Introduction to Creative Writing
CRWRI-UA-815
Fall 2020
8AM Mon/Wed

“I have absolutely no idea what I’m saying. I know only that I have a certain sympathy for the rhetoric of risk and mystery.” —Ben Lerner

Course Overview: Whatever your literary background, whatever your prior experience as a writer or reader, you are welcome here. No course of this structure could conceivably seek to provide a complete, comprehensive guide to the canon, so instead, we’re going to explore a survey of some foundational texts, alongside those which have challenged the mainstream. We will look at stories, essays, poems, and hybrid pieces that defy categorization, in an attempt to figure out how they work, why they make us feel what they do, and how. Then, we will apply those concepts to generating our own written work. As we proceed, we will develop a lexicon for discussing texts. Hopefully, you will come away with new favorite writers, and a fancy vocabulary with which to defend them. Hopefully, too, you will come away with a new group of readers whom you trust, with whom you can move forward together in your creative careers.

Structure: This class is a composite of craft and workshop. Throughout the semester, you will be expected to generate four (4) writing assignments—at least one short story, one poem, and two in any genre you choose—which will be workshopped by your peers. In addition to writing and workshopping your submissions on Wednesdays, every Monday will be dedicated to a craft concept or theme, for which we will read an assortment of assigned texts. We will dedicate the first five weeks to fiction, the next four to nonfiction, and the final four to poetry. That being said, genre is little more than a handy means of classification so we can better think about the ways in which authors are subverting or playing with expectations of their form. Some of the greatest novels are written in verse. Some of the greatest poems are syntactically indistinguishable from prose. This is all to say nothing of “truth” and what the fiction/nonfiction distinction means. We’ll talk about these questions at length in class, and I excitedly welcome your interrogation of any categories with which you find fault. Rebuttal is all part of the fun.

Grading:
Attendance & Participation — 40%
Submissions — 20%
Weekly Responses — 20%
Revised Portfolio — 20%

Required Texts: Unless otherwise noted, the readings will be posted on NYU Classes. You must print the readings and bring them to class each week.
Reading Responses: In addition to bringing the readings themselves, you must bring to class a typed written response to the assigned readings each week. These should be no more than one page in length. These do not have to be formal or “academic” in nature. You may write an analysis or exegesis, a list of observations, a stream-of-consciousness reproduction of your impressions, an ekphrastic poem, or any other means of response that feels appropriate to you. If you feel inclined to respond with a creative work of your own, please feel free to do so.

Workshop Submissions: You will be assigned to a submission group for workshop. It is your responsibility to submit your work to the class via email no later than 5PM the Friday before your designated workshop. Points will be deducted for late submissions. I also strongly suggest you bring a printed copy of your own work for reference. In addition, please write a page of feedback in response to each of your peers’ and print out two copies to bring to class, one for them and one for me.

- **Prose:** 4-10 pages, double-spaced.
- **Poetry:** 1-3 pages, or: up to two poems.

Revised Portfolio: Revision is essential to the writing process. At the end of the semester, you should thoughtfully revise and edit each of the pieces you turned in to workshop, and submit them to me in a completed portfolio. Your grade will coincide with how well you were able to make generative improvements and integrate feedback into your revisions. This is an assessment of growth, not of “objective quality,” which is a concept that doesn’t exist in art anyway.

Presentations: At the beginning of every workshop class, one student will present on a creative work that is important to them. Presentations need not be any longer than five minutes, and cannot exceed ten minutes in length; this is merely an opportunity for each of you to impress upon us something you love. Tell us what it is, why you love it, what the artist does that’s working so well on a technical and emotional level, whether it has inspired or is inspired by past or future media. Put it in context for us. I should add, this does not need to be a conventional written work. You may present on a book, a story, a movie, a song, anything that you believe can be “read” like a text. Each of you will present at least once.

Conference: You will be expected to meet with me at least once during the course of the semester. You may sign up for a slot during my office hours, or email me to arrange an alternate time in the event of a scheduling conflict.

