

Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry

CRWRI-UA 815 014

M/W 11:00AM-12:15PM

Instructor: Matthew T. Williams

Email: mtw358@nyu.edu

Location: Bobst LL140

Office Hours: TBD

“Most of what you put on the page in that first draft is garbage, but there’ll be a little nugget to pardon it.” ~ D.A. Powell

*“Everything has a lot to do with poetry
everything has a lot to do with prose.”
~ Gertrude Stein*

*“Don’t be afraid of surprising oneself.”
~Yusef Komunyakaa*

Course Description

With focus on fiction and poetry, this course is designed to guide students in building a fundamental set of tools for transmuting interior and exterior experience into art through the act of writing. In the service of this goal, students will read and discuss a number of literary and theoretical texts to assist them in thinking critically about their own developing writing practice. Students will also be asked to produce their own creative work and to familiarize themselves with the workshop model as a generative, critical, and safe environment for them to experiment, take risks, and above all, improve the quality of their writing.

Required Texts

All required reading material will be provided.

Class Structure

To ensure that each student gets the full benefit of our readings as well as generous critical feedback from their fellow writers, there are some logistical intricacies to be aware of:

The **class will be split into 2-3 workshop groups**, depending on the number of students enrolled.

- Each week one group will be workshopped.
- Each workshop group will be workshopped by all their classmates not just those in their group.
- Students being workshopped must turn in a piece of Creative Work that week.
- Students not being workshopped are not required to turn in a piece of Creative Work, but may do so if they want additional feedback.

Tuesdays, students being workshopped will turn in their Creative Work (poems/stories), and all students will turn in Reading Responses via NYU Classes by the time class begins. In class we'll discuss the week's assigned readings which typically include a craft essay along with a short story or a set of poems.

Thursdays will be workshop days. Students will bring in a set of Annotations for the Creative Work being workshopped that day and give each writer being workshopped a thoughtful, respectful, and critical in-class response regarding their work.

Coursework

Reading Responses help students collect and organize their thoughts about the week's assigned reading. Responses should be approximately 250-500 words. These limits are flexible as long the student's response demonstrates that they have engaged deeply with the material. This might be as simple as a personal reflection on how the readings have affected your own reading or writing practice, or as complex as applying concepts from the craft essays to the poems or short stories we are reading. Regardless, *only thoughtful, considered responses will receive full credit.*

Annotations assist students in thinking their way through any given poem or narrative and act as guides for authors of those pieces to revise them. These have no strict requirements as to the amount of annotation that need be done, but they should be of quality and demonstrate deep engagement with the piece. Additionally, students must annotate every student's work being workshopped that week.

Craft Discussion gives students an opportunity to, in collaboration, clarify and analyze assigned readings. The student's role in class discussion is to discuss. Guidance and facilitation will be provided, but there will be no lectures. So, it is incredibly important that every student comes prepared to speak on the readings. This doesn't mean students must speak on every single topic that arises at length, but students should aim to add something to discussion at least once during each class. Students who are less-comfortable engaging in discussion are encouraged to bring written statements as a means of generating or adding to discussion. *Only students who engage regularly in discussion will receive full credit.*

Workshop is the crux of this course. Submissions to workshop should consist of one poem (*up to three pages*) or one short story (*5000 words max.*), depending upon which genre the class is focusing on. If your submission falls outside these limits, you're welcome to make a compelling argument via email as to why your piece necessitates breaking the guidelines. Also, please note that, unless there is explicit information in the piece that demonstrates otherwise, the people and events of any given piece will be treated as fictional. (More on this in Student Wellness section under Class Policies)

Moreover, as with Craft Discussions, it is vital that every student comes prepared with their annotations and ready to speak on each piece being workshopped (excluding their own of course). In workshop itself, students should strive to give both praise and suggestions for improvement. When it comes to suggesting

improvements (and evening praising), it cannot be stressed enough that we all must be as respectful and considerate as possible. (In our course, we'll discuss some ways of ensuring our criticism isn't cutting.)

A **Final Portfolio** provides students the chance to revisit and revise their work, to take what they've learned through the semester and apply it. Final Portfolios should consist of at least three creative pieces they've written during the semester. Students may submit either one poem and two short stories or vice versa. Please note that these pieces should show development from their previous iterations. It may be best to submit work that has gone through the most revision, rather than the most polished pieces. *Only Final Portfolios demonstrating a concerted effort at revision will receive full credit.*

Grading

Reading Responses/Creative Work	30%
Craft Discussion/Workshop Participation	30%
Final Portfolio	30%

Office Hours

Students are expected to attend office hours *at least once* during the semester. However, students are encouraged to come early and often.

Class Policies

Attendance & Punctuality are especially important to our course, because the class is designed around discussion, and it is impossible to recreate the educational benefits of challenging and being challenged on the concepts (and interpretations of those concepts) that we will come across in our readings and apply to our criticism. That being said, students will be allowed *one excused absence; all other absences will be considered unexcused*, unless the student provides a legitimate reason via email for their absence the week prior to the date they will be absent, the student is experiencing an emergency, or is ill and can provide a doctor's note upon returning to class. An unexcused absence will result in the student's grade being reduced by one third (i.e., A to an A-, B- to a C+). Note: Students who are late to class more than twice will be counted as having an absence.

Plagiarism is antithetical to creative writing. Do not do it. All work must be the student's own.

Late Work cannot be accepted, especially creative work. It wouldn't be fair to other students who must read and respond in a limited amount of time. *If there is an assignment you're struggling to complete, please contact me before it's due; I cannot accommodate students who simply allow a deadline to pass by.*

Student Wellness is far more important than writing. As said above, unless there is 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 my attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting a piece, 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.

Counseling Services:
726 Broadway
New York, NY 10003
(212) 998-4780

Wellness Center:
24-Hour Hotline: (212) 443-9999
Email: wellness.exchange@nyu.edu

Extra Credit will be available to students throughout the semester: Living in NYC is an opportunity to participate in, arguably, the single most vibrant literary community in the anglophone world. Students who go to readings (TBA) and write a reflection on the experience will earn *an extra point on their Final Portfolio for each reflection (limited to five)*.

Technology may be used to access readings in class for class discussion. Notes, however, must be taken by hand.

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
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>

Class Schedule

Week 1: Class Overview

1/27 Monday

Meet & Greet, Class/Syllabus Overview

1/29 Wednesday

“How to Become a Writer” by Lorrie Moore

Workshop Etiquette Handout

“Having a Coke with You” by Frank O’Hara

Annotation/Workshop Practice (in class)

Week 2: Image

2/3 Monday

“Imagery” from *Introduction to Poetry* by X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia

“In a Station of the Metro” by Ezra Pound

“The piercing chill I feel” by Taniguchi Buson

“A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” by Ezra Pound

“The Hug” by Thom Gunn

“Facing It” by Yusef Komunyakaa

“The Garden by the Moonlight” by Amy Lowell

2/5 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 3: Sound

2/10 Monday

“Poetry and the Art of Sound” by Marilyn L. Taylor

“Mowing” by Robert Frost

“Blue Light Lounge Sutra for the Performance Poets at Harold Park Hotel”
by Yusef Komunyakaa

“Tale of a Tub” by Sylvia Plath

“Down in the River” by Joshua McKinney

“American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin” by Terrance Hayes

2/12 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 4: Rhythm & Meter

2/17 Monday

“The Pursuit of Form” by Robert Pinsky

“Rhythm and Meter” from *Poetic Designs* by Stephen Adams

“The Figured Wheel” by Robert Pinsky

“Sam Smiley” by Sterling Brown

“The Moose” by Elizabeth Bishop

“What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why” by Edna St. Vincent Millay

2/19 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 5: Speaker

2/24 Monday

“Listening to a Voice” from *Introduction to Poetry* by X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia

“My Papa’s Waltz” Theodore Roethke

“White Lies” by Natasha Trethewey

“Rites of Passage” Sharon Olds

“Oh No” by Robert Creeley

“The Author to Her Book” Anne Bradstreet

“Odyssey of Big Boy” by Sterling A. Brown

“ode to buttoning and unbuttoning my shirt” by Ross Gay

“Venus’s-flytraps” by Yusef Komunyakaa

“Declaration” by Tracy K. Smith

2/26 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 6: Semantics

3/2 Monday

“Flowing Uphill” by Andrew Joron

“Cracks in the Oracle Bone” by Brenda Hillman

“Changes; or, Reveries at a Window Overlooking a Country Road, with Two Women Talking Blues in the Kitchen” by Yusef Komunyakaa

“Gathering” by Natasha Trethewey

“California Poppy” by D.A. Powell

“Dazzled” by Arthur Sze

“Wakǎalyapi” Layli Long Soldier

3/4 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 7: Special Topic

3/9 Monday

“Theory and Play of the Duende” by Federico Garcia Lorca

“summer somewhere” by Danez Smith

“Ganymede” by Jericho Brown

“Prayer” by Marie Howe

“Power” Audre Lorde

“I Don’t Have A Pill For That” by Deborah Landau

“A New National Anthem” by Ada Limón

3/11 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 8: Spring Break

3/16 Monday

NO CLASS

3/18 Wednesday

NO CLASS

Week 9: Story, Plot, Structure

3/23 Monday

“War Games” from *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative* by Janet Burroway

“Use of Force” by William Carlos Williams

“Mockingbird” by Laurie Berry

“The Mayor of the Sister City Speaks to the Chamber of Commerce in Klamath Falls, Oregon” by Michael Martone

“Molibi” by Leigh Hancock

3/25 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 10: Characters I

3/30 Monday

“Book People” from *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative* by Janet Burroway

“Orbiting” by Bharati Mukherjee

“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid

4/1 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 11: Characters II

4/6 Monday

“Flesh Made Word” from *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative* by Janet Burroway

“My Man Bovanne” by Toni Cade Bambara

“Everything That Rises Must Converge” by Flannery O’Connor

4/8 Thursday

Workshop

Week 12: Point of View

4/13 Monday

“Call Me Ishmael” from *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative* by Janet Burroway

“The Masked Marvel's Last Toehold” by Richard Selzer

“The Wrysons” by John Cheever

4/15 Wednesday

Workshop

Week 13: Symbol & Motif

4/20 Tuesday

“Garlic in Fiction” by Shirley Jackson

“The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson

4/22 Thursday

Week 14: Theme

4/27 Tuesday

“I Gotta Use Words When I Talk To You” from *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative* by Janet Burroway

“A Man Told Me the Story of His Life” by Grace Paley

“Cathedral” by Raymond Carver

“Ralph the Duck” by Frederick Bush

4/29 Thursday

Workshop

Week 15: Revision & Class Reading

5/4 Tuesday

Revision Strategies & Snacks

5/6 Thursday

Party & Class Reading