

Creative Writing: Intro to Poetry and Fiction

Instructor: Lucas Jorgensen

M/W: 2:00-3:15

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Office hours: by appointment

“There are no rules. That is how art is born, how breakthroughs happen. Go against the rules or ignore the rules. That is what invention is about.”

—Helen Frankenthaler

Course Goals and Outline:

By the end of this course, students should demonstrate an understanding of creative writing craft and be able to apply this knowledge within their own writing. Students should also leave this course with an understanding of workshop procedure and the ability to offer thorough and thoughtful critique.

We will meet these goals by first completing a survey of the basic elements of fiction and poetry craft. This will give students the tools necessary to work on their own writing, through the lens of craft, which will later be workshopped in class. This survey will be done in the style of a discussion where we read and respond to selected works in respect to our week's topic.

Next, we will move into workshop. Each workshop day will be started with a ten-minute craft discussion that is meant to cover a smaller and more specific topic. If the first part of the class is a macroscopic view, these craft lessons will be microscopic. This will also act as a warm-up for the workshopping of students' work that will follow.

Course Work and Grading:

Responses: (30%)

Readings (15%): Each class we will have readings to fuel our discussion. As a place to begin, please bring in a half-page response to the reading. These responses should include craft that stood out to you, the things you liked or disliked, and the things you can keep in mind for their own writing (and explain why).

Critique (15%): At the end of each workshop day, students' comments on a workshop piece will be turned into me. For a poem or micro fiction piece, at least three substantial comments must be made. More feedback than this is always okay and encouraged. For a short fiction piece, at least five should be made.

Participation: (40%)

Attendance (25%): Attendance to this class is mandatory; it is very difficult to replace work done inside class with work done outside of it. Students will be given two no-questions-asked absences. Any absences beyond this will result in a 5% grade deduction. Absences such as documented illness, bereavement, religious holidays, school-sponsored activities, etc. will not be included in this count so long as they are properly documented and I am notified. Three late

arrivals will count towards one of the free absences. Students who arrive within five minutes of the class's start time are not considered to be late so long as they do not make a habit of it.

Involvement in class (15%): As this course is highly discussion-based, it is important for students to share their thoughts and be involved in class. This will be important both in our craft discussions and in the workshops where we will be critiquing student work.

Writing: (30%)

Final portfolio (14%): This portfolio will contain a sample of writing that was worked on for this class which the student feels is a best representation of their work. This portfolio will also include an artist's statement regarding their revision process and the elements of craft they feel like they have embodied in their work. This will include three poems and two fiction pieces.

Workshop (10%): Each week after our craft survey, students' work will be workshopped. Students will workshop three poems and two short fiction pieces (one will be a piece of micro-fiction or a short-short). Copies will be due the Monday before the piece is workshopped.

Off-week writings (6%): Three times throughout the semester when they do not have workshop pieces due, students will turn writing in directly to me for feedback. One of these writings, of the student's choice, will be brought in and discussed with me in conferences. One of these writings must be a fiction piece and one a poetry piece, with the third being the students' choice. Students who plan to write two fiction pieces should do one short-story length piece and one micro-fiction length piece. Students who choose to do two poems should attempt one of the forms discussed in class for one of their pieces.

Quality of writing and 'talent' will not be considered factors for the grading of the assignments in this section. Workshops and off-week writings will be graded on completion. The final portfolio must show signs of revision and polish, as well as a thoughtful artist's statement and attempts to incorporate craft.

Required Reading Materials:

Night Sky with Exit Wounds — Ocean Vuong

The Carrying — Ada Limón

The ECCO Anthology of Contemporary American Short Fiction

This course will also include a number of readings which are either available for free online or that will be made available to you on the class site in the form of a pdf. These selections will help to give a more diverse viewpoint (than what an anthology and two collections can provide) and will include non-creative writing such as craft essays to foster a more holistic approach.

Electronics:

During craft discussions, electronics will be allowed out so that students may access online documents. However, if a student is caught engaging with non-class material, they may be asked to print out these documents for class instead.

There will be no devices in use during workshop.

Academic Honesty:

Work that is submitted for this class must be the students' own work. Do not share work and do not plagiarize. Any violations of this will be reported.

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 register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, or at 726 Broadway (2nd floor) or at 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.

Course Calendar:

Monday 1/27: Syllabus day and introductions. Introductory discussion on contemporary creative writing.

