

CREATIVE WRITING: INTRODUCTION TO FICTION & POETRY

CRWRI-UA.815

FALL 2018

Instructor: Gbenga Adesina

Monday/Wednesday: 8AM-9:15AM

Email: gea257@nyu.edu

Classroom: Room: C02A

Office hours: By appointment

Overview

Welcome. What a joy to have you.

The goal of this class will be to give you a solid foundation in creative writing and reading. How to write articulate, convincing and deeply felt creative pieces (short stories, poems, novellas, essays etc.). And how to read a work of literature and see, like map lines, the logic of beauty with which it was made. This is called reading like a writer.

Together, we will create a kind, inspiring and safe space, and within that space we will pursue our objective through craft, and workshop sessions. We will study the old, high art (Shakespeare, John Keats, Toni Morrison etc.) but we will also pay great attention to contemporary writers working now in our lifetime and the new ways they continue to make excellent art.

I hope you are as excited as I am about our class. See you.

General Structure

* **CRAFT CLASSES:** This will be on Mondays, and is a crucial part of our sessions together. We will focus on the assigned materials. It is important that you read these materials before class, make notes and be prepared to discuss and offer your views if called on. We will dig into the things in between the lines, we will learn how to track and see the blueprints of a piece of writing, and how we can use some of those tools and blueprints in our own writing. This, I believe, is the secret of all great writing. As the course title suggests, we will focus on poetry and prose forms but we will also interest ourselves in what we can learn from other forms (songs and song lyrics, visual art and even tweets and blog posts etc.). After each craft class, you will be required to write a short essay (one page) on the craft lessons you got from some of the discussed pieces. This will be due the following Sunday by 7pm.

***MATERIALS:**

I have gone a great length to provide links to all the materials we'll be studying in class. Check the course schedule. It is important that you study these materials before class.

***Workshop Sessions:** This is the lifeline of our class. It will happen on Wednesdays. This is where you will put into use the blueprints and tools you glean from the workshop. This is also where you will learn

how to be a good and productive member of a creative commune. We will have generative writing sessions using prompts and other creative means. We will also have sessions where you will bring in original writing. All members of the class will pay quality attention to a work being workshopped and will strive to give helpful feedback.

You will be divided into groups on the first day of class and we'll work out a workshopping schedule for all the groups. If your work is to be workshopped on a given Wednesday, then you are required to submit that work to me and your classmates latest by the preceding Sunday(7pm).

MORE NOTE ON WORKSHOP:

Also **PRINT OUT** your copy of the materials to be workshopped (yours or/and that of your colleagues before class). Always write your written response to the submitted works before class and make two copies (one for the student being workshopped and one for me).

Response must start with attention and well considered views. Begin, I suggest, with what is working in the writing, with a brief description of your idea of the work (the form, works by other writers it reminds you of etc.) and then your suggestions on how to make it better. This must be done in goodwill, utmost decency and camaraderie.

Final Portfolio:

At the end of the semester, in lieu of final exam:

*You will submit a portfolio of revised, edited and well crafted writing(poems, short stories, essay or a novel excerpt etc.). It must not be less than 10 pages.

*You will also submit a two page essay on craft lessons outlining the blue prints and craft principles you have learned in the course of the semester, how they have impacted your writing and how you intend to keep using them in your work.

*Finally, you will submit an artistic statement and goal trajectory outlining where you see yourself and your creative work(the projects or ideas you'll like to pursue or have achieved) in the next 1 year, 3 years, 5 years, 10 and 15 years.

DOCUMENTS/TYPESET: All assignments, works, portfolios etc that has to be typed, must be in Times New Roman, 12 font and double spaced.

Preparation and Participation:

It is essential that you read all the assigned materials before class and be prepared, if called on, to share your ideas and views. Participation, let me affirm to you again, will be central to the success of the collaborative project our class will be. You are an important and valuable part of this project. It is important that you talk in class and make valuable contributions during craft and workshop sessions. The highest percentage of your grade will come from this. Punctuality, decency, full, undivided attention while in class are the ethos of the class.

***SAFE SPACE**

Our class will be a forte of decency, camaraderie, integrity, intellectual rigor and respect for human dignity. We will acknowledge one another and be of great value in the commune. No bullying, no continuous interruption or talking down of another person. No uncouth, foul or triggering language. Even when we

are handling volatile materials, we will do it with all sense of historical responsibility and great sensitivity.

