

**Introduction to Fiction and Poetry
Form, Genre, and Beyond**
Section number: CRWRI-UA.815.003
Schedule: MW: 11AM - 12:15PM

Instructor: Charis Caputo
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Texts:

The Making of a Poem: The Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms, Mark Strand and Eaven Boland, eds.

Autobiography of Red, Anne Carson

There Are More Beautiful Things than Beyoncé, Morgan Parker

American Innovations, Rivka Galchen

All other reading will be distributed as handouts and/or PDFs

Objective and Methods:

“Genre is a minimum-security prison”
--David Shields

“New ideas...often emerge in the process of negotiating the charged space between what is inherited and what is known.”
-- Mark Strand and Eaven Boland

What is fiction, and how is it different from poetry? How is it different from nonfiction? What is a narrative? What is “realism” and how much does it differ from “genre fiction”? Can a poem be anything and can anything be a poem? Why do poetic “forms” exist, and are they outdated? Some of these might seem like obvious questions, but in fact, they’re all questions worth discussing, questions without straightforward answers.

The process of becoming better writers, of exploring the possibilities of our own creativity, involves striving to discern both how and why we write, both as individuals and as participants in a culture with certain demands, assumptions, and inherited traditions. In this class, we will write, edit, and critique each other’s work, and as a necessary part of learning how to do so, we will also have readings and discussions about the craft of poetry and fiction. In these discussions, we will attempt to think critically about the nature and evolution of genre and form, the

distinctions and fluidities between and among genres, and the dialogue between tradition and novelty. What can we learn or express by imitating certain “canonical” works or certain generic formulae? What can we learn or express by subverting the expectations of form and genre? How can the mastery of key literary concepts and vocabulary help us to become better writers and editors? Let’s find out together!

Office hours: By appointment. Each of you must schedule a meeting with me at least once during the semester.

Grade breakdown:

Participation: 30 %

Workshop submissions: 25 %

Final Portfolio (revisions, reading responses, 3rd submission): 15 %

Reading Responses: 10 %

Critique letters: 10%

Performance of Memorized Poem: 10 %

Possible Extra Credit: up to 10%

Assignments:

Workshop submissions: Over the course of the semester, we will have five poetry workshops and five fiction workshops. Each individual student will be workshopped once in each genre. At the end of the semester, you will submit a third piece (in any genre of your choice) to be commented upon by the instructor only. Submissions received on their due dates will receive full credit. Late submissions will be lowered a full letter grade per day. Submissions that are never turned in will receive zeros. For poetry submissions, you may turn in up to 5 poems (no more than 5 pages of poetry). For fiction submissions, you may turn in a short story, several short stories, or a novel excerpt up to 8,000 words. All prose submissions should be double-spaced, in 12 point font. Students will sign up for their workshop slots at the beginning of the semester. All submissions are to be distributed as *paper copies* to the class one week before the workshop date.

Final Portfolio: This will include your two workshop submissions, any revisions you’ve done, and all your reading responses for the semester. It also must include your third (un-workshopped submission). This must be submitted to me as a hard copy by the last day of class. Your portfolio grade will drop 5% for every day late that it is.

Participation: Participation is vitally important for both workshops and craft discussions, and you will be graded on your participation in both. You are expected to come to workshops with written feedback on all pieces, which you will turn in to those of your classmates who are being workshopped. Students are also expected to participate and put effort into the in-class writing exercises.

When workshopping each other's pieces, it's important to speak and act respectfully. We will try to conceptualize our critiques less as what we "disliked" about a piece, and more as what we felt was working in the piece, what could work better, and questions we might have had while reading.

Attendance is part of participation! Attendance policy: Students should miss no more than three class periods in a semester. In case of emergency, you will need to provide documentation for absences exceeding three class periods. Every absence after three periods will drop your grade five percent. Three tardies count as an absence.

Reading responses: On each craft discussion day, you will need to come with a 2-3-page (double-spaced, 12 point font, one-inch margins) written response to the readings. You may respond to the readings in any way you like (analytically, experimentally, synthetically, discretely, etc.), but your response should demonstrate that you have read the assigned reading and thought critically about it. These responses will help you formulate your thoughts for discussion. At the end of the discussion, they will be turned into me for a grade.

Critique Letters: For each piece we workshop, you are expected to write a (typed) critique letter for the author, summarizing your overall thoughts and suggestions. Please bring two copies to every workshop, for each piece. At the end of the workshop, you'll hand me one copy of each, and hand the other copies to their respective authors, along with your line edits of their pieces.

Performance of a memorized poem: Performance, orality, and memory are essential elements in the history of poetry and poetic form. During one class period during the semester, students will take turns performing a poem of their choice which they will have memorized beforehand. Throughout the semester, we will also watch a number of videos of poems in performance.

Extra Credit opportunity: You may receive up to 10% of your overall grade in extra credit if you attend a live literary event and turn in a review of the event (500-1000 words).

A Note on Respect: It is paramount that we are able to discuss all readings with respect for each other and for the authors. This means respect for the writing, the intent of the writing, and for the personhood of the author as well. Racism, sexism, xenophobia, transphobia, and other forms of prejudice will not be tolerated in the classroom. Instances of disrespectful language or behavior will result in one-on-one conversations with the instructor. If such behavior continues, disciplinary action will be taken. If any of you feel targeted or disrespected at any time, do not hesitate to speak with me about it privately, and I will do my best to rectify the situation.

