Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry  
(CRWRI-UA.815.021)

Instructor: Waleed Bhatti  
Time: Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:45pm  
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Office Hours by Appointment

“The truth does not change according to our ability to stomach it.”  
Flannery O’Connor

“What art offers is space - a certain breathing room for the spirit.”  
John Updike

Purpose:
As an artistic form, writing is quite minimal; Words on pages and not much else. Rather than asking how we derive meaning from such a form, it may be more advantageous for you as writers to ask, how do writers make meaning in their work? In this introductory creative writing class, we will explore the art of storytelling and poetry through the ways in which language, voice, characterization, structure, rhythm, and themes are employed by writers to “create meaning”. We will both read well and write well, and at the end of it all, we will have gained a more profound insight into the art of writing.

Course Structure:
Tuesdays will be craft classes; we will have in-depth discussions of the assigned readings. Our primary objectives in these discussions will be to share observations about the specific decisions and techniques the author has made, and to explore how these elements inform our encounter with the work. We will end our discussions with in-class writing exercises as a creative response to the readings, which you will then extend into short written pieces as homework for the next week.

Thursdays will be workshop classes; a selected number of students will submit their own fiction or poetry for critique. Over the course of the semester, everyone will submit two poems and two stories. Pieces for workshop must be distributed one week in advance so that I and your fellow classmates can respond thoughtfully.

- Short stories should be 5-15 pages (do not exceed 15 pages)
- Poetry should not exceed 10 pages

Print two copies of your responses, one for the writer and one for me.
**Readings:**
You will find the list of required readings at the end of this syllabus. You must read each assigned story or poem prior to the Tuesday craft classes, as the bulk of all craft lessons will be focused on discussing and analyzing the readings in detail. The majority of our fiction readings will be short stories, and I will provide photocopies or free digital links for those as well as the poems ahead of time. You will, however, be required to purchase any books listed.

**Submissions:**
All craft responses, exercises, workshop submissions and portfolios must be turned in on the assigned deadline, in class. It is your responsibility to have photocopies of your workshop piece available the week preceding your workshop. Email submissions are highly discouraged and will only be accepted in the event of an excused absence. You are not permitted to email your responses to your fellow students.

**Final Portfolio:**
At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio of all the pieces you have workshopped in class. Two of these four pieces must be visibly revised drafts; one short story and one poem is the requirement. You will also submit a 1-2 page letter outlining the changes you made, why you made them, and which critiques from workshops you found helpful in revising your work.

**Extra Credit:**
You’re in NYC, the literary capital of the world. Go to a reading, a panel discussion, a book launch, get out there and then write a one-page response about your experience. There are readings at the Lillian Vernon Writer’s House every week, find one you like, attend, and bask in the joy of free wine and cheese (if you’re underage, stick to the cheese).

**Grading:**
Participation – 40%
Writing Assignments – 40%
Final Portfolio – 20%
Extra Credit – 5% (added to final grade)
**Attendance:**
Attendance is expected at every class meeting. The reason is simple; it’s near impossible to thoroughly workshop each other’s work if people don’t attend. Each unexplained absence will result in a 5% decrease to your total grade. Two or more instances in which you are late to class will count as an absence (you will have a five-minute grace period after the start of class in which to come in without penalty). Absences or lateness owing to a medical or other emergency circumstance must be accompanied by a doctor’s (or other official) note.

If you have an emergency and cannot attend class, nor obtain a note, it will be necessary to contact me and explain the absence. I’ll judge whether or not the explanation is considered sufficient enough to waive the penalty. Students who are absent the day of their workshop will not receive a make-up workshop, whether the absence is excused or not. Students who are late for their workshop will go last and only for as long as time allows.

**Plagiarism:**
The sole purpose of this class is reading and writing creative, original pieces. It should then (hopefully) come as no surprise to you that there is a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy in effect. You will fail the class and all instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department, without exception. There is no justifiable excuse. Don’t do it.

**Electronics:**
This class only works if you are fully present. All electronic devices must be silent and out of sight during class. We may at some point make use of screens or the internet, but for the most part, I’d like you to use pen and paper to take notes. If I catch you on a device goofing off (it’s not hard; there won’t be many of us in the class), I’ll ask you to put it away. If I catch you a second time (whether in the same class or another day), I’ll ask you to leave the class. Each subsequent time you’ll also be asked to leave.

**Office Hours:**
You must meet with me at least once during the semester. You are free to schedule additional meetings if you like. In these sessions, we can discuss what you are working on, what you are reading, your goals for your writing, and any other topic that you think would be valuable to discuss with me. Don’t be shy!
Health & Wellness:
Take your physical and mental health seriously. NYU offers many (free) services to support you, including the Wellness Exchange. The Wellness Exchange is your key to accessing the University's extensive health and mental health resources designed to address your needs. You can call a private hotline (212-443-9999), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which will put you in touch with a professional who can help to address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns. These might include: medical issues, academic stress, depression, sexual assault, anxiety, alcohol and other drug dependence, sexually transmitted infections, eating disorders, etc. The hotline is also available if you just need to talk or want to call about a friend.

