CREATIVE WRITING: INTRODUCTION TO FICTION & POETRY  
(CRWRI-UA.815.006)

Instructor: Patrick Doerksen  
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Tues/Thrs @ 9:30 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.  
Location: TBD  
Office Hours by Appointment

The madness that ye bring to me,  
I wadna change’ it for sense.  
—Hugh MacDiarmid

Course Overview: This is a creative writing class, not an English Literature class. Students will be writing their own stories and poems. However, on top of 1) writing stories and poems, students will also be 2) reading, 3) critiquing other students’ work, 4) and revising their own work. These four skills are mutually dependent. Our goal is to “peer behind the curtain” of literature to see how stories and poems work and how they achieve their effects so that we can bring insight and technique into our own work.

Required Book:  
*Franny and Zooey* (J. D. Salinger)

What is Expected of You

Attendance: Attendance is expected. Each unexplained absence will result in a 5% decrease in a student’s final grade. Two or more instances in which a student is significantly late to class will count as an absence. Absences owing to a medical or other emergency circumstance must be accompanied by a doctor’s (or other official) note.

Reading: I will send out the readings via email; students will print them out themselves. Do the reading! I have kept the reading fairly light so that everyone will be able to read everything. Readings may be added or omitted over the course of the semester. I might, for example, decide that as a class we should tackle *Infinite Jest*. If that is the case, I will let you know a week in advance. Kidding—I’ll give you more time than that!  
(Just so we’re clear, that is also a joke. We won’t be reading *Infinite Jest*.)

Reading Responses: This is how I know you have done the reading. It is also how I judge your engagement with the texts. I am not looking for short, tidy, academic papers; I want responses which show me you are paying close attention both to the words on the page and the way the
words on the page are working on you. (These reading responses will give us material for classroom discussion if we need it.) Two paragraphs: the first paragraph should focus on observations and personal reactions to one or more the assigned readings, the second paragraph should connect the work(s) in question to other assigned readings and previous craft class discussions and reach some sort of conclusion.

Word count: No less than 250 words and no more than 350.
Reading responses are due by midnight the night before Tuesday classes.

Workshop Submissions: This class is split into two units, fiction and poetry. In each unit, students will turn in work twice (four times total). By the end of the semester students will have turned in 2 short stories and 6 poems.

All work must be typed. Stories should be between 4-8 pages, double-spaced, and poems 1-3 pages, single-spaced. Bring at least 16 copies of each poem or story to workshop meetings.

Stories and poems must be sent to the class one week before they are workshopped, in order to give everyone sufficient time to read and prepare thoughtful feedback. (E.g. if the workshop is on Nov. 12, then they are due on midnight, Nov. 5.

How are these workshop submissions graded? Write stuff, write it within the parameters, and turn in your work on time: that’s all it takes to get full grades here.

Written Feedback: Students will write critiques of their peers’ work. Prior to class, please print two copies of your critique—one for me, and one for the writer. Good feedback is encouraging (never condemnatory). It aims to understand what the writer is trying to do and seeks to improve the work with that goal in mind.

End of Unit Presentations: During the last two classes of each unit (fiction and poetry), individual students will give a 5-7 minute presentation to the class. During the fiction unit the subject of these presentations will be a passage of fiction, no more than one page, of an author’s work which the student admires, is moved by, or simply reacts strongly to. During the poetry unit the subject will be a poem. The presenter will make 15 photocopies to bring to class. All fiction authors and poets are fair game.

The student’s goal during the presentation is to articulate why liked the work in question. This is a close analysis of the craft involved in the fiction passage or poem, not an author biography. Good writing is born out of good reading: by analyzing what concrete elements on the page produced this or that effect, the writer learns to understand the techniques of literature in the way (sort of) a clocker maker learns the mechanisms of a clock by dismantling it. The guiding questions of the presentation, therefore, should be: “How did the author achieve that effect?”

Participation: This is a large part of your overall grade. Many things affect participation marks, including attendance, contributions to workshop critiques and class discussions, and general demeanor. Passion! Curiosity! Insight! Kindness! These things the grading system converts to points.

Final Portfolio: At the end of class you will submit two short stories and four poems. You are to revise one of these stories and two of these poems (and mark which ones). I will be assessing the changes you
have made for meaningful engagement with workshop feedback. You will also write a 1 page letter outlining the changes you made, why you made them, and which critiques from workshops you found helpful in revising your work.

**Grading:**
- Participation: 35%
- Workshop Submissions: 25%
- Written Feedback: 10%
- Written Responses: 10%
- Presentations: 10%
- Portfolio and Revision: 10%

**Policies**

**Plagiarism:** Don’t. This is *creative writing*. It will be so obvious. And if I catch you I have to fail you, report you to the university.

