

Introduction to Poetry and Fiction

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I study nature as not to do foolish things- Mary Ruefle

Objective:

This course will largely focus on generating new work with an equal focus on craft and workshop where both elements will be encouraged to overlap. In terms of thematic concerns, we will look at texts dealing with psychological, geographical and linguistic displacements while attempting to explore our individual and collective gaze. We will branch out into looser discussions on theme, form, style, imagery and the question of ‘voice’ and what role it plays in shaping a writer’s work. The aim of this course is to observe ourselves and each other in the world, first as people, then as writers.

Course Structure:

The course will navigate between poetry and fiction. We will rotate between workshop and craft every alternate week but discussion on craft will be welcomed during workshop. For workshop, the class will be divided into two groups and we will focus on one group per class. You are expected to incorporate the elements discussed in craft class into the work you generate for workshop.

Workshop Guidelines:

- Comments for each workshop piece are to be emailed to me one day prior to class. (DOCX or PDF)
- Group A must submit their poems/stories by Sunday evening and Group Z must submit by Tuesday evening.
- Participants are expected to be well-traveled in the prescribed texts before class.
- All relevant reading material will be uploaded to NYU CLASSES or emailed beforehand but you will need to have the novels and poetry collections on hand. (*Look, Interpreter of Maladies*)

Workshop Style:

In this class, it is inadequate and inappropriate to say “the poem’s message.” We want to emphasize the experience or exploration in a particular poem or story. We do not look at paintings, say, as sermons, or listen to non-sacred music and think of singers as missionaries. Art

is not reducible to a “message.” Enjoy the details of discovery and revelation AND include your impressions in your thoughtful critique.

How to Critique:

- The purpose of the workshop is NOT to present your perspective as the poet/writer, or to offer reasons for choosing a certain word or phrase, or to get offended by the suggestions of your peers. You are here to see how your work is received and to get it “workshopped,” which by its very definition means that you will receive comments that you may or may not agree with. It is your prerogative to accept or reject the feedback you are receiving, but out of respect for your peers, you may not say whether you “like” their suggestions or not.

- Critics must give an overall impression of the poem or story while also giving specific suggestions/comments. Both are EQUALLY important.

- Remember that whether you are giving criticism or praise, it is extremely important to be as specific as possible, citing particular lines, images, metaphors, etc. whenever applicable.

- As a critic, you do not need to bring up every possible issue related to the piece. Rather, your task is to ask specific questions that will encourage the writer to rework their piece.

- As a critic, the most important thing to keep in mind is to be respectful, honest, and kind. It is much more helpful to say, “In my opinion, it might be better to rethink the basis of the first stanza, see if you can tackle the metaphor in the first line and expand it, rather than introducing more metaphors in the following lines,” rather than, “In my opinion, the first stanza is horrible. There are simply too many metaphors.”

Policies:

Punctuality is key! Please try to arrive to class at least 5 minutes before.

Work must be **formatted** in a readable 12pt font

Poems should **not exceed** three pages and stories should not exceed 1,500 words.

Plagiarism can be easily spotted- it’s easier to just write your own work!

If you will be **missing a class**, please email me beforehand.

As writers, we will often find ourselves delving into **sensitive topics** that make us **vulnerable** to the situations and people around us. I would ask all participants to be aware of the sensitivities of their peers especially when writing on deeply personal topics.

You are required to meet with me at least once for **office hours**.

Grading:

Participation/Attendance/Conferences: 30%

Workshop Submissions: 20%

Workshop Feedback: 20%

Reading Responses: 10%

Final Portfolio: 20%

Week 1: WELCOME

- Sept/5th: Student introduction and course objectives/overview. Ice-breaker with in-class writing exercises.
- Sept/7th: Reading Response: *Letters to a Young Poet*- **Rainer Maria Rilke**, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*, **T. S Eliot**

Week 2:

- Sept. 12^t: Workshop group A
- Sept 14th: Workshop group Z

Week 3:

- Sept 19th: Reading response: *The African Writer and the English Language* by **Chinua Achebe**, poems by **Zaffar Kunial**, **Mona Arshi**, **Warsan Shire**, **Joshua Bennet**
- Sept 21st: In- class discussion of *LOOK* by **Solmaz Sharif**

Week 4:

- Sept 26th: Workshop group A
- Sept 28th: Workshop group Z

Week 5:

- Oct 3rd: Writing the Self as Personal and Political: *Center of the World*, **Safiya Sinclair**, *The Bridge Poem*, **Donna Kate Rushin**, *Some Day I'll Love Ocean Vuong*, **Ocean Vuong**, *The Waiting Room*, **Elizabeth Bishop**, *I Woke Up*, **Jameson Fitzpatrick**
- Oct 5th: In-Class Writing Exercise

Week 6:

Oct 10th: Workshop group A

Oct 12th: Workshop group Z

Week 7:

Oct 17th: In-class discussion of select stories: *Interpreter of Maladies*, **Jhumpa Lahiri**

Oct 19th: In-class response to: **The Examined Life** (documentary)

Week 8:

Oct 24th: Workshop group A

Oct 26th: Workshop group Z

Week 9:

Oct 31st: *The Nose*, **Gogol**. *The Metamorphosis* **Franz Kafka**

Nov 2nd: In-class writing exercise/ *That Crafty Feeling* by **Zadie Smith**

Week 10:

Nov 7th: Workshop group A

Nov 9th: Workshop group Z

Week 11:

Nov 14th: Odes by **Sharon Olds** and **Pablo Neruda**

Nov 16th: Sonnets by **William Shakespeare**, **Terrance Hayes** and **Rita Dove**

Week 12:

Nov 21st: In- class writing exercise
[THANKSGIVING BREAK]

Week 13:

Nov 28th: Workshop group A

Nov 30th: Workshop group Z

Week 14:

Dec 5th: Poems of Place, Nature and Environment. Poems from *Poet in New York*, **Federico Garcia Lorca**, *Life on Mars*, **Tracy K. Smith**

Dec 7th: In-class presentations on individual poems

Week 15:

Dec 12th: In-class writing exercise

Dec 14th: FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE. End of semester reading!