Wednesday 1/29: Fiction Craft Discussion: Structures and Organizations

Readings: "Fat" by Raymond Carver, "Epcot World Showcase" by Kristen Arnett, "Incarnations of Burned Children" by David Foster Wallace (p. 705), "Legends of the Seoul Dogs" by R.O. Kwon

Monday 2/3: Poetry Craft Discussion: Narrative, Lyric, and the Experimental

Readings: "Tar" by C.K. Williams, "[But isn't midnight intermittent]" by Lyn Hejinian, "Peanut Butter" by Eileen Myles, "Angel Nafis" by Angel Nafis, "Everything But" by Beth Ann Fennelly (essay)

Wednesday 2/5: Fiction Craft Discussion: Time, Place, and Verisimilitude

Readings: "The Flower" by Louise Erdrich, "Playing Metal Gear Solid V: Phantom Pain" by Jamil Jan Kochai, "Jamil Jan Kochai on the Intimate Alienation of Video Games" (interview)

Monday 2/10: Poetry Craft Discussion: Form

Readings: "Duplex" (series) by Jericho Brown, "The Golden Shovel" by Terrance Hayes, "The Colonel" by Carolyn Forché, "Transgender Heroic: All this Ridiculous Flesh" by Kayleb Rae Candrilli, "Invention" (essay) by Jericho Brown

Wednesday 2/12: Fiction Craft Discussion: Characters and Point of View

Readings: “Baboons” by Sheila Kohler (p. 471), “When We Were Happy We Had Other Names” by Yiyun Li, “How to Write Compelling Characters” (essay) by David Corbett
1st Non-workshop Writing Piece Due in Class.

Monday 2/17: No Class, Presidents’ Day

Wednesday 2/19: Poetry Craft Discussion: Structure, Lines, and Stanzas

Readings: “Projective Verse” (essay) by Charles Olson, “I Know a Man” by Robert Creeley, “Persimmons” by Li-Young Lee, selections from *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine, “Straw House, Straw Dog” by Richard Siken

Monday 2/24: Fiction Craft Discussion: Symbolism and the Figurative

Readings: “The Stone” by Louise Erdrich, “The Second Bakery Attack” by Haruki Murakami, “Horror Story” by Carmen Maria Machado

Wednesday 2/26: Poetry Craft Discussion: Imagery and Music

Readings: “how many of us have them” by Danez Smith, “The Blue Dress” by Saeed Jones, “Rabbits on Fire” by Alberto Ríos, “Sex Without Love” and “Saturn” by Sharon Olds

Monday 3/2: Generative Workshop Poetry

No assignment due in class today.

Wednesday 3/4: Generative Workshop Fiction

2nd Non-workshop Writing Due.

Monday 3/9: Workshop Fiction 1 & Fiction Craft Discussion: Dialogue

Readings: selection from *Beloved* by Toni Morrison

Wednesday 3/11: Workshop Fiction 1

Readings: “Landfill” by Joyce Carol Oates (p. 607)

Monday 3/16: No Class, Spring Break

Wednesday 3/18: No Class, Spring Break

Monday 3/23: Workshop Fiction 1

Readings: “The Wife of the Lion” by Hernán Díaz

Wednesday 3/25: Workshop Fiction 1

Readings: “Off” by Aimee Bender (p. 107)

Monday 3/30: Workshop Poetry 1 & Poetry Craft Discussion: The Speaker

Readings: selection from *Deaf Republic* by Ilya Kaminsky, “Litany in Which Certain Things Are Crossed Out” by Richard Siken, “The Doubling of Self” interview with Richard Siken

3rd Off-week Writing Due (those who are being workshopped on this day may instead turn theirs in Wednesday, 4/1)

Wednesday 4/1: Workshop Poetry 1

Readings: *Night Sky With Exit Wounds* pgs 3-30

Monday 4/6: Workshop Poetry 1

Readings: *Night Sky With Exit Wounds* pgs 31-58

Wednesday 4/8: Workshop Fiction 2

Readings: “Emergency” by Denis Johnson (p. 383)

Monday 4/13: Workshop Fiction 2 & Craft Discussion: Developing Voice

Readings: Rather than doing any readings, please come to class having a half page of notes written down describing the writing you have done so far in this class. Focus on the positives and the things that distinguish your work from others’. Ask yourself: how can I tell that this poem or story is mine? Repeat this process except looking outwards, at the piece we’ve read for our craft discussions which has spoken to you most this semester. These responses will be the basis for our craft discussion in class today.

Wednesday 4/15: Workshop Fiction 2

Readings: “Night Women” by Edwidge Danticat (p. 203)

Monday 4/20: Workshop Fiction 2

Reading: “Once in a Lifetime” by Jhumpa Lahiri (p. 483)

Wednesday 4/22: Workshop Poetry 2

Readings: *Night Sky With Exit Wounds* pgs 59-83

Monday 4/27: Workshop Poetry 2

Readings: *The Carrying* pgs. 3-25

Wednesday 4/29: Workshop Poetry 2/3 (when we finish the end of the second set of the class’s poems we will move directly into the third set)

Readings: *The Carrying* pgs. 26-47

Monday 5/4: Workshop Poetry 3

Readings: *The Carrying* pgs. 48-69

Wednesday 5/6: Workshop Poetry 3

Readings: *The Carrying* pgs. 70-91

Monday 5/11: Final portfolios due. Discussion on publishing. Class readings.