Body talk ○ Memoir ○ Ode	“The Empathy Exams” (Leslie Jamison) “Rate Me” (Rebecca Schiff) “Ode to the Hymen” (Sharon Olds) “A Plate of Bones” (Terrance Hayes) “The Cocktail Hour Finally Arrives” (D.A. Powell)
	Thursday	12/7	Group C Workshop	Workshop Responses
15	Tuesday	12/12	Arranging your portfolio and performance poetry	Revise your work!
	Thursday	12/14	Celebratory Reading	Final Portfolio due in class

Prompt Exercise 1: Choose one of the following in either Poetry or Prose

Due Tuesday 10/3

Poetry:

- Persona poem from the perspective of an animal or an inanimate object
- Sonnet
- Self-portrait from a third person point of view
- A poem written in the second person “you”

Prose:

- A story about a “How to _____” similar to the Junot Diaz story, but it can be on any subject, e.g. “How to Stay Vegan” or “How to Get Your Brother in Trouble”
- A story told entirely from the 2nd person perspective
- A story from a perspective of a main character who is different from you in either gender or age, or from the perspective of an object

Prompt Exercise 2: Choose one of the following in either Poetry or Prose

Due Tuesday 11/14

Poetry:

- An elegy
- A villanelle
- A poem that uses elements of myth, fairy tale, or religion

Prose:

- A story about heritage and/or home, incorporating the syntax or dialect of the region
- A story about loss: think outside of the box. Doesn’t necessarily have to be a person or love interest
- A story in the style of magical realism