Electronics Policy: The use of laptops, tablets, and other devices will not be allowed during class time. All readings and submissions will need to be printed out prior to submissions and discussions. This is partly because reading on the page is better for comprehension and partly because the use of devices in class can prove distracting for both the user and others.

Disability Disclosure Statement

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

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New York, NY 10003-6675
Telephone: 212-998-4980
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114
Web site: <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.

Calendar:

W. 9/4: Syllabus, expectations, introductions, writing exercise, workshop sign-up

M. 9/9: Discussion: What is poetry? / Components of Form

--Reading: Handouts: Lerner, excerpt from *The Hatred of Poetry*; Meena Alexander, "What use is poetry?"; *The Making of a Poem*: 136-139; 159-161

--In-class writing exercise

M. 9/23: Poetry Workshop #1

M. 9/23: Discussion: Verse Forms: Villanelle, Sonnet, Blank Verse

--Reading: *The Making of a Poem*: 1-53; (focus specifically on Roethke, Bishop, Thomas, Ashbery); *The Making of a Poem*: 55-71; 101-161 (Focus on Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Cummings, Cole, Salter, Frost); "Delicate and Jumpy," Morgan Parker; Handout: Terrance Hayes, "American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin".

--In-class writing experiment in form

W. 10/2: Poetry Workshop #2

M. 10/7: Discussion: Occasional Poems: Elegy and Ode

--Reading: *The Making of a Poem*: 165-167; 1st Duino Elegy, Rilke; "Vita Nova," Louise Gluck; Danez Smith, "Not an Elegy for Mike Brown"; Percy Shelley, "Ode on a Grecian Urn"; Wallace

Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar,"; "Ode to Watermelon," Neruda; "Heaven Be a Xanax," "ALL THEY WANT IS MY MONEY MY PUSSY MY BLOOD," "Ode to Fried Chicken's Guest Appearance on *Scandal*," Morgan Parker
--In-Class Writing Exercise

W. 10/9: Poetry Workshop #3

M. 10/14: No Class

T. 10/15: (Classes meet on Monday schedule):

Open Form: Antecedents, Modernism, and Beyond

--Reading: Handout—Dickinson, "I Cannot Live with You"; Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself" (section 1); e.e. cummings, "Since Feeling is First"; Langston Hughes, "I, Too"; Sylvia Plath, "Tulips"; Frank O'hara, "Mayakovsky"; Morgan Parker, "Please Wait (Or, There Are More Beautiful Things than Beyonce)"

--In-Class Writing Exercise

W. 10/16: Poetry Workshop #4

M. 10/21: The Image and the List

--Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro"; H.D., "Sea Rose"; William Carlos Williams, "This is Just to Say," Basho, "Old Pond and Frog"; Sappho's fragment 90; Wallace Stevens, "13 Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"; Allen Ginsburg, "Howl" (Section 1); Chris Forhan, "Rock Polisher"; Morgan Paker, "13 ways of looking at a Black Girl," "99 problems"

--In-class writing exercise

W. 10/23: Poetry Workshop #5

M. 10/28: Prose Poems and Flash Fiction: What's the Difference?

--Reading: selections from Anne Carson's *Short Talks*; Morgan Parker, "Now More than Ever," "Afro"; Lydia Davis, "The Outing"; Amy Hempel, "Housewife"; Franz Kafka, "A Little Fable"
--Assignment: You will memorize a poem and come to class prepared to perform it for your classmates

W. 10/30: Fiction Workshop #1

M. 11/4: What is Fiction?

--Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*

W. 11/6: Fiction Workshop #2

M. 11/11: What is "Real"? Minimalism, Maximalism, and Naturalism

--Reading: Raymond Carver, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love"; David Foster Wallace, "Forever Overhead"; George Saunders, "Escape from Spiderhead"

W. 11/13: Fiction Workshop #3

M. 11/18: **Conversing with the Canon**

--Reading: Jorge Luis Borges, "Aleph"; James Thurber, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty"; Rivka Galchen, "The Lost Order," "The Region of Unlikeness" (from *American Innovations*)

W. 11/20: Fiction Workshop #4

M. 11/25: **Fairytales, Magical Realism, and Horror**

--Reading: Charles Perrault, "Bluebeard"; Angela Carter, "The Bloody Chamber"; Helen Oyeyemi, "Fitcher's Bird"; Carmen Maria Machado, "The Husband Stitch"; excerpt from *Danse Macabre*, Stephen King
--in-class writing exercise

W. 11/27: No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

M. 12/2: **Sci-Fi, "Slipstream," and the Surreal**

--Reading: Ursula LeGuin, "Solitude"; Zadie Smith, "Now More than Ever"; Jeff Vandermeer, "Exhibit H.: Torn Pages Discovered in the Vest Pocket of an Unidentified Tourist;" James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel, "Slipstream, The Genre that Isn't"
--in-class writing exercise: world-building and false documents

W. 12/4: Fiction Workshop #5

M. 12/9: **Autofiction and the "Fictional Essay"**

--reading: David Shields, excerpt from *Reality Hunger*; Shiela Heti, excerpt from *How Should a Person Be?*; Anne Carson, "The Glass Essay"

W. 12/11: Last day party and class reading!

Portfolios due, including 3rd (wildcard) submission