

Introduction to Creative Writing: Fiction and Poetry

Instructor: Madeleine Mori
Course Number: CRWRI-UA.815.003
Meeting Times: MW 11 AM - 12:15 PM
Classroom:
Office: 58 W 10th St
Office Hours: By Appointment
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“Fiction is one of the few experiences where loneliness can be both confronted and relieved. Drugs, movies where stuff blows up, loud parties — all these chase away loneliness by making me forget my name’s Dave and I live in a one-by-one box of bone no other party can penetrate or know. Fiction, poetry, music, really deep serious sex, and, in various ways, religion — these are the places where loneliness is countenanced, stared down, transfigured, treated.”- David Foster Wallace

"I strongly feel that every poem, every work of art, everything that is well done, well made, well said, generously given, adds to our chances of survival by making the world and our lives more habitable."- Philip Booth

COURSE DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES

In this class, we will read typically 3-5 poems and one short story a week over the course of the semester to challenge and broaden your comprehension of the craft of poetry and fiction. With a focus on people of color, queer, and marginalized voices, we will explore our responsibility as writers under the modern sociopolitical pressures. We will question the functions of language within history and the canonical classics.

On Mondays, we will explore the craft of writing poetry and fiction. This will involve discussing readings and any supplementary interviews, lectures, music, or film selections uploaded to NYU Classes. We will also conclude our discussions of craft with a brief ten-minute writing exercise on that week’s topic.

On Wednesdays, we will workshop your original writings. Throughout the semester, you will each have one short piece of fiction, one poem, and two additional works of your choice (either poem or short story) workshopped. This is an introductory workshop, so no one’s work is expected to be “flawless”. For many of you this may even be your first workshop experience. I encourage you to write risky, write wild, write weird, but most importantly, write honest! This is a safe space. You will be graded based on effort and your willingness to learn, not on expertise.

GRADING & ASSIGNMENTS

Class Participation, Attendance, Office Hours- (30%)

The intention behind all art is communication. This is especially true for the art of writing as its primary concern is language. We have strong memories and feelings inside ourselves and the writer's job is to render them accurately and interestingly outside of the body. While we do not always have the proper expression, we must always keep trying. Workshops and craft classes rely on discourse; thus, they are dependent on your participation.

Each of you will be expected to visit me at least twice during office hours, preferably once towards the beginning of the semester and once towards the end of the semester. During these meetings, I will be able to get to know you and your writing goals in greater detail than in our normal class sessions. You may bring any questions about the class or your writing, any revisions of workshopped pieces, or additional pieces we may not get to as a class.

Please review the attendance policy below.

Workshop- (40%)

- **Workshop Submissions- (20%)**

Throughout the semester, you will each be required to submit one short piece of fiction, one poem, and two additional works of your choice (either poem or short story) to be workshopped. I will split the class into 3 workshop groups, meaning you will each be workshopped once every 3 weeks. Fiction pieces must be 2-5 pages long and poems can be up to 2 pages long (12 pt, Times New Roman, 1-inch margins). Remember to include your name, the date, and which workshop group you are in on the top of your submissions. You will post this work on NYU Classes in the appropriate folder for the class to access one week before you are to be workshopped (on the prior Wednesday by 11:59 PM the latest).

- **Workshop Critique- (20%)**

Each week of workshop, you will be required to print out, read, and annotate the work of your classmates, as well as write each a short response letter (250-500 words). Please highlight at least two elements of their work you enjoyed and two elements that you felt could be improved in their work. Provide reasoning and suggestions for improvement with your critique. This act will prepare you for in-class workshop discussion and build your skills of revision. Print out two copies of your response letters, one to give to your classmate and one copy for me.

Craft- (30%)

- **Reading Quizzes- (10%)**

There will be required reading due every week on our craft days (typically Mondays). All readings will be uploaded to NYU Classes. You will be required to print out each reading and bring them to class, as we will be referencing them in our discussions. Please mark up your readings with any discussion questions. To hold you accountable for completing the readings each week, we will have a brief in-class quiz at the start of class every Monday. If you pay attention in class and do the readings, these quizzes should be easy.

- **Final Portfolio- (10%)**

At the end of the semester you will also be required to turn in a final portfolio. This portfolio will primarily consist of revisions of your four works from this semester's workshop, as well as typed-up versions of your homework assignments. If you like, you may insert one additional piece of writing we may not have workshopped, however the other three should be pieces the class has seen.

Be proud of your accomplishments! This portfolio should be in a presentation folder or thin binder with laminated pages, no spiral bound notebooks or manila folders. Final Portfolios will be due on the last day of class 12/13/17 by 5pm. Please turn these in to my mailbox in the basement of the Lillian Vernon Writers House (58 W 10th St).

▪ **Why I Write Assignment- (5%)**

You will be required to write a short personal essay (2-3 pages, 12 pt Times New Roman, double-spaced) reflecting on your experience with writing, specifically why you write and what you hope to gain from this class. This will be instructive for your own goals as well as give me deeper insight into your personhood.

