Creative Writing: Intro to Poetry and Fiction
Instructor: Lucas Jorgensen
M/W: 11:00-12:15
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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 dividing our class time into two sections. Over the course of the semester we will complete 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 for the first part of each class.

The latter half of each class we will devote to workshop, in which students will read and offer critique of work submitted by their fellow students.

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: (35%)
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 (10%): 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: (35%)**

**Final portfolio (19%):** 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). Enough hard copies for the class will be due in class ONE WEEK BEFORE the workshop date.

**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:**

*Love Song to the Demon-Possessed Pigs of Gadara* — William Fargason  
*Bright Dead Things* — Ada Limón  
*Jesus’s Son* — Denis Johnson  
*Grand Union* — Zadie Smith

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.

**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:**

**Wednesday 9/2:** Syllabus day and introductions. Introductory discussion on contemporary creative writing.

**Monday 9/7:** No Class, Labor Day

**Wednesday 9/9:** Fiction
Readings: “Car Crash While Hitchhiking,” “Two Men,” and “Out on Bail” (Jesus’ Son)

**Monday 9/14:** Poetry

**Wednesday 9/16:** Fiction
Readings: “Dundun,” “Work,” and “Emergency” (Jesus’ Son)

**Monday 9/21:** Poetry
Readings: *Love Song* Section I

**Wednesday 9/23:** Fiction / Generative Workshop
Readings: “Dirty Wedding” (Jesus’ Son)
Monday 9/28: Poetry / Generative Workshop
Readings: *Love Song* Section II, “Everything But” by Beth Ann Fennelly (essay)

Wednesday 9/30: Fiction
Readings: “The Other Man” and “Happy Hour” (Jesus’ Son)

Monday 10/5: Poetry ***START OF WORKSHOPS***
Reading: *Love Song* Section III

Wednesday 10/7: Fiction
Readings: “Steady Hands at Seattle General” and “Beverly Home” (Jesus’ Son)

Monday 10/12: Poetry
Reading: *Love Song* Section IV

Wednesday 10/14: Fiction
Reading: “The Dialectic” and “Sentimental Education” (Grand Union)

Monday 10/19: Poetry
Readings: *Bright Dead Things* Section I

Wednesday 10/21: Fiction
Readings: “The Lazy River” and “Words and Music” (Grand Union)

Monday 10/26: Poetry
Readings: *Bright Dead Things* Section II

Wednesday 10/28: Fiction
Readings: “Just Right” and “Parents’ Morning Epiphany” (Grand Union)

Monday 11/2: Poetry
Readings: *Bright Dead Things* Section III

Wednesday 11/4: Fiction
Readings: “Downtown” and “Miss Adele Amidst the Corsets” (Grand Union)

Monday 11/9: Poetry
Readings: *Bright Dead Things* Section IV

Wednesday 11/11: Fiction
Readings: “Mood” and “Escape From New York” (Grand Union)

Monday 11/16: Poetry
Readings: “Angel Nafis” by Angel Nafis, “Peanut Butter” by Eileen Myles, and “The Gas Station” by C.K. Williams

Wednesday 11/18: Fiction
Readings: “Big Week” and “Meet the President”

Monday 11/23: 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 11/25: Generative Workshop 3
Readings: For this exercise we will be cold-reading a poem and a story in class. You will need nothing prepared. Though please continue on the readings: “Two Men Arrive in a Village” and “Kelso Reconstructed”

Monday 11/30: Poetry
Reading: “Scheherezade,” “Straw House, Straw Dog,” and “Litany in Which Certain Things Are Crossed Out” by Richard Siken

Wednesday 12/2: Fiction
Readings: “Blocked” and “The Canker”

Monday 12/7: Poetry
Readings: “Saturn” and “Sex Without Love” by Sharon Olds, and “Rabbits and Fire” by Alberto Rios

Wednesday 12/9: Final portfolios due. Discussion on publishing. Class readings.