You can also stop by the Wellness Center right by campus:
726 Broadway
New York, NY
10003

You can also email them: wellness.exchange@nyu.edu

On Difficult Materials in Class:
This is a class about art, and art may (and often does) deal with difficult and disturbing themes. The prose and poetry written by your classmates may include difficult subject matter; the readings that I assign you will. I want you to be prepared for this in general, but I also want you to know that should you feel uncomfortable with certain class material, you can speak to me privately. I cannot promise how class discussions will go, either during craft or workshop classes, but I will do my best to guide these discussions in an open and respectful manner.

Furthermore, as this is a fiction & poetry course, unless there is explicit evidence to suggest otherwise, I will assume all speakers, characters, and events in your submissions are fictional. However, if there are concerning themes (murder, suicide, rape, etc.) or it seems like a cry for help, I will reach out to you via email to check in. If I am still concerned, or I don’t hear back from you, I will reach out on your behalf to the Wellness Center and/or your advisor. This will be done with the utmost respect and privacy and only out of my concern for your health and safety. If you are struggling, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can help guide you to the available resources.
**Workshop Procedure and Etiquette:**
Workshopping is an exciting way to engage with literary craft and to move your own writing forward. Whether you’re the one being workshopped or you’re doing the workshopping, the issues that come up in discussion open new avenues of exploration and discovery for your work. Here are some guidelines to maximize the benefit for everyone:

**Writers**
- Submit pieces that you have worked on intensively, not something you slapped together the night before. On the other hand, make sure it’s a fresh piece, one you genuinely want feedback on. Don’t bring in a story or poem you wrote two years ago and are finished with.
- Don’t get defensive. It’s easy to feel threatened by criticism of creative work, since its sources are often deeply personal. But the workshop process is designed to help you develop as a writer, and that requires focusing a critical eye on your own work.
- **Think carefully before bringing autobiographical material to class.** Make sure it’s something you’re comfortable submitting to the workshop process.
- Silence is the best response as your work is being critiqued. This keeps you from feeling you have to explain or defend your work and leaves you free to listen. When asked a direct question, it’s up to you whether you want to respond or respectfully decline. When the critique is over, you’ll have a chance to ask your own questions and clarify comments made by your peers.
- Finally, remember that you are the sole author of your work. One of the skills of workshopping is the ability to sift through a range of critiques and pick out what’s most useful to you.

**Readers**
- Read each piece twice. On the first read, simply absorb the story/poem. Sit with it for a moment. On the second read, begin your critical analysis.
- You should make line notes on the physical manuscript. See a great line? Note it. See a typo or grammatical error? Note it. Something not working as well as it could? Note it. Once you complete your line notes, write a response letter to the writer, telling them in greater detail what you enjoyed about their piece and what you think could be improved. Always start with what you like before moving onto questions, suggestions, and criticisms. Be both honest and respectful.
- Keep in mind that your first duty is to understand what the writer is trying to do and to help them do it better. Be open to the writer’s unique vision and respectful of their struggle to put that vision on paper. **Don’t assume that what the writer is trying to do has no value because it’s not to your taste, and don’t try to rewrite a writer’s work to reflect your own preferences or style.**
Provisional Reading Schedule (Subject to Change)

Class 1 – January 28th
First Day Introductions and Jubilations
Donald Barthelme – The School
George Saunders – The Gerbil

Class 2 – January 30th
Two unnamed stories provided for mock workshops

Class 3 – February 4th
Craft One
Shirley Jackson – The Lottery

Class 4 – February 6th
Workshop One
Fiction

Class 5 – February 11th
Craft Two
Flannery O’Connor – Good Country People

Class 6 – February 13th
Workshop Two
Fiction

Class 7 – February 18th
Craft Three
Edgar Allen Poe – The Raven and others

Class 8 – February 20th
Workshop Three
Poetry

Class 9 – February 25th
Craft Four
Robert Frost – Mending Wall / Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening

Class 10 – February 27th
Workshop Four
Poetry
Class 11 – March 3rd
Craft Five
John Cheever – *Reunion*

Class 12 – March 5th
Workshop Five
Fiction

Class 13 – March 10th
Craft Six
Alice Munro – *Boys And Girls*

Class 14 – March 12th
Workshop Six
Fiction

**SPRING BREAK**
No Classes

Class 15 – March 24th
Craft Seven
Terrance Hayes – *American Sonnet For My Past And Future Assassin*

Class 16 – March 26th
Workshop Seven
Poetry

Class 17 – March 31st
Craft Eight
Toi Derricotte – *I Give In To An Old Desire*

Class 18 – April 2nd
Workshop Eight
Poetry

Class 19 – April 7th
Craft Nine
Tobias Wolff – *Bullet In The Brain*

Class 20 – April 9th
Workshop Nine
Fiction
Class 21 – April 14th
Craft Ten
Denis Johnson – *Emergency*

Class 22 – April 16th
Workshop Ten
Fiction

Class 23 – April 21st
Craft Eleven
*Haikus*

Class 24 – April 23rd
Workshop Eleven
Poetry

Class 25 – April 28th
Craft Twelve
Hasan Namir – *The Worst / How To Kill Homosexuals*

Class 26 – April 30th
Workshop Twelve
Poetry

Class 27 – May 5th
Final Craft
Rachel Zucker – *Soundmachine*
Raymond Carver – *Tell The Women We’re Going*

Class 28 – May 7th
Final Portfolios Due
Class Readings / Party
*excitement*