Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry

Instructor: Daniel Murage  
Contact: dmm738@nyu.edu  
Class Schedule: MW 12:30 – 1:45  
Office Hours: TBD and by appointment

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Course Overview

The purpose of this course is to inspire the production of new works of fiction and poetry, and to learn how to think about those works critically and constructively in order to revise and improve them. We will cover the basics of the writing process and build a community in which we will share, critique and revise our work. In the role of writer, we will also read, discuss, and respond creatively to a series of texts throughout the semester. For your final project, you will submit a portfolio of revised work along with a critical response detailing your progress throughout the semester.

Course Objectives

In this course, you will:

1. Learn how to analyze the forms and methods of poetry and fiction.
2. Blend literary strategies learned in class in your writing pieces.
3. Collaborate as peer reviewers, learning how to effectively edit your own writing as you gain insight through critiquing others’ drafts.

Course Structure:

Monday’s class: Craft of Writing/Poetry

We will spend our class time discussing assigned reading texts. We will pay close attention to elements of style (plot, character development, language, dialogue) and evaluate how effective the writer is in entertaining/enlightening/moving us. You will be expected to bring a short-written response to class every week. In addition, you will email 2–3 sentences or paragraphs that you liked/disliked from the assigned readings to me, with a short reflection on why you liked/disliked the specific sentences/paragraphs (this 2-3 sentences should be emailed to me at least two days prior to scheduled class).

Wednesday’s class: Workshop

We will spend our class time workshopping each other’s work. Here’s how it will work: if you are signed up to be workshopped, you will email your piece to the class one week in advance of the workshop date. You may submit an expanded and revised version of your written response (unless it’s an analytical piece, in which case it does not qualify for workshop submission). Those not being
workshopped on a specific week will be required to bring hardcopies of their edits and a 1-2-page comments/suggestions response to the cohort’s submissions at the end of the workshop.

NB: Editing will involve everyone reading, marking up beforehand and discussing everyone’s work in class. At the end of a workshop, (1) you will hand over your edits and 1-2-page comments/suggestions to the person being workshopped and (2) hand over a copy of the 1-2-page comments/suggestions to me as well; if you prefer to email me the 1-2-page response, make sure you do this before the beginning of class.

Note: one of the best ways to improve as a writer is to edit others work – this way, you notice what does or does not work in someone else’s story and you can apply this knowledge to your own writing.

**Course Components:**

**Written response:** At the beginning of Monday’s class, you are required to submit a written response to me. The written response can be (1) an analysis of the assigned readings (2) your own piece that employs the techniques used in the assigned readings for that specific week, or (3) a response to a writing assignment given by me in class. If you prefer to email the written response, you MUST do this any time before class begins.

**Portfolios:** At the end of the semester you will submit a portfolio of original fiction and poetry (produced in this class) that you have edited and revised based on feedback from your classmates and from me. You will also include the original drafts of these revised pieces, along with a 1-2-page critical response addressing your revision process.

**Attendance**

You are allowed one unexcused absence over the course of the semester. All other absences must be excused with a doctor’s/advisor’s note or discussed with me at least one week in advance. Common permissible absences might include familial obligation, religious or civic duties. Any absence not discussed with me in advance will result in your grade being lowered to one degree (e.g. A to A- and so on).

**Grading**

- Participation – 20%
- Written response – 10%
- Attendance – 10%
- Workshop submissions – 40%
- Portfolio – 20%

**Course Administration:**

**Classroom etiquette:** Every student is expected to behave respectfully towards fellow students in this class. Bullying or harassment of any kind on other students in unacceptable and may lead to disciplinary action.
**Late submissions:** All submissions must be submitted on time. For each day an assignment is late, you lose a letter grade on that assignment.

**Accommodations:** If you require accommodations of any kind in order to make this class run more smoothly for you because of a physical or learning disability, please bring this to my attention during the first week of class and we will work together to make arrangements.

**Electronics:** Laptops and cellphones are not required in this class. Please bring printed handouts of the material to class unless instructed otherwise.

**Extra credit:** You can receive extra credit by attending a reading at NYU or elsewhere in the city and writing a 1-2-page response about your thoughts about the event, what you learned etc. (make sure to attach a flyer, ticket stub, program of the event etc.) These count as written responses and would thus be submitted at the beginning of class when you’d normally submit the written response. Maximum of 2 per student.

**Office Hours**
You are required to meet with me once a semester. I suggest you set up an appointment with me after you have been workshopped so we can address any concerns over your work.

**Required Texts** *(All texts will be emailed to the class beforehand)*
Anton Chekhov – Vanka, Lady with the Dog
Gabriel García Marquez – A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings, Blacaman the Good, Vendor of Miracles
Petina Gappah – A Short History of Zaka the Zulu, The Mupandawana Dancing Champion
Jorge Luis Borges – The Aleph, The Dead Man,
Roald Dahl – Lamb to the Slaughter, William and Mary
Jamaica Kincaid – Girl
Ernest Hemingway – Hills Like White Elephants, The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber Jhumpa Lahiri – The Third and Final Continent, Sexy
Binyavanga Wainaina – How to Write About Africa
Lorrie Moore – How to Become a Writer

**Essays**
Zadie Smith – That Crafty Feeling
George Saunders – On Rocky Islands
Poetry: Wooden Die, Study of the Object—Zbigniew Herbert
Journal of an ordinary grief (select passages)—Mahmoud Darwish
Night Sky with Exit Wounds—Ocean Vuong
Pablo Neruda – Selected Poems
Odes—Sharon Olds
Charles Simic – Selected Poems
3arabi—Zeina Hassan Beik
Eileen myles
Bob Marley – Exodus album (select songs)