WRITING AND READING OUTSIDE THE CANON

Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry
Summer 2017 *Provisional Syllabus*
Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-4:40pm
Location: TBD
Instructor: Jessica Marion Modi
Email: jmm883@nyu.edu
Office hours: Tuesday 11-1 and by appointment in Lillian Vernon House, 58 W 10th Street

“And by the way, everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.”
—Sylvia Plath

“For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn’t any other tale to tell, it’s the only light we’ve got in all this darkness.” —James Baldwin

All strong writers are also strong readers. In this class, we will write poetry and prose as we explore how to read creatively. We will assume that writing is a result of, and in a feedback loop with, reading. Following that, this class aims to foster strong writers through habits of strong reading. You will write inside and outside of class, experiment, workshop, and revise. You will read across geographies, languages, centuries, and identities. Through poetry, short stories, novels, lyric essays—and everything in between—we will discover what it means to learn from what we read, and write from what we learn. We may even answer why we write at all. And so, let the creative energies flow!

TEXTS
Course reader
Interviews, audio, and video available online
One of the following books, or check with me for an alternative:
The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison
Bluets, Maggie Nelson
Citizen: An American Lyric, Claudia Rankine
Dance Dance Revolution, Cathy Park Hong
Fun Home, Alison Bechdel
Lunch Poems, Frank O’Hara
Self-Help, Lorrie Moore
We Need New Names, NoViolet Bulawayo
What We Talk About When We Talk About Love, Raymond Carver
CLASS POLICIES

ATTENDANCE
“If you can’t be on time, be early.” Please arrive a few minutes early to class. We will begin on time. If you’re not in class by 9:45 am, you will be marked absent. You will also miss the reading quiz. You are allowed one unexcused absence for the semester. After that, your final grade will drop one mark for each absence (an “A” becomes an “A-,” etc.). An absence can only be considered excused with a letter from a physician or a similarly official note. If you have an excused absence or will not be present to distribute workshop submissions, please arrange for a classmate to print/bring your submissions in your stead. If you do not, you will forfeit your workshop slot and your grade will be negatively impacted.

Additionally, it is imperative that we are not only physically present, but also mentally present. As such, any unapproved use of electronics (cellphones, iPads, iPods, laptops, etc.) will count as an unexcused absence.

Lastly, six or more absences will result in automatic failure.

PAPER & PRINTING
I love trees, but paper is a necessary material for the writer and reader. You will be expected to:
- Bring a copy of your course reader with you to every class
- Bring 16 copies of your workshop submission a week prior to your workshop date
- Submit hard copies of any written assignment
- Purchase a notebook and bring a writing utensil to class (note-taking on laptops or cell phones will not be permitted)

All of this must be done before class. There are no exceptions. Please do not wait until right before class to print necessary materials or let a lack of preparation, a long line, or a printer jam cause you to be late to class. Heads-up: this means that you’ll need to be writing ahead of your due date and be very familiar with the course syllabus and deadlines.

RESPECTFUL SPACE
To create a safe learning environment, we will agree to the following community norms:
- Be present and engaged (all electronics must be silenced and out of sight)
- Be aware of power and voice in the classroom
- Adhere to and maintain workshop etiquette and guidelines
- Write, read, and talk with integrity (plagiarism and laziness will not be tolerated)

COURSE STRUCTURE
We will divide our time between craft (Thursday) and workshop (Tuesday). In craft class, we will engage in readings and exercises focused on the technical elements of creative writing. In workshop, you will present and provide feedback on poems and short stories.

