INTRODUCTION TO FICTION AND POETRY
CRWRI-UA.815.015
TUES/THURS 3:30 PM - 4:45 PM

INSTRUCTOR: JD DEBRIS (PLEASE, CALL ME J.D.)
JDD430@NYU.EDU

OFFICE HOURS: TUES/THURS 1:30-3:00 PM
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“To sing you must first open your mouth. You must have a pair of lungs, and a little knowledge of music. It is not necessary to have an accordion, or a guitar. The essential thing is to want to sing. This then is a song. I am singing.”
– Henry Miller

“The role of a writer is not to say what we all can say, but what we are unable to say.”
Anaïs Nin

COURSE OBJECTIVE:
We’re going to do what poets and fiction writers do. The four basic steps are:

• To read voraciously and let it directly inform our writing
• To get our hands dirty with raw and uninhibited first drafts
• To polish these first drafts via processes of revision
• Having written and revised, read again

REQUIRED BOOKS:
Larry Levis – Winter Stars
(avail. as free e-book on JHU Project Muse)

Lucia Berlin – A Manual for Cleaning Women
(e-book avail. as free loan through NYPL)

CLASS STRUCTURE:
Tuesdays: Craft
Thursdays: Workshop
• In CRAFT classes we will discuss the week’s readings (listed below). Most weeks, readings will be posted as .pdf files to the NYU Classes site. We will also read a complete book of poems and a complete book of stories.

**Your homework for every Tuesday is this:** print out the readings, read them, read them again, mark them up noting elements of the reading that stand out to you, then come up with **three prompts** based on the readings (some element from the reading that you—or someone else—might use as a launching point for your own writing). Come to class Tuesday ready to exchange prompts and notes with classmates.

• In WORKSHOP classes we will discuss classmates’ writing. There will be three/four workshop groups, who will take turns bringing pieces to workshop each week.

**Your homework for every Thursday is this:** If it’s your turn to workshop, upload your piece, print out the pieces your classmates submit to the class site, read them, read them again, mark them up noting elements of the reading that stand out to you. Come to class Thursday ready to exchange notes with classmates.

**GRADING:**

Three steps: Write, read, and show up.

**25% Workshop submissions:**
All this means is turn something in when it’s your week to workshop and you’re good. Workshop submissions will be graded on effort, not quality.

**25% Notes/Prompts:**
Mark up your printed-out papers in a way that shows your thinking about the piece

**25% Attendance, Preparation, and Discussion:**
Come to class having read the week’s assigned reading and be ready to talk about it in a group.

**25% Final Revised Portfolio:**
...consisting of at least one story and one poem. Include notes on your revision process.

**LATE WORK:**

A creative writing class relies on writers showing up and having read/submitted the work.

Even if you feel like you’re not understanding the reading, just note patterns you detect.
If you feel like you’re stuck on a piece you’re writing, just focus on making a poem-shaped thing or a story-shaped thing. Disregard quality for a minute and just trust the poem or story to take shape—rough drafts are supposed to be rough!

This is all to say: turn something in. You’re going to get the same grade for that cyberpunk retelling of “Grandma got Run Over by a Reindeer” where you can’t seem to nail the opening, middle, or ending as you would for writing a gargantuan, sprawling successor to The Waste Land.

So turn it in: the worst thing you can read or write is nothing. Late poems and stories will not be accepted. You can always revise a piece after the due date.

I know what it’s like to be overworked. If you’re feeling the crunch, please let me know one-on-one and we will adapt as necessary.

OTHER POLICIES:

- **Tardiness** of more than 15 minutes will be considered an absence. We have a short window of time for workshop and don’t really have time to sit around waiting to start.
- Please no laptops, phones, or tablets. Open laptops and tablets will only be acceptable on the craft days when we discuss the Levis and Berlin books, if you have an e-book copy.
- **Plagiarism** = Grade of “F.”
- Please be respectful of classmates at all times. Sharing work can be tough for some writers, so be cognizant of this when offering feedback.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS:
are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should 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
Website: [http://www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd)

STUDENT WELLNESS POLICY:
Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt the instructor’s attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work, especially for workshop, 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.

