

Creative Writing: Introduction to Poetry and Prose

Instructor: Rob Franklin (rmf9227@nyu.edu)

Semester: Fall '21

Section number: CRWRI-UA.815.005

Schedule: MW: 2 PM - 3:15 PM

"I remember every poem I ever wrote. I can't recite them but they come back like waves because they are a part of my brain. They are how I have a brain" — Eileen Myles

Overview —

Having come to fiction-writing through poetry, I am interested in how forms borrow strategies from one another, particularly in a contemporary literary landscape characterized by collapsing distinctions: how do we define a prose poem? What can fiction learn from the essay? How can the novel leverage poetics?

In the interest of exploring these questions, much of the work we read this semester will attempt to challenge our understanding of what the short story, poem, and novel can look like. We will incorporate these lessons, both tactical and personal, into our own respective writing practices through workshop and class assignments with the goal of defining our own literary voice(s).

Objectives —

We are here to improve as writers and readers of literature, both poetry and prose, and to create a community committed to nurturing the creative impulse. To do so, we will read and discuss the work of poets and fiction writers from a variety of backgrounds and styles, from the literary "canon" to contemporary experimental work.

We will also bring in writing of our own, at least one piece in each fiction and poetry, to be considered and discussed as literature as a class, the hope being that hearing the impressions of others will help us better express what