Introduction to Poetry & Fiction, Spring 2019

Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30-10:45 p.m.
Office Hours: TBD
Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House
58 W 10th St (btw 5th and 6th)
Contact: alexandra.zukerman@gmail.com

*You can also get items to me by putting them in my mailbox located at the Lillian Vernon Creative Writer’s House, downstairs in basement.

Description: As a workshop, you will make your own poems and short stories and submit them to the class for discussion, but one of my favorite poets, Jorie Graham, says that “You can’t give out what you haven’t taken in”: In this introductory course, we will read fiction and poetry (and even memorize some short poems!) so that they enter our bloodstream as writers. The inspiration to write often comes from a deep appreciation of the works that came before us and in our time. As we uncover new aspects of craft from week to week, we will discuss the reading both as practitioners and as readers.

The semester will be in two segments, one for Poetry and one for Fiction, but the genres often inform and inspire each other. We will be mindful of that fertile connection. We will watch films throughout the semester, in keeping with cross-fertilization.

Part of writing poetry is losing control and allowing our irrational minds to think on the page. In order to loosen up and generate new material, there will be in-class writing exercises every week. These will be collaborative or independent in nature. The goal is to have fun and to surprise ourselves.

For the Fiction segment, we will focus on short fiction and novellas. Every week, you will choose several sentences or a paragraph from the reading and briefly share with the class what you liked about it or found inspiring. Based on these lines, you will write the first sentence of a short story (yet to be written) in which you stand “knee deep” in whatever questions your chosen lines raised for you. As fiction takes longer to workshop, you will submit fewer short stories overall, but you will have more time to work on them in between submissions.

The required books are: Mary Oliver, A Poetry Handbook; James Baldwin, Giovanni’s Room; Franz Kafka, The Metamorphoses; and Don Delillo, The Body Artist

Required books and all films will be on reserve through NYU Classes.
Poetry

Class 1, Jan 30th (Wednesday)
Introduction, syllabus review, exercises;

Class 2, Feb 4th (Monday)
Poetry as Making; exercises
ESSAYS (provided): “Poetry” (entry from Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics)
*Group 1: Email your poem to the class

Class 3, Feb 6th (Wednesday) Poetry Workshop (Group 1)
*Group 2: Bring 11 copies of your poem to class

Class 4, Feb 11th (Monday) Craft
Sound and Rhythm; exercises; in-class listening
ESSAYS: Mary Oliver, A Poetry Handbook (pp. 19-58)

Class 5, Feb 13th (Wednesday) Poetry Workshop (Group 2)
*Group 1: Bring 11 copies of your poem to class

NO CLASS- Feb 18th

Class 6, Feb 20th (Wednesday) Craft
Closed Form; exercises; in-class listening

Class 7, Feb 25th (Monday) Poetry Workshop (Group 1)
*Group 2: Bring 11 copies of your poem to class

Class 8, Feb 27th (Wednesday) Craft
Open Form; exercises
POEMS (provided): William Carlos Williams, “Spring and All”; Ocean Vuong,
ESSAYS (provided and optional): Lyn Hejinian, “The Rejection of Closure”
FILM (optional): Bela Tarr, “The Turin Horse”

Class 9, March 4th (Monday) Poetry Workshop (Group 2)
*Group 1: Bring 11 copies of your poem to class

Class 10, March 6th (Wednesday) Craft
Autobiographical ‘I’; exercises
POEMS (provided): Claudia Rankine, Plot (excerpt); Walt Whitman, Song of Myself, “(selected sections); William Wordsworth, “Stepping Westward”; Emily Dickinson, “Tell all the truth but tell it slant”; Yusef Komunyakaa, “Facing It”
FILM (optional): Werner Herzog, “Grizzly Man”

Class 11, March 11th (Monday) Poetry Workshop (Group 1)
*Group 2: Bring 11 copies of your poem to class

Class 12, March 13th (Wednesday) Craft
Self, Voice, Persona; exercises
POETRY: Zbigniew Herbert (selected); Louise Gluck (selected); Lucie Brock-Broido (selected); Elizabeth Bishop, "To the Fishhouses"
FILM (required): Andrei Tarkovsky, "Nastalghia"

