

Introduction to Prose and Poetry (CRWRI-UA.815.016)

Instructor Perry Levitch

Tues & Thurs 3:30-4:45pm, Fall 2021

Office hours: TBD

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Course Information

“Is life kind or cruel? Yes, Literature answers. Are people good or bad? You bet, says Literature. But unlike other systems of knowing, Literature declines to eradicate one truth in favor of another; rather, it teaches us to abide with the fact that, in their own way, all things are true, and helps us, in the face of this terrifying knowledge, continually push ourselves in the direction of Open the Hell Up.” - *George Saunders*

“I believe that poetry secretes a kind of pleasure that theory can’t, and I believe that pleasure always carries a political charge... I approach the two as a tandem activity in which neither collapses into the other.” - *Kay Gabriel*

Rather than making people and concepts and places and feelings *more* steady, how can good writing actually *unsteady* these things and, in turn, us? What potentials - political, ethical, romantic, collective - come alive when writing manages to keep everything true, keep anything from collapsing? Over the semester we will get to know a dozen writers, mainly American and mainly contemporary, whose work dives into the generative potential of the unsteady, and we’ll conduct our own writing alongside them. Each week we’ll discuss a sampling of an author’s work, letting it teach us something about how to read and how to write, and also workshop each other’s pieces, building a shared critical vocabulary and a community where we feel bold enough to dip into unsteadiness ourselves.

Readings

We’ll be spending time with about a dozen writers (aside from you all!) this semester. Each week we’ll focus our craft discussion around either five poems or two short stories. Aside from *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine (which you should borrow or buy a physical copy of), all course texts will be provided as pdfs.

Poems from:

The Tradition, Jericho Brown

Postcolonial Love Poem, Natalie Diaz

Ecodeviance: (soma)tics for the Future Wilderness, CA Conrad

Four Reincarnations, Max Ritvo

Voyage of the Sable Venus and Other Poems, Robin Coste Lewis

We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics, ed. Andrea Abi-Karam & Kay Gabriel

Fiction by:

Jennifer Egan

Haruki Murakami

Otessa Moshfegh
Jhumpa Lahiri
Claudia Rankine
George Saunders

Assignments

Course Readings: Weekly.

Aside from *Citizen*, I'll provide pdfs of all course readings; it'll be your responsibility to print them out and bring them to class. Each week you'll write a one-paragraph (6-8 sentence) response - your impressions, observations, questions, connections to other readings, or whatever else strikes you. Reading responses are due by email before Tuesday's class.

Workshopping: Weekly.

Four students' writing will be workshopped per week, two on Tuesday and two on Thursday. You'll have at least four total opportunities to be workshopped this semester. At least one piece must be poetry and at least one piece must be fiction; otherwise, your form is up to you. Your work can respond to the prompt for that week, or to any previous prompt. Workshop pieces are due to me by midnight Thursday before your workshop week.

Weeks you aren't being workshopped are just as important as weeks you are. Every student is expected to arrive having read each workshop piece - generously and attentively - and to bring written feedback on your classmates' work. (We'll talk together about what feedback can look like, don't worry.) I'll send out the workshop pieces and workshop schedule on Friday - it's your job to print the packet, mark it up, and bring it to class. Digital copies of your feedback (as a scan and/or email) are due to me at the end of each workshop.

Author Presentations: Once.

Everyone will be responsible for presenting on one author over the course of the semester. The week we read your author, you'll start our Tuesday class with an 8-10 minute presentation. Feel free to include a brief biography and/or collection of a few things they've said about how or why they write, but the main focus should be on one of the pieces we read and what it can teach us, and then providing a few discussion questions to get us going. You don't have to write a reading response the week of your presentation. An outline of your presentation is due by the Thursday before the Tuesday you present.

Final Portfolio and Whole-Collection Review: End of semester.

You'll end the semester by submitting a final portfolio, which should include a cover page with a collection title and a table of contents, revised copies of all the pieces you've brought to workshop, and your whole-collection review (as described below). You can also include up to two additional pieces of writing from the semester that you feel proud of, if you'd like.