READINGS:

UNIT 1 - MEMORY (2 classes)
(30 Jan, 4 Feb)
*NO WORKSHOP 1st WEEK* 2 CONSEUTIVE CRAFT DAYS INSTEAD*

- Jamel Brinkley – I Happy Am (https://muse.jhu.edu/article/692928/pdf)
- Roberto Bolaño – El Gusano
- Yusef Komunyakaa – Gerry’s Jazz, Venus’ Flytraps, More Girl than Boy
- David Berman – Classic Water
  (https://dogembassy.tumblr.com/post/51344429673/david-berman-classic-water)
- John Porcellino – Heat Lightning (comic strip)
- David Hernandez – Made in California
- Marie Howe – Practicing
- César Vallejo – To My Brother Miguel
- Mario Santiago Papasquiaro – Leap Year Adolescence
- Arthur Rimbaud – Novel
  (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57278/novel)
- James Merrill – The Broken Home

UNIT 2 - COMPLICATING THE “I” (11 Feb)

- Julio Cortázar – Axolotl
- Jorge Luis Borges – Borges & I
- Cynthia Cruz – Self Portrait
  (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56784/self-portrait-56d2399b690d0) Sparks, Nevada
  (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56950/sparks-nevada)
- Atilla Joszef – Atilla Joszef
- Fernando Pessoa – “Countless Lives...”
- John Murillo – On Confessionalism (https://www.thecommononline.org/on-confessionalism/)
- Hieu Minh Nguyen - Confessional
- [César Vallejo – Black Stone on a White Stone](https://poets.org/poem/confessional)
- [Jack Giavour – Trans Man in Spring; T.M. in October](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/657128)

### UNIT 3 - LISTS & NEGATION (18 Feb)

- Clarice Lispector – The Fifth Story
- Joe Lansdale – Godzilla’s 12 Step Program
- David Shields – Life Story
- David St. John – Guitar
- Marie Howe – Magdalene and the Seven Devils
- Aimé Césaire – Ex-voto for a Shipwreck; Lynch 1

Half the first week, half the second week

### UNIT 5 (TASTE, SCENT, AND INCANTATION) (10 Mar)

- Derek Walcott – A Sea Chantey
- Lucille Clifton – Cutting Greens ([https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54590/cutting-greens](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/54590/cutting-greens))
- Paul Celan – Deathfugue (w/ audio)
- Nicolás Guillén – Sensemayá
- Arthur Sze – Fauve
- Bei Dao – Midnight Singer; The Orange is Ripe

### UNIT 6 (EKPHRASIS – GET ARTY) (24 Mar)

- David Wojahn – from *Mystery Train* ([https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/1219538](https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/1219538))
- Wm. Carlos Williams – Landscape with the Fall of Icarus ([https://poets.org/poem/landscape-fall-icarus](https://poets.org/poem/landscape-fall-icarus))
- RM Rilke – Archaic Torso of Apollo ([https://poets.org/poem/archaic-torso-apollo](https://poets.org/poem/archaic-torso-apollo))
- Corsino Fortes – 3 Canvases for Tchalé Figueira
- Zbigniew Herbert — Mona Lisa

UNIT 7 - Levis - *Winter Stars* (31 Mar, 7 Apr)
Half the first week, half the second week

UNIT 8 (CHARACTER & PERSONA) (2 wks) (14 Apr, 21 Apr)
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – Apollo
- Haruki Murakami — Yesterday
- Carlos Drummond de Andrade - Disappearance of Luisa Porto
- Terrance Hayes – The Blue Kool; “Maxine Waters…”
- Sterling A. Brown — Slim Greer in Hell

UNIT 9 (COMMUNITY) (2 WKS) (28 Apr, 5 May)
- Denis Johnson – Strangler Bob
- Ishion Hutchinson – The Night Autobiographies of Leopold Dice
- David Hernandez — All-American

(wk 2)
- Italo Calvino – from *Invisible Cities*
- George Oppen – Red Hook: December
- Pablo Neruda – Walking Around; Fable of the Mermaid and the Drunks
- CK Williams – She, Though
- Zbigniew Herbert — What Mr. Cogito Thinks About Hell

7 May: Final Portfolio Reading & Salon