Unless otherwise noted, all workshop pieces are due one week before they are workshopped. For example, if you will be workshopped on the Tuesday of Week 3, your piece is due the Tuesday of Week 2.
Craft: We will discuss texts and examine the tools they show us as writers. Please come prepared to engage in hearty dialogue. Bring questions, insights, and observations. Make time to read assignments multiple times: once as a reader and once with a writers’ eye on craft. During the semester, we will have weekly quizzes on assigned readings. The quizzes will be 3-5 questions and take place within the first ten minutes of class. Also, students may be asked to informally lead class discussions. I will give writing prompts based on our discussions. Everyone will complete the assignments and turn them in the following class. It can serve as a workshop submission if it is your submission week; otherwise, it will be an assignment seen only by me.

Workshop: Each student will be workedshopped four times. Each student will write one short story (3-8 pages), one poem (1-2 pages), and either one additional story or poem (3-6 pages for fiction, 1 page for poetry). Except for our first assignment (micro-fiction), submissions are due one week prior to workshop. We will begin each round of critique by answering the questions: What did you notice? What did you feel? We can learn as much about being a writer by reading and critiquing others’ work as we do by drafting and revising our own. In this spirit, please give your classmates ample and thorough feedback. Each week, I will collect everyone’s feedback for one workshop piece. I will grade them as indicative of the feedback you’re giving to everyone.

GRADING
Craft – 25%
  Proven critical engagement with reading, including class participation
  Weekly reading quizzes
Workshop – 25%
  Written critical engagement with peer work (before class)
  Verbal critical engagement with peer work (in class)
  One story, built from your micro-fiction (4-10 pages double-spaced)
  One poem (no more than 2 pages)
  One additional story or poem (3-7 page story or 1 page poem)
Writer engagement – 25%
  Writer responses & prompts due throughout semester
  Book review, due anytime throughout the semester until our last class
  Attend office hours at least twice a semester (one before mid-term, one after)
Portfolio – 25%
  Midterm Response, with revision if needed
  Final Portfolio, includes the following:
    -three page artist statement built from your midterm response;
    -major and studied revisions of all workshop material;
      writing prompts from throughout the semester
Extra Credit is available for up to 5% of overall grade
COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

WEEK 1
TUESDAY: SYLLABUS, BUILDING OUR WORKSHOP CULTURE, IN CLASS READING
“The Archaic Torso of Apollo,” Rainer Maria Rilke, trls. by Edward Snow
“Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota,” James Wright
“The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till,” Gwendolyn Brooks
“Emmett Till’s Glass-Top Casket,” Cornelius Eady
Girl, Jamaica Kincaid
Sticks, George Saunders
watch video of Ira Glass on Storytelling
THURSDAY: IMAGES—HOW WE MAKE THEM & WHAT THEY DO
“Sci-Fi,” Tracey K. Smith
“Persimmons,” Li Young-Lee
“Coal,” Audre Lorde
“Too Many Pigeons to Count and One Dove,” Mary Szybist
short article “The Art of Finding”
Micro-fiction due: Please keep your submissions to 450 words or fewer.

WEEK 2
TUESDAY: SYNTAX AND PROCESS
“That Crafty Feeling,” Zadie Smith – might become a poetry excerpt.
excerpt from Several Short Sentences About Writing, Virginia Tufte
excerpt from Fun Home, Alison Bechdel
Workshop half of micro-fiction
THURSDAY: NARRATIVE
“The Sun, The Moon, The Stars” Junot Diaz
excerpt from The Inheritance of Loss, Kiran Desai
Workshop half of micro-fiction

WEEK 3
TUESDAY: PLACES, REAL, AND IMAGINED
“The Filling Station,” Elizabeth Bishop
“Parsley,” Rita Dove
“Facing it,” Yusef Komunyakaa
“The Day Lady Died,” Frank O’Hara
“Extended Family,” A.K. Ramanujan
“Planetarium,” Adrienne Rich
Rita Dove’s video on writing “Parsley”
WORKSHOP GROUP A
THURSDAY: PERSPECTIVE, ANGULARITY, & SUBJECTIVITY
“Going for a Beer,” Robert Coover
“The Empathy Exams,” Leslie Jamison
“Two Men Arrive in a Village,” Zadie Smith
WORKSHOP GROUP B