***Office Hours:**

You are required to have at least one meeting with me during my office hour in the course of the semester. You are however encouraged to come for a couple of meetings before the semester ends. All of these meetings will be by appointment through email.

***Grading:**

Participation 40%

Final Portfolio 40%

Recitation 10%

Extra Points (10 points)

- Attending a Literary Event in the city and writing a short report about it

***Recitation:**

You are encouraged to memorize a poem, excerpt of a story or an essay etc. It should be a minimum of 15 lines. We will have a student recite a piece every Monday before the class commences. Every member of the class will participate in this before the semester ends.

***Guiding Principles**

Plagiarism:

NYU disapproves of plagiarism. It's unethical and jeopardizes your prospect. Desist from it.

Attendance and Punctuality:

Attendance is key. You are expected to attend every class. Except for emergencies(in which case, you are advised to email me), absence will be penalized. Endeavor to come to class on time. I know it's an early morning class, but we can all do this. Repeated tardiness will be penalized. Absence from class and tardiness will affect your grade adversely. You don't want that.

Late Assignments: Deadlines are important. Endeavor to meet them.

Eating or Disruptive behavior in class. Don't. You will be penalized. (Except for occasional and unobtrusive beverage and snack).

Technology: Phones are not allowed. Laptops are okay for the sole purpose of consulting the assigned materials during class.

Student Wellness Policy: We deeply care. If there is a hint relating to extreme stress, suicidal ideation, depression, isolation, murder, sexual assault, or severe mental distress in the work you submit, I will take that as a cue to contact you. If not, I advise that you send me an email explaining any background stories or ideas behind it and how to appropriately approach it in class, especially in a workshop. Please do reach out to me, if there is something you need to talk about. I'll also guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

Disability Disclosure Statement:

NYU has a great policy as regards disability. 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 also 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>

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE

Wednesday, September 5th:

We are going to introduce ourselves, set house rules, workshop schedules, go over the semester plan, expectations, requirements etc.

We are going to have a brief, “Why do you write session.”

And perhaps a writing exercise.

A LITTLE NOTE:

This class, being the first, we will not have a full discussion of the materials below. But I have provided them, so that if you so wish you can study them on your own. Here are brief historical sketches and materials in literature (and life) in which a young writer or an artist makes the decision to write, and insights from great writers on writing and creativity.

There are also materials produced by some greats in their youth (and how those works were crucial steps either as beginners or writers in the intermediate stage).

Materials:

WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG LIKE US

*Letters to a Young Poet (first letter). *An Imitation of Spenser by John Keats (age 19)
by Rainer Maria Rilke.

*How to Become A Writer by Lorrie Moore. * I thought That I Could not Be Hurt by
Sylvia Plath (age 14)

* Eight Letters to a Young Writer (1st) by Teju Cole *On the Joy of Living by Sylvia Plath
(age 17)

* Zadie Smith and Jeffrey Eugenides’ Interview on Writing. *A City’s Death by Fire By
Derek Walcott (age 18)

- * You in America by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. *Digging by Seamus Heaney(age 25)
(at early short story, age 24)

WEEK TWO

Monday, September 10th:

CRAFT CLASS: SENTENCES

Sentences are the live-wire of writing. When they are greatly done, the reader feels the flux in their body. It's benign electricity. We find a piece of writing compelling largely because the sentences are compelling. So why do young writers often lock up our sentences like things in a cage? How can we free our sentences up?

How do you curate the elements of tone, mood, energy, diction, live, humor, flow, and a signature voice through the facility of the sentence?