▪ **Personal Notebook- (5%)**

On the first day of class, I will give you each a blank notebook. These notebooks will be for your personal use, to record details, images, and overheard dialogue from outside of class. At the beginning of each class we will go around and share one spectacle. This practice will help connect your mind to your senses and help you tune into the creative possibilities of your environment. Feel free to make your notebook your own with photos, drawings, collages, and general thoughts. At the end of the semester, you will be required to briefly show me your journal (If there is any sensitive material you don't want me to see, you may cover it up with a square of paper).

Extra Credit Opportunities- up to 10%

If interested, you have the whole semester to complete two of the following for a 10% boost in your grade:

- Attend a poetry or fiction reading and write a 1-2 page response paper
- Memorize a poem of at least 14 lines and recite to the class
- Write a book review of at least 2 pages on a novel, short story collection, or poetry collection

POLICIES

Attendance: You are expected to attend every class; however, I understand things come up. Please try not to miss class on a workshop day, *especially* if it is a day you are scheduled for workshopping. It is imperative to the collaborative aspect of a creative writing class that all students actively participate in workshop. No matter the circumstances, please email me as soon as you feel you will not be able to make it to class, so we can adjust. You may miss a total of two classes without penalty. After that, each following absence will result in a 10% drop in your grade. All work is due as normal regardless of if you are in class or not.

Tardiness: If you are more than 10 minutes late, you will be considered tardy. Being tardy to class twice will be counted as one absence.

Late Work: Late work will not be accepted unless you have made previous arrangements with me and have an adequate need for additional time.

Integrity: Plagiarism is lazy and obvious. Don't do it. If I find out something is plagiarized, I will need to report it to NYU.

Technology: No laptops, phones, tablets, iPads, iPods, or any other electronics will be allowed in class unless otherwise instructed. Make sure to print a physical copy of your readings ahead of time.

Food: Snacks and drinks are allowed, as long as they're not distracting. Please don't eat while people are discussing sensitive subjects or reading work.

Difficult Material: Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, we will assume the speaker is fictional. However, if the nature of your work is particularly disturbing, such as containing murder, depression, suicide, or severe mental disillusionment, or seems to be a cry for help, I will email to ask if you are okay. Please send me an email letting me know your work is simply meant creative before submitting work that may be interpreted as such. If you do feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

W 9/6/17- First Class

- Introductions and syllabus
- Hand out journals
- Writing Exercise- Post-It Game

Homework: Why I Write Assignment
Read Short Poems Packet

WEEK 2

M 9/11/17- Imagery & Narrative in Poetry

- Discuss Short Poems Packet:
 - Ezra Pound "In A Station of the Metro"
 - William Carlos Williams "The Red Wheelbarrow"
 - Beth Ann Fennelly "Gong"
 - Gary Snyder "Shinkyogoku, Kyoto"
 - Gwendolyn Brooks "We Real Cool"

▪ Poetry Writing Exercise: Imagery

Homework: Read Flannery O'Connor "A Good Man Is Hard To Find"

W 9/13/17- Imagery & Narrative in Fiction

- Discuss Flannery O'Connor "A Good Man Is Hard To Find"
- Fiction Writing Exercise: Imagery

Homework: Group A post poems on NYU Classes
Read Lyricism Poem Packet

Read Vladimir Nabokov "Signs and Symbols"

WEEK 3

M 9/18/17- Lyricism in Poetry and Fiction

- Discuss Lyricism in Poetry Packet:
Aracelis Girmay "On Kindness"
Lynda Hull "Love Song During Riot with Many Voices"
James Wright "A Blessing"
- Discuss Vladimir Nabokov "Signs and Symbols"

W 9/20/17- Poetry Workshop A

Homework: Group J post poems on NYU Classes
Read Alice Munroe "Walker Brothers Cowboy"

WEEK 4

M 9/25/17- Writing about Family

- Discuss Family Poem Packet:
Franny Choi "Choi Jeong Min"
Li-Young Lee "The Gift"
Lynn Emanuel "Frying Trout While Drunk"
- Discuss Alice Munroe "Walker Brothers Cowboy"

W 9/27/17- Poetry Workshop J

Homework:
Group Z post poems on NYU Classes
Read Mia Alvar "The Kontrabida"
Read Place Poem Packet

WEEK 5

M 10/2/17- Writing Place: Real and Imagined

- Discuss Mia Alvar "The Kontrabida"
- Discuss Place Poem Packet:
Larry Levis "In A Country"
Rita Dove "Parsley"
Susan Mitchell "Havana Birth"
Patricia Smith "Tavern. Tavern. Church. Shuttered Tavern..."
- Place Writing Exercise

W 10/4/17- Poetry Workshop Z

Homework: Group A post fiction pieces on NYU Classes
Write a poem or short fiction of personal history in the context of a larger history