A Few Words on Workshop: A writing workshop is a sacred space, one of mutual respect, dignity, trust, and compassion. While it is the ethos of a good workshop to be constructive, we want to nurture one another’s strengths foremost, and encourage experimental, idiosyncratic, aesthetically exciting work that pushes boundaries and innovates upon preexisting narrative mechanics. Sharing creative work can be a scary thing, but that’s part of what makes this process so precious. It is absolutely imperative that we show one another respect. Everything that is submitted to workshop will (and must) remain confidential.
This is nonnegotiable. Treat your fellow classmates as you would like to be treated, which means coming prepared every Wednesday having carefully read and annotated their work with thoughtful comments, and providing feedback in a kind and conscientious manner. We will discuss workshop etiquette more specifically in class. If you have any concerns, anxieties, or questions, please feel free to reach out to me. When workshop works, it is a magical thing.

**Attendance & Tardiness:**
This is a discussion-based class. Come prompt and prepared. More than two unexcused absences will result in a reduction of your grade. Moreover, I know this is an 8AM. I was once you, too. My freshman year, I took an 8AM political philosophy class that was a huge bummer. Let’s not make this class a huge bummer. Be here on time, or your grade will suffer.

**Plagiarism:**
There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. All instances of plagiarism, obviously, will be reported to the department, no exceptions. You really don’t want this to happen. Don’t believe me? Check the student handbook.

**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
Website: [http://www.nyu.edu/csd](http://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.

**SEMESTER OUTLINE:**

WEEK 1: Introductions
Mon. 9/2:
Wed. How to Read as a Writer / Why We Write
- “The Situation and the Story” by Vivian Gornick
- “Why I Write” by George Orwell
- “Why I Write” by Joan Didion

Part I: FICTION
“Fiction is one of the few experiences where loneliness can be both confronted and relieved.”
—David Foster Wallace

WEEK 2: Character & Conversation
Mon.:  
- “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” by Raymond Carver
- “Dirty Wedding” by Denis Johnson
- “Sleep” by Haruki Murakami

Wed.: Workshop Group 1

WEEK 3: World-Building
Mon.:  
- “Jon” by George Saunders
- “There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury
- “A Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka

Wed: Workshop Group 2

WEEK 4: POV, Perspective, Performance
Mon.:  
- “How To Be An Other Woman” by Lorrie Moore
- “Making Love In 2003” by Miranda July

Wed.: Workshop Group 3

WEEK 5: Subversion & Transgression
Mon.:  
- “The Husband Stitch” by Carmen Maria Machado
- “The Company Of Wolves” by Angela Carter

Wed.: Workshop Group 1

WEEK 6: Endings
Mon.:  
- “Rise, Baby, Rise!” by George Saunders
- “The School” by Donald Barthelme
- “The Bear Came Over The Mountain” by Alice Munro
Wed.: Workshop Group 2

*Part II: NONFICTION*

“If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people.”

—Virginia Woolf

WEEK 7: *Voice & the Constructed “Self”*

Mon.:  
- “Borges and I” by Jorge Luis Borges  
- “On Turning the Self into a Character” by Phillip Lopate  
- “The Empathy Exams” by Leslie Jamison

Wed.: Workshop Group 3

WEEK 8: *How We Freeze the Shifting Phantasmagoria of Experience*

Mon.:  
- “The White Album” by Joan Didion  
- “Red Letters from a Red Planet” by Chelsea Hodson

Wed.: Workshop Group 1

WEEK 9: *Grief + Politicization of the Personal*

Mon.:  
- “Notes Of A Native Son” by James Baldwin  
- “Shipping Out” by David Foster Wallace

Wed.: Workshop Group 2

WEEK 10: *Hybrid*

Mon.:  
- *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson

Wed.: Workshop Group 3

*Part III: POETRY*

“It is a test [that] genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.”

—T. S. Eliot

WEEK 11: *The Lyric*

Mon.:  
- “The Glass Essay” by Anne Carson  
- “In the Waiting Room” by Elizabeth Bishop

Wed.: Workshop Group 1

WEEK 12: *Expansion of the Lyric*

Mon.
- *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine
Wed.: Workshop Group 2

**WEEK 13: Beautifying the Quotidian**
Wed.: Workshop Group 3

**Week 14 Sonnets**
Mon.: “American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin” by Terrance Hayes, TBD
Wed.: TBD

**Week 15**
Mon.: Final Celebration & Class Reading