NO CLASS- March 18th

NO CLASS- March 20th

Class 13, March 25th (Monday) Poetry Workshop (Group 2)

Class 14, March 27th (Wednesday) Craft
The Long Poem
POEM: Anne Carson, “The Glass Essay”

Class 15, April 1st (Monday)
Poetry Reading and Discussion
**REVISIONS of 3 poems due
Fiction

Class 16, April 3rd (Wednesday) Craft
READING: Amy Hempel, *Collected Short Stories* (selected); James Joyce, *Dubliners* (selected);
start reading Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*
EXERCISE: Choose inspirational lines; write a 1st sentence
FILM (required): Documentary, “Between the Folds”

Class 17, April 8th (Monday) Craft
READING: Start reading Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*
EXERCISE: Choose inspirational lines; write a 1st sentence
*Group 1: Please email your short story to the class*

Class 18, April 10th (Wednesday) Craft
READING: Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*
EXERCISE: Choose inspirational lines; write a 1st sentence
FILM (optional): David Lynch, “The Elephant Man”

Class 19, April 15th (Monday) Craft and Fiction Workshop (Group 1)
READING: Flannery O’Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (selected)
start reading James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*
EXERCISE: Choose inspirational lines; write a 1st sentence
*Group 2: Please email your short story to the class*

Class 20, April 17th (Wednesday) Fiction Workshop (Group 1)
FILM (optional): Harmony Korine, “Gummo”

Class 21, April 22nd (Monday) Fiction Workshop (Group 2)
*Group 1: Please email your short story to the class*

Class 22, April 24th (Wednesday) Craft and Fiction Workshop (Group 2)
READING (provided): James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*
EXERCISE: Choose inspirational lines; write a 1st sentence
FILM (required): Jim Sheridan, “The Field”

Class 23, April 29th (Monday) Fiction Workshop (Group 1)
*Group 2: Please email your short story to the class*

Class 24, May 1st (Wednesday) Craft and Fiction Workshop (Group 1)
READING (provided): Mark Richard, *The Ice at the Bottom of the World* (selected); start reading Don Delillo, *The Body Artist*
EXERCISE: Choose inspirational lines; write a 1st sentence
FILM (optional): Jules Dassin, “Never on Sunday”
Class 25, May 6th (Monday) Fiction Workshop (Group 2)

Class 26, May 8th (Wednesday) Craft and Fiction Workshop (Group 2)
READING: Don Delillo, *The Body Artist*
EXERCISE: Choose inspirational lines; write a 1st sentence
FILM (optional): Zacharias Kunuk, “Fast Runner”

Class 27, May 13th (Monday) Reading and Celebrate!
FILM (optional): Arthur Hiller, “The Hospital”
**REVISION of 2 short stories due**

Further Information and Policies:

Workshop: Due dates for poetry submissions are provided above (by Group). For fiction, short stories will be due one week prior to the date of your workshop. I will provide you with a schedule of dates on which you will workshop your stories. Please read and annotate your classmates’ work carefully and thoughtfully. Remember that as readers, our objective is not to judge whether a work is good or bad, but whether the author is achieving what he or she is trying to achieve. I will ask each of you to point out what is working in a piece and be prepared to comment on your classmates’ concerns about their work.

Readings: I will keep you posted on readings at the Lillian Vernon Creative Writer’s House and in the city. I encourage you to attend!

Community: This is not just a class but a community. It is a safe and nurturing space in which we support each other in our development as writers. Hopefully you will share work with one another long after this class has ended!

Grading: 20% participation; 80% preparation and submissions

Late work: Unlike other courses, late work simply cannot be considered due to the nature of workshopping. If you cannot submit a piece on time for workshop, the lack of preparation will affect your overall grade.

Attendance: Like late work, attendance is key to participation and preparation. If you miss class, it will affect your overall grade. You are permitted one absence without penalty but only if you write to me ahead of class with a solid reason.

Confidentiality: We sometimes put ourselves into our creative work and therefore submitted work or work read out loud in this course may never be shared outside of class, unless with the explicit consent of the author. While we must uphold the privacy of the authors, we cannot assume that their work is autobiographical, either.
Plagiarism: is obviously not tolerated.

No electronic devices will be used during class. Please silence your phones and put your computers away prior to the start of class.

Open-mindedness is required.