WEEK 6

M 10/9/17- No Class: Indigenous Peoples Day

W 10/11/17- Fiction Workshop A

Share historical poems & short fiction pieces

Homework: Group J post fiction pieces on NYU Classes
Read Self-Portrait Poem Packet
Read Virginia Woolf excerpt from *The Waves*

WEEK 7

M 10/16/17- Writing the Self

- Discuss Self-Portrait Poem Packet:
 - Ocean Vuong “Someday I’ll Love Ocean Vuong”
 - Safiya Sinclair “Center of the World”
 - Jorge Luis Borges “Borges and I”
 - Lucille Clifton [won’t you celebrate with me]
- Discuss Virginia Woolf excerpt from *The Waves*
- Self-Portrait writing exercise

W 10/18/17- Fiction Workshop J

Homework: Group Z post fiction pieces on NYU Classes
Read Marjane Satrapi excerpt from *Persepolis*
Read Poetic Forms Packet

WEEK 8

M 10/23/17- The Field of the Page: Form & Stanza

- Discuss Marjane Satrapi excerpt from *Persepolis*
- Discuss Poetic Forms Packet:
 - Terrance Hayes “Sonnet”
 - Carol Muske-Dukes “Little L.A. Villanelle”
 - Robert Hass “A Story About the Body”

W 10/25/17- Fiction Workshop Z

Homework: Group A post work of your choice on NYU Classes
Read Téa Obreht “The Sentry”
Read “Human Drama” Poem Packet

WEEK 9

M 10/30/17 Rendering Human Drama

- Discuss Téa Obreht “The Sentry”
- Discuss “Human Drama” Poem Packet:
 - Marie Howe “What The Living Do”
 - William Matthews “Bystanders”
 - Wanda Coleman “You Judge a Man by the Silence He Keeps”
- “Human Drama” writing exercise

W 11/1/17- Mixed Workshop A

Homework: Group J post work of your choice on NYU Classes
Read Raymond Carver “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”
Read Desire Poem Packet

WEEK 10

M 11/6/17- The Language of Desire and Eros

- Discuss Raymond Carver “What We Talk About...”
- Discuss Desire & Eros Poem Packet:
 - Ada Limón “State Bird”
 - Dorianne Laux “The Lovers”
 - Kim Addonizio “Intimacy”
- “Language of Desire & Eros” Writing Exercise

W 11/8/17- Mixed Workshop J

Homework: Group Z post work of your choice on NYU Classes
Read “Political Body” Poetry Packet
Read Jhumpa Lahiri “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”

WEEK 11

M 11/13/17- Writing the Political Body

- Discuss “Political Body” Poetry Packet:
 - Martín Espada “Two Mexicanos Lynched in Santa Cruz...”
 - Natalie Diaz “Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination...”
 - Warsan Shire “The House”
 - Charif Shanahan “Asmar”
- Discuss Jhumpa Lahiri “When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine”
- “Political Bodies” Writing Exercise

W 11/15/17- Mixed Workshop Z

Homework: Read Ekphrasis Packet
Read James Agee excerpt from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
Bring a photograph (art or personal) to class for writing exercise

WEEK 12

M 11/20/17- Ekphrasis and Art

- Discuss Ekphrasis Packet:
 - Sharon Olds “I Go Back to May 1937”
 - Adrienne Rich “The Photograph of the Unmade Bed”
 - Larry Levis “Photograph: Migrant Worker, Parlier, California, 1967”
- Discuss James Agee excerpt from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
- Ekphrasis Writing Exercise

Homework: Write a Thanksgiving poem or short story over the break
Group A post work of your choice on NYU Classes

W 11/22/17- No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

Homework: Group J post work of your choice on NYU Classes

WEEK 13

M 11/27/17- Mixed Workshop A

Share Thanksgiving Poems & Stories

W 11/29/17- Mixed Workshop J

Homework: Group Z post work of your choice on NYU Classes
Read Ted Chiang “The Great Escape”
Read Surrealism Poem Packet

WEEK 14

M 12/4/17- World-building, the Fantastic, Dreams, and Surrealism

- Discuss Ted Chiang “The Great Escape”
- Discuss Surrealism Poem Packet:
 - Cathy Park Hong excerpt from *Engine Empire*
 - Joy Harjo “Deer Dancer”
 - Thylas Moss “An Anointing”
- World-building Writing Exercise

W 12/6/17- Mixed Workshop Z

Homework: Read Hybrid Texts Packet

WEEK 15

M 12/11/17- Hybrid Texts

- Discuss Hybrid Texts Packet:
 - Maggie Nelson excerpt from *Bluets*
 - Claudia Rankine excerpt from *Citizen*
 - Anne Carson excerpt from *Autobiography of Red*
 - Lydia Davis “Break it Down”
- Hybrid Texts Writing Exercise

W 12/13/17- Last Day of Class: (depending on the weather) potentially in Washington Square Park

- Check Journals
- In-Class Reading & Party

Homework: Turn in Final Portfolios by 5pm at Lillian Vernon Writers House