WEEK 4
TUESDAY: TRIANGULATION—DESIRE, CONFLICT, & EROS
“The Glass Essay,” Anne Carson
“Heart Condition,” Jericho Brown
“How the Milky Way Was Made,” Natalie Diaz
“After Making Love in Winter,” Sharon Olds
excerpt from Eros the Bittersweet, Anne Carson

WORKSHOP GROUP C
THURSDAY: STRUCTURE, TIMING, & THE ORDER OF INFORMATION
“Questions of Grammar,” Lydia Davis
“Sign and Symbols,” Vladimir Nabokov
excerpt from Department of Speculation, Jenny Offil

Midterm reflection due

WEEK 5
TUESDAY: VIA NEGATIVA—WHAT IS EXCLUDED/INCLUDED & WHY
“Eye of Heaven,” Valerie Mejer Caso
“Lure,” Robin Coste Lewis
“City of Lights,” Larry Levis
“Don’t Say Anything Beautiful, Kiss Me,” Rachel Zucker
*strongly encouraged: excerpt from Ordinary Genius

WORKSHOP GROUP A
THURSDAY: WORLD-BUILDING, REALISM, & THE FANTASTIC
“Hitting Budapest,” NoViolet Bulawayo
“Twilight of the Superheroes,” Deborah Eisenberg

WORKSHOP GROUP B

WEEK 6
TUESDAY: GENRE—THE LINE BETWEEN POETRY & PROSE
excerpt from Bluets, Maggie Nelson
excerpt from Citizen: An American Lyric, Claudia Rankine
excerpt from The Waves, Virginia Woolf

WORKSHOP GROUP C
THURSDAY: REVISION & READING
revision workshop with whole class
excerpt from Ordinary Genius, Kim Addonizio

READING & CELEBRATION

AUGUST 15: Final portfolio & book reviews due by 2pm in my mailbox at Lillian Vernon House.
OTHER CLASS POLICIES

TECHNOLOGY IN CLASS
Cell phones, iPods, etc. must be on silent and out of sight. Remember: Violation of this policy without pre-approval counts as an unexcused absence.

Laptop/Tablet Policy: Laptops and tablets in class can be distracting, both to those using the computer and to others. Note-taking by hand is an invaluable skill that enhances learning. I therefore ask that you do not use a laptop or tablet in class except when specified.

EXTRA CREDIT
You may submit extra credit for up to a total of 5% of your overall grade. Extra credit consists of the following writer engagement assignments:
- Writer engagement #1 due: At some point in the semester, attend a reading, lecture, or panel. This can be at academic institutions—NYU, Columbia, Hunter, Barnard, etc.—or literary arts institutions—Poets House, an UrbanWord slam. Write one-page reflecting on how it will influence (or not influence) your work, the difference between solitary reading and a group event, and generally how you engaged.
- Writer engagement #2: Visit an art venue — museum, theater, concert hall, architectural park. Write about your interaction with the art in real-time. Then answer: How will it inform, influence, or infect your reading/writing?
- Writer engagement #3: Memorize and recite a poem of at least 14 lines. It can be an entire poem or a section. Please provide me with a copy of the poem ahead of time.

E-MAIL POLICY
Email is the easiest way to reach me with questions, comments, errata, emergencies. I want to be available and accessible via email, but I don’t want it to be a crutch. That is, I am more than happy to answer questions via email or follow-up on individual concerns you may have; I’m less happy, for example, receiving emails at 11:45 p.m. the night before an assignment is due.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE
As a nonsectarian, inclusive institution, NYU policy permits members of any religious group to absent themselves from classes without penalty when required for compliance with their religious obligations. The policy and principles to be followed by students and faculty may be found at The University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays.

MOSES CENTER
Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980.

NYU’s Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003-6675
Telephone: 212-998-4980
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114
Web site: http://www.nyu.edu/csd