Materials:

- * Girl by Jamaica Kincaid. *53 of the Best Opening Sentences in Literature
* Beloved(excerpt) by Toni Morrison. *Fragment by Sappho
* Their Eyes Were Watching God(excerpt) * American Pastoral(excerpt) by Phillip Roth
by Zora Neale Hurston.
* A Hunger Like None Since by Teju Cole. * He Wishes for the Clothes of Heaven by W.B. Yeats
* Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong by Ocean Vuong. * The Wild Iris by Louise Gluck
* Watching Spider-man in Santo Domingo by Junot Diaz. * The New Intelligence by Timothy
Donnelly
*Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong(video)

Wednesday, September 12th:

Workshop

WEEK THREE

Monday, September 17th:

CRAFT CLASS: OUTGROWING CLICHES

Maturing as a writer is finding ways to sidestep and subvert cliches. Cliches are walls that hem us within the borders of a narrow world.They drain your writing. The reader yawns repeatedly. Writing a good sentence is the process of individuation. Cliche is you ceding power and accepting powerlessness in your craft. So how do you blast through that narrow wall? How do we transcend not just cliché words and sentences, but also cliché perception, cliché seeing, cliché being, cliché rhythm and tone in our writing?

Materials:

- * The Huntress by Sofia Samatar * Brand New Ancients by Kate Tempest(videos)
* When I Consider the African-American * People Like That Are the Only People Here
by Terrance Hayes by Lorrie Moore
* Why Do We Hate Cliches (New York Times). *Avoiding Cliches (WritersDigest)

- * David Foster Wallace's Commencement Speech. *Wishing Well by Gregory Pardlo
 at Kenyon University(video)
 *From Black Maria by Aracelis Girmay

**Wednesday, September 19th:
 Workshop**

WEEK FOUR

Monday, September 24th:

CRAFT CLASS: ATTENTION AND DESCRIPTIVE GENIUS

The opposite of cliché is willful and sustained attention. Both physical and verbal. The singularity of your attention and descriptive power enliven your writing. As young writers, how do we take our first steps on this lifelong journey?

Materials:

- * The Fish by Elizabeth Bishop. * The Guest by Albert Camus
 * I Go Back to May 1937 by Sharon Olds.
 * The Gift by Li-Young Lee. * The Shipping News(excerpt) by Annie Proulx
 * Austerlitz (excerpt) by W.G. Sebald *A Poem in Which I try to Express My Glee at the
 Music My Friend Has Given Me by Ross Gay

**Wednesday, September 26th:
 Workshop**

WEEK FIVE

Monday, October 1st

CRAFT CLASS: OUR PAIN AND THE PAIN OF OTHERS

We will discuss grief, melancholy, loneliness, and alienation in literature. We will also discuss estrangement, ethical loneliness, violence, trauma, and how are they embedded in literature across canons and traditions. The idea here is to make us sensitive young writers who can articulately write about our own pain and the grief and pain of others.

Materials:

- . * Notes of A Native Son
 by James Baldwin
 * Unsteady by X Ambassadors * In Bed by Joan Didion
 * Fugue of Death by Paul Celan. * I Explain a Few Things by Pablo Neruda
 * Kingdom Animalia by Aracelis Girmay. * Explaining the Attempt to the Doctors, Beginning
 with Two Lines From Darwish by Leila Chatfi
 * Angel Nafis by Angel Nafis. * Upon Reading That Eric Dolphy Transcribed Even the Calls
 of Certain Species of Birds by John Murillo
 *Divine Wrath by Adelia Prado (tr by Ellen More Watson)
 *Colosseum by Jericho Brown. * Warsaw Shire(Video)

* The Empathy Exam(excerpt) by Leslie Jamison

Wednesday, October 3rd -Workshop

WEEK SIX

Monday, October 8th:

NO CLASS

Fall Recess

Wednesday, October 10th: Workshop

WEEK SEVEN

Monday, October 15th:

CRAFT CLASS: Excursions in Poetry

We will consider: Elements of poetry (Prosody, Forms, Line breaks, stanza and sub genres within poetry etc). We will also consider a brief history and evolution of poetry in the Western Canon (across epochs and eras), and how this intersects with other global canons; our place as young writers in writing within and against these canons and traditions.

