

## **Introduction to Fiction and Poetry Summer Session I May 22-July 2.**

Instructor: Razmig Bedirian

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Class times: Tuesday and Thursday 1:30-4:40pm

### **Course Objectives**

The goal of this course is to encourage a creative use of language. We will be looking at works of both prose and poetry while keeping in mind their historical, political and individual drives and relevance. My hope is that by examining these texts and the techniques they make use of, students will be able to identify and articulate their literary tastes and build upon them. As we will be meeting twice a week, Tuesday's class will be dedicated for discussing the texts and setting goals for our workshop. While students are free to submit anything they are working on, we will be setting writing prompts inspired by our readings. (i.e. characters from Arabian Nights; story structure in Chekov fashion; description of physical objects like Herbert, or dialogue; or places like Calvino's invisible cities) These prompts, I hope, will help students hone their understanding of the different literary modes of creative expression and communication.

### **Course Structure**

We will be meeting twice a week, three hours per class with a twenty minute break halfway. Tuesday's classes will be dedicated to discussing the assigned texts. We will be looking at character development, plot, dialogue, and image. You will be expected to bring a short response to the reading every week. Thursday's classes will be designated as workshop days. You will be required to bring in a piece to workshop based on the weekly writing prompts. Workshops will involve everyone reading, marking up, and discussing each other's work. By the end of the semester, students must submit a portfolio, the contents of which are elaborated below. Students are required to give either handwritten or typed responses to their cohorts' submissions. Our course will end with students reading from their portfolios.

### **Attendance**

Up to two days of absence without penalty or explanation are allowed. After that, you will need to provide a doctor's note or similar documentation for any absence. Unexcused absences after your second will result in the loss of a letter grade.

If you are more than ten minutes late to class it will be counted as an unexcused absence.

### **Electronic Devices**

I insist that everyone bring in printed copies of both the readings, which I will provide you as pdfs, and the workshop pieces. The class demands participation and I feel electronic devices are detrimental to level of engagement. As such, please keep your mobile phones, tablets, silenced and stowed away.

## **Grading**

Participation – 30%

Presentation – 10%

Workshop submissions – 30%

Portfolio – 30%

## **Final Portfolio**

Your final portfolio will include all of the work you have handed in over the course of the semester. Here is what you will complete by the end of the semester—

3 workshop pieces (one poem, one story, one of your choice)

2 revised pieces (one revised poem, one revised story)

Your weekly reading and workshop responses

In class writing exercises

## **Weekly readings**

Week one: Introductions

Nuts and Bolts: Thought Verbs—Chuck Palahniuk

The Shapes of Stories—Kurt Vonnegut (Video)

Arabian Nights—excerpts

Week two: The Voice and Structure

First chapters of Hadji Murat and Death of Ivan Illych—Leo Tolstoy

Can't and Won't (excerpts)—Lydia Davis

Introduction of Slaughterhouse 5—Kurt Vonnegut

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler—Italo Calivo

The Corpse Exhibition—Hassan Blasim

Week Three: The Visual

The Art of Description: World into Word (excerpts) by Mark Doty

Ways of Seeing—John Berger

The Traveler and His Road—Gostan Zarian

Illuminations—Rimbaud

Calligrammes by Guillaume Apollinaire

Week Four: The Political

Wooden Die, Study of the Object—Zbigniew Herbert

The Colonel—Carolyn Forché

Journal of an ordinary grief (select passages)—Mahmoud Darwish

How to Escape from a Leper Colony by Tiphonie Yanique

## Week Five: The Body

Excerpts from the Cambridge Companion to The Body in Literature

Delta of Venus (select passages)—Anais Nin

Immortality (select passages)—Milan Kundera

Watt (select passages)—Samuel Beckett

A Country Doctor's Notebook (select passages)—Mikael Bulgakov

Interzone (select passages)—William Burroughs

Crotagé—Carl Philips

Odes—Sharon Olds

Week Six: Review and finalize portfolio.

Radical Revision—Rachel Zucker

On Failure— George Saunders

### **Final Portfolio**

Your final portfolio will include all of the work you have handed in over the course of the semester. Here is what you will complete by the end of the semester—

3 workshop pieces—one poem, one story, one of your choice

Revisions of 2 of your workshop pieces

Your weekly reading and workshop responses

In class writing exercises

### **Office Hours:**

You will be required to meet with me at least once over the course of the semester, so that we can discuss about how the semester is going for you. Please email me to arrange meeting times.