For the sake of time, our weekly readings are mostly going to be samplings from longer collections of poetry and short stories, but there's something invaluable about reading a book in its entirety - a fuller sense of an author's formal nimbleness, the experience of a collection's emotional trajectory, and so on. Please pick one book by an author from the syllabus to read all the way through. Then, you can either meet with me during office hours for an informal conversation about it and write a one-page review, or write a two-page review.

The final portfolio, including this review, is due by the end of the semester.

Office Hour Conferences: Twice.

Every student should meet with me one-on-one at least twice. Get feedback on a piece you aren't workshopping, or chat about how revisions are going, or ask for reading recommendations, or describe what you had for lunch in great detail. Meeting for the whole-collection review counts towards this requirement. Due by the end of the semester.

Live Reading Review: Extra credit.

Since there are a million poetry and fiction readings happening in New York every week, it's a great idea to attend one if you have the time. I'll send out reminders about some that NYU hosts, but pick whatever you want. Write a one-page review/reflection on the reading you attend - how was it hearing work read aloud? What moved you? Were there terrible delays on the 1/2/3 trains and the reader showed up late? Extra credit, any time.

Policies and Procedures

Grading Breakdown

- 30% Attendance & participation
- 20% Workshop submissions & reading responses
- 20% Author presentation
- 20% Final portfolio, including whole-collection review
- 10% Completing two office hour conferences

Attendance

Because attendance is vitally important to creating a workshop community, you have one absence a semester (excluding religious holidays or excused absences with documentation, like a doctor's note). Beyond that, your grade will drop by half a letter grade for each absence. Notify me of any anticipated absences as soon as possible. Two instances of being more than 15 minutes late will count as an absence. If in-class participation worries you, reach out to me and we can make arrangements.

Plagiarism

Don't! There is a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy for both academic papers and creative work; all writing should be original and specifically for this class. Any instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department, without exception. If you're feeling stuck on an assignment, come talk to me.

Technology/Printing

Personal copies of all readings, workshop packets, and written feedback should be printed out and brought to class. I know printing quotas exist, but this is a much cheaper alternative to having you buy 13 books for the semester! If the cost of printing poses a hardship, please reach out. Similarly, if you need to use a laptop for accommodation reasons, please reach out. Otherwise, no laptops unless you're presenting, and phones silenced and away.

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. More information is available at www.nyu.edu/csd.

Student Wellness Policy

In all workshop submissions, our class will 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. Before submitting work that may be interpreted as such, please send an email putting this work in context. If you 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.

We'll create our workshop's content warning guidelines together on the first day of class.

Class Schedule

Thurs Sept 2
Overview

Tues Sept 7 (Rosh Hashanah) / Thurs Sept 9
How do we read and talk about stories?
How do we read and talk about poems?

Tues Sept 14 / Thurs Sept 16 (Yom Kippur)
Reading: Stories by Jennifer Egan
Workshop: Group A

Tues Sept 21 / Thurs Sept 23
Reading: Poems by Jericho Brown
Workshop: Group B

Tues Sept 28 / Thurs Sept 30
Reading: Stories by Haruki Murakami
Workshop: Group C

Tues Oct 5 / Thurs Oct 7
Reading: Poems by Natalie Diaz
Workshop: Group A

(No class Tues Oct 12 - Mon. schedule) / Thurs Oct 14
Reading: Stories by Ottessa Moshfegh
Workshop: Group B

Tues Oct 19 / Thurs Oct 21
Reading: Poems by CAConrad
Workshop: Group C

Tues Oct 26 / Thurs Oct 28

Reading: Stories by Jhumpa Lahiri
Workshop: Group A

Tues Nov 2 / Thurs Nov 4 (Diwali)

Reading: Poems by Max Ritvo
Workshop: Group B

Tues Nov 9 / Thurs Nov 11

Reading: *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine
Workshop: Group C

Tues Nov 16 / Thurs Nov 18

Reading: Poems by Robin Coste Lewis
Workshop: Group A

Tues Nov 23 / (No class Thurs Nov 25)

Reading: None, in-class activity

Tues Nov 30 / Thurs Dec 2

Reading: Stories by George Saunders
Workshop: Group B

Tues Dec 7 / Thurs Dec 9

Reading: Poems from *We Want It All*
Workshop: Group C

Tues Dec 14

In-Class Reading & Final Portfolio due