Materials:

- * The Epic of Gilgamesh (first page).
- * Ovid's Metamorphosis(first page).
- * If no Love is...by Chaucer
- * Lyrical Ballads(excerpt, first part) by William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge
- * The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by T.S. Eliot
- * Pastoral by William Carlos Williams.
- * One Art by Elizabeth Bishop
- * Dreams by Laughston Hughes
- * The Double Image by Anne Sexton
- * Light of the World by Derek Walcott.
- * Black Berry Picking by Seamus Heaney
- * American Sonnet Terrance Hayes
- * Iliad by Homer(first page)
- * Dante's Inferno(Canto I)
- * Love's Secret's by William Blake
- * Song of Myself XLVIII by Walt Whitman
- * Canto I by Ezra Pound
- * The Candle, A Saint by Wallace Stevens
- * Epilogue by Robert Lowell
- * We Real Cool by Gwendolyn Brooks
- * Won't You Celebrate with Me by Lucille Clifton
- * Canary by Rita Dove
- * Other People's Comfort Keeps Me Up At Night by Morgan Parker

Wednesday, October 17th:

Workshop

WEEK EIGHT

Monday, October 22nd:

CRAFT CLASS: Excursions in Prose

Central elements of good prose (language, structure, arc, flux and motion, clarity, complexity, style, energy, mood, tone, voice etc). A brief history of the genre and types (fiction, non fiction, new journalism, memoir, etc).

A brief treatise on the historical debates on the difference between prose and poetry.

Materials:

- *Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert.
- * The Necklace by Guy De Maupassant
- * David Copperfield (excerpt) by Charles Dickens.
- * The Snake by John Steinbeck
- * The Old Man and the Sea(excerpt)
- *The Washington Square by Henry James(1st chpt)
- * by Ernest Hemingway
- * The Invisible Man(1st chapter) by Ralph Ellison
- *The Enigma of Arrival by V.S. Naipaul
- *Temporary Matter by Jhumpa Lahiri
- * Inscape by Yaa Gyasi

Wednesday, October 24th:

Workshop

WEEK NINE

Monday, October 29th:

CRAFT CLASS: LOVE AND HEARTBREAK

We love, we hurt. Our lives are bound by the intractable pull of the human heart. This experience is perhaps the most universal of the human interior. How can we write movingly, with freshness, empathy, and unwavering honesty about this interior landscape? What can we say about love and heartache that the love songs have not already said? Well, a lot, I assure you.

Materials:

- *The Glass Essay by Anne Carson.
- *On the Loves of Others Hannah Black
- *Tenderness by Stephen Dunn
- * Love in the Time of Cholera (excerpt) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- *Sonnet XVII by Pablo Neruda
- * Bird Song by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- * Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare.
- * Love After Love by Derek Walcott
- * An excerpt from Corelli Mandolin by Louis. De Bernieres
- * The Breakup Museum by Leslie Jamison.
- * I Gotta Find Peace of Mind by Lauryn Hill
- * They Can't Take That Away From Me by ELLA FITZGERALD AND LOUIS ARMSTRONG

Wednesday, October 31st: **WORKSHOP**

WEEK TEN

Monday, November 5th:

CRAFT CLASS: CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION

Humans, in reality, are complex, layered, and multiple. They should be no less in the stories we create.

Materials:

- * Two Soldiers by William Faulkner
- * Sula (excerpt on pg 77) by Toni Morrison
- * Half of A Yellow Sun (excerpt, first chapter) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.
- * Dream Song 76 by John Berryman
- * Self Portrait as A Door by Donika Kelly.
- * The Return by Phillip Levine
- * The Remembrance of Things(excerpt) by Marcel Proust
- * Orlando (excerpt) by Virginia Woolf
- * Corelli's Mandolin by Louis de Bernieres
- * Winter Stars by Larry Levis
- * A Certain Chinese Encyclopedia by Sarah Howe
- * Open City (first chapter) by Teju Cole
- * The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka

Wednesday, November 7th: **WORKSHOP**

WEEK ELEVEN

Monday, November 12th:

CRAFT CLASS: THE STORY AND VOICE OF A PLACE

The best of writing is atmospheric. You feel, see, smell and ear everything in the invented world of the writing. The high mark is transport.

How do we write compelling portraits of a place (physical, invented or even the internal landscape of a mind)?

Materials:

- * After the Race (in the Dubliners) by James Joyce
- * One Hundred Years of Solitude (excerpt) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- * The Lazarus Project(excerpt) by Aleksander Hemon
- * The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost
- * From Summer Somewhere by Danez Smith
- * The Road (excerpt) by Cormac McCarthy
- * The Sorrow Gondola 2 by Tomas Transtromer
- * Ibadan by J.P. Clark
- * Ithaka by C.P. Cavafy
- * Rootless and Ledger by Jenny Xie

Wednesday, November 14th

Workshop

WEEK TWELVE

Monday, November 19th:

CRAFT CLASS: METAPHOR

Metaphors are the rocket of words. They make meaning and emotions travel and penetrate consciousness at a deeper level. How do we construct effective metaphors?

Materials:

- * Archaic Torso of Apollo by Rainer Maria Rilke.
- * Written by Himself by Gregory Pardlo
- * In Praise of Darkness by Jorge L. Borges
- * A Prayer for the Unflummoxed Beaver by Kei Miller
- * The Lazy River by Zadie Smith
- * Five Short Stories by Lydia Davis
- * Gustave Mahler's Symphony No 1 (the 1st 20 minutes by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra)
- * Bodak Yellow by Cardi B(clean version)
- * Casket Pretty by Noname.
- * Halleluyah by Leonard Cohen
performed by Jeff Buckley

Wednesday, November 21st:
NO CLASS (Thanksgiving break)

WEEK THIRTEEN

Monday, November 26th:

CRAFT CLASS: CREATIVE SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The world is in turmoil. The old forces of good and evil are at loggerheads, and we are, simply by being, implicated in this epic human struggle. There, really, is no neutrality. But art is art first.

How then can we do the radical work of empathy and justice in our writing without giving in to grandiosity and cant? Is the answer perhaps the pursuit of universal human emotions in our writing?

We shall look at materials that will demonstrate to us moral clarity, artistic bravery and social engagement with the world while not sacrificing excellent artistry.

Materials:

- * Musee des Beaux Arts by W.H. Auden
- * Monet's Waterlilies by Robert Hayden
- * In Jerusalem by Marmoud Darwish
- * God Has Pity on Kindergarten Children
By Yehuda Amichai
- * Letter to the Local Police by June Jordan.
- * The Husband Stitch by Carmen Maria Machado
- * The Border: A Double Sonnet
by Alberto Rios
- * Power(excerpt) by Naomi Alderman
- * In The Pain Cavern by Maggie Nelson
- * Bad Feminist by Roxanne Gay

- * A Most American Terrorist by Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah
- * Half of A Yellow Sun(short story) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie
- * Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation by Natalie Diaz
- * Alright by Kendrick Lamar
- * This is America by Childish Gambino
- * If We Run And They Kill Us, So Be It. But We Have To Run Now. by Sarah A. Topol

**Wednesday, November 28th:
Workshop**

**WEEK FOURTEEN
Monday, December 3rd**

CRAFT CLASS: Let's Change the World!

Hybrid genres, collapsing the walls of genres, the migration of literature into digital spaces, a brief history of technological revolutions and how literature shape-shifted with it; the re-imagination and redefinition of the page, futuristic writings etc

Materials:

*Courting the Peculiar, (a series of essays, sound texts and performances on Creative Nonfiction) with

Barrie Jean Borich, Ames Hawkins, and Kate Bradford.

- * Mary Cappello by Heir to Ambiguity.
- * Bluets (excerpt) by Maggie Nelson
- * Don't Let Me Be Lonely(excerpt) by Claudia Rankine
- * Bird Woman by Pemi Aguda
- * Teju Cole's Short story written in "real time". *An Approach by Roger Lewinter through 35 Retweets on Twitter
- * Arbor for Butch (a Pecha kucha) by Terrance Hayes

**Wednesday, December 5th:
Workshop**

**WEEK FIFTEEN
Monday, December 10th**

CRAFT CLASS: Let's Change the World!

Continuing with hybrid genres, reimagining and reversing canonized works, erasures and writing into the empty spaces , "dislocating language into meaning" etc.

Materials:

- * Superstar: An Excerpt from Spectacle by Susan Steinberg
- * From Reaching Guantanamo by Solmaz Sharif
- * Book of Isaiah part1 by Anne Carson
- * Zong(excerpt) by Nourbese Phillip
- * Aubade With Burning City by Ocean Vuong
- * Inaugural Poem(Redacted) by Jayy Dodd
- * Reverse Eurydice by Rowan Ricardo Phillips

* George Saunders on Experimental Story

* Odyssey (first page of the translation by
Emily Wilson

* I'll bring a copy of the box-book NOX by Anne Carson to class

Wednesday, December 12th –
Workshop and Conclusion of the Semester!