

Introduction to Creative Writing, CRWRI-UA.815.011

Instructor: Aleksandra (Sasha) Burshteyn

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Class Hours: M/W 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM

Office Hours: by appointment!

MEMORY / HYBRIDITY / FRAGMENTS / ETCETERA

“Poetry is a political action undertaken for the sake of information, the faith, the exorcism and the lyrical invention that telling the truth makes possible. Poetry means taking control of the language of your life.”

– June Jordan

“Study is what you do with other people.”

– Fred Moten

“We have art in order that we not perish of the truth.”

– Emily Dickinson

In this class we will read, write, and learn together. As the title of the course suggests, we will circle around and dive into the topics of memory, hybridity, fragments, and all the things floating around in between. If any of that is what you want to read and write towards, you are in the right place!

We’ll be reading a range of texts from writers of varied nationalities, times, and disciplines. Depending on our conversations and what’s happening in the world, I will bring in additional bits of writing for you to read, to add to the depth of your explorations.

This is a class is a space for deep reading, engaged discussion, and generative writing.

Note: It is highly possible that this class will be happening **remotely, over Zoom**, in which case many of the requirements listed below will be shifted and the no-tech

policy will look different, with accommodations for everyone's varied circumstances and abilities.

On Mondays, I will give you a **writing prompt**. Often, it will have some relationship to the text(s) you will have just read. This part of the class is about freeing your mind, getting words on the page, and detaching yourself from ideas of "good" or "bad" and just seeing where your ideas are taking you! These short writing exercises can feed into the pieces you bring into workshop, or not – that is up to you. **Your creative responses will be due the following Monday**, printed and handed in during class.

On **workshop** days, if you are not being workshopped, you are expected to come in with **2 copies** of your typed up responses to your peers' work – one for me and one for your peer. Each response must be at least two pages, double-spaced, 12 pt font. If you are being workshopped, you will have sent us your piece days in advance by the 9 PM deadline. We will discuss expectations for workshop – formatting, style, respect for your peers and their work – in person.

You will be split up into **three groups of five** and workshopped with your group **three times** during the semester. Since one of the themes of this class is hybridity, we will discuss the question of "genre" for your workshop pieces as a class.

Critical responses to readings are *due at 9 PM the day before class over email*. Do not forget. Set an alarm on your phone, do whatever you need to do, but follow the timing. These can be academic, personal, literary, etc. – mainly, they must present a serious engagement with the reading, and be *at least one double-spaced page* (12pt font) in length.

Final projects will consist of a creative portfolio of revisions to the writing you'll do over the course of the semester. What shape those pieces of writing will take, we will discuss throughout the semester, to come to a collaborative understanding.

Grade Breakdown:

Attendance counts for **10%** of your grade. We will meet for one hour and fifteen minutes two times a week – our time together is precious. Class will begin promptly at 12:30. One late arrival will be forgiven. The second, and all further lateness, will result in a **half-letter deduction** from your grade. One missed class, whatever your reason, will also be forgiven. The second, and all further missed classes, will result in a **half-letter deduction from your grade**.

Participation counts **25%** of your grade. I understand that sometimes speaking up in class is intimidating or stressful, which is why the critical responses exist – think of them as a little sheet of pre-prepared thoughts or remarks. Sometimes I may call on you to share some of the thoughts in your responses, to start our discussions. Therefore, participation contains both the **critical responses** and **speaking in class**. You are allowed **2 (only 2!) missed critical responses**, to use as you wish during the semester. Each missed response after that will result in a **half-letter deduction** to your grade (A to A-, A- to B, etc.).

Workshops count for another **25%** of your grade. This means turning your piece in on time when you are assigned to be workshopped, showing up ready with feedback when you are not being workshopped, and being a thoughtful participant in the workshop setting. We will discuss what this looks like – structures for feedback, how to approach reading other people’s work, what is helpful and what is not – in class.

Creative responses count for **15%** of your grade. These exist to flex your writing muscles and get you thinking in new, different, ways – to open up your mind and get you to surprise yourself. They do not have to be longer than a page, can take whatever form the prompt inspires in you, and do not have to be perfect, and especially do not have to be “good”. They are to be your first attempts, your very first drafts – sincere efforts on the page at letting your mind work. You are allowed **2 (only 2!) missed creative responses**, to use as you wish during the semester. Each missed response after that will result in a **half-letter deduction** to your grade (A to A-, A- to B, etc.).

The final project will count for **25%** of your grade. This will be a portfolio of revised work from the semester, and new work written for the portfolio if you wish. The emphasis will be on looking on what you've been thinking about and writing towards during the semester, and revising/refining that work.