**Electronics:** Cell phones will be on silent and students will not use them. Neither will students use laptops. (If you absolutely need to use electronic materials for some reason, let me know and we can discuss it.)

**Office Hours:** You must meet with me once during the semester. You are free to schedule additional meetings if you like. I am happy to talk with you about what you are working on, what you are reading, your goals for your writing, and so on.

**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*
The Syllabus

“Increasingly indecisive, about matters both big and little, I have found that poetry is the one arena where I am not inclined to crank up the fog machine, to palter or dissemble or quaver or hastily reverse myself. This is the one scene where I advance determined, if not precisely ready, to do battle with what an overly cited Jungian described as the anesthetized heart, the heart that does not react.”

—“My American Scrawl,” C.D. Wright

Part One: Fiction

Sept 3 Welcome/Housekeeping
“Creative Writing” (Etgar Keret)

8 Craft Class: the Basics
“Technique in Writing the Short Story” (Anton Chekhov)
“How to Become A Writer” (Lorrie Moore)

10 Craft Class: Structure
“The School” (Donald Barthelme)
“The Perfect Gerbil” (George Saunders)

15 Workshop
Writers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

17 Craft Class: Voice
“Emergency” (Denis Johnson)
“In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried” (Amy Hempel)

22 Workshop
Writers 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

24 Craft Class: the Strange
“The Sudden Walk” (Franz Kafka)
“Before the Law” (Franz Kafka)
“Younger” (Brian Evenson)

29 Workshop
Writers 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

Oct 1 Craft Class: Character, part 1
*Franny and Zooey* (J. D. Salinger)
6 Workshop
Writers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

8 Craft Class: Character, part 2
“The Doctor and the Rabbi” (Aimee Bender)
“Adams” (George Saunders)

13 Workshop
Writers 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

15 Craft Class: Experimental Fiction
“Extracts from a Life” (Lydia Davis)
“Going for a Beer” (Robert Coover)

20 Workshop
Writers 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

22 Class Presentations

27 Class Presentations

Part Two: Poetry

29 Craft Class: Education of the Poet
Selections from *A Poetry Handbook* (Mary Oliver)
“Introduction to Poetry” (Billy Collins)
“Workshop” (Billy Collins)

Nov 3 Craft Class: Haiku and the Imagists
Selections from *The Japanese Haiku* (Kenneth Yasuda)
Selected Haiku
“In a Station of the Metro” (Ezra Pound)
“The Hug” (Thom Gunn)

5 Workshop
Writers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

10 Craft Class: the Passionate Sensibility
Selections from *Letters to a Young Poet* (Rainer Maria Rilke)
“Tear it Down” (Jack Gilbert)
“Power” (Audre Lourde)
“For the Dogs Who Barked at Me on the Sidewalks in Connecticut” (Hanif Abdurraqib)
12  **Workshop**  
Writers 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

17  **Craft Class: the Storyteller**  
“The Birches” (Robert Frost)  
“The Ride” (Richard Wilbur)  
“Heartbeats” (Melvin Dixon)  
“Ode to Alternatives” (Keith Leonard)

19  **Workshop**  
Writers 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

24  **Craft Class: the Riddler and the Surrealist**  
“Further In” (Tomas Tranströmer; trans. Patty Crane)  
“I always thought reality” (Inger Christensen; trans. Susanna Nied)  
“Siren Song” (Margaret Atwood)  
“Everything that exists in the world...” (Fernando Pessoa)  
“Sappho Drives Upstate (Fr. 2)” (Anne Carson)

26  **Workshop**  
Writers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

**Dec 1**  
**Craft Class: the Idiosyncratic Sensibility**  
“This is just to say” (William Carlos Williams)  
“The Art of Disappearing” (Naomi Shihab Nye)  
“as freedom is a breakfastfood” (E.E. Cummings)  
“‘kitty’. sixteen,5’1”,white,prostitute” (E.E. Cummings)  
“My Father Speaks to Me from the Dead” (Sharon Olds)

3  **Workshop**  
Writers 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

8  **Craft Class: the Ecstatic Sensibility**  
“Untitled” (Basavesvara)  
“Someone Start Laughing” (Hafiz; trans. Daniel Ladinsky)  
“Hymn” (A. R. Ammons)  
“Wichita Vortex Sutra” (Allen Ginsberg) [with composition by Phillip Glass]  
“Praise the Rain” (Joy Harjo)

10  **Workshop**  
Writers 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

15  **Class Presentations**

17  **Class Presentations**  
“Berryman” (W. S. Merwin)