There is a **zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism** in this class. Being inspired by a creative work is one thing, and is in fact one of the aims of this class! We will discuss, in the first few weeks, what this can look like. But **plagiarism will result in a failing grade** in this class, and will be reported to the university.

This classroom will also be a **tech no-go zone**. Cell phones, laptops, and tablets are not welcome in the classroom, as they frequently provide distraction to their user, the people around them, and the instructor as well. If there is an accessibility concern or need, however, please speak to me and we will be sure to work something out.

Accessibility / 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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Readings (full text):*

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Wide Sargasso Sea by Jean Rhys

The Hour of the Star by Clarice Lispector

Readings (excerpts):*

SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Selected poems of Paul Celan

Selected poems of Yehuda Amichai
Selected poems of Mahmoud Darwish
The Undercommons by Fred Moten
Selected poems of Valzhyna Mort
Selected poems of Aracelis Girmay
A Handbook of Disappointed Fate by Anne Boyer
Garments Against Women by Anne Boyer
Her Body and Other Parties by Carmen Maria Machado
Whereas by Layli Long Soldier
LOOK by Solmaz Sharif
Calamities by Renee Gladman
Odessa Stories by Isaac Babel
Selected poems of Natalie Diaz
Selected poems of Anne Carson
Selected poems of Kimiko Hahn
My Brilliant Friend by Elena Ferrante
Selected poems of Carolyn Forché
The Patio and The Index by Tan Lin (online essay)
The Memory of Fire Trilogy by Eduardo Galleano
Flights by Olga Tokarczuk
Primeval and Other Times by Olga Tokarczuk
Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments by Saidiya Hartman

*You can reserve these books at the NYPL, BPL, and NYU's library. Readings that are in excerpt format will be provided online for the class, to be printed and brought with you to our class meetings. These are some incredible writings, and so I highly recommend (but *do not* mandate) buying them, if that's an affordable/desirable option for you.

SCHEDULE

Week One:

WEDS, SEPT 2

Introductions, syllabus, writing exercise, expectations. We will sort into three workshop groups. I will hand out readings & prompts for next week.

Reading for next week: excerpts of Gladman, Moten, Boyer

Week Two:

WEDS, SEPT 9

You've had a whole week since we first met! Quick new introductions, we talk about the reading. I give you another writing prompt.

Reading for next week: Lispector's *Hour of the Star*

Week Three:

MON, SEPT 14

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

Reading for Wednesday: selected poems of Celan, Amichai, Darwish

WEDS, SEPT 16

Discussion, writing, etc.

Reading for Monday: excerpts of Boyer, Hartman

Week Four:

MON, SEPT 21

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

WEDS, SEPT 23

WORKSHOP #1

Reading for Monday: excerpts of Babel, Ferrante

Week Five:

MON, SEPT 28

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

WEDS, SEPT 30

WORKSHOP #2

Reading for Monday: selected poems of Mort, Girmay

Week Six:

MON, OCT 5

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

WEDS, OCT 7

WORKSHOP #3 + discussion.

Reading for Monday: Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Week Seven:

MON, OCT 12

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

WEDS, OCT 14

WORKSHOP #4

Reading for Monday: selected poems of Long Soldier, Sharif

Week Eight:

MON, OCT 19

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

WEDS, OCT 21

WORKSHOP #5 + discussion.

Reading for Monday: Tan Lin's essay on Triple Canopy, [*The Patio and the Index*](#)

Week Nine:

MON, OCT 26

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

WEDS, OCT 28

WORKSHOP #6 + discussion.

Reading for Monday: selected poems of Diaz, Carson

Week Ten:

MON, NOV 2

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

WEDS, NOV 4

WORKSHOP #7

Reading for Monday: selected short stories of Maria Machado

Week Eleven:

NOV 9

Drafts/ideas for your final project are due!

NOV 11

WORKSHOP #8

Reading for Monday: selected poems of Forché, Girmay, Hahn

Week Twelve:

NOV 16

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

NOV 18

WORKSHOP #9

Reading for Monday: excerpts of Galleano, Tokarczuk

Week Thirteen:

NOV 23

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

NOV 25

WORKSHOP #10

Reading for Monday: surprise poets based on your class interests!

Week Fourteen:

NOV 30

Discussion, writing prompts, etc.

DEC 2

WORKSHOP #11

Week Fifteen: Our Last Week !

DEC 7

WORKSHOP #12

DEC 9

We celebrate, you hand in your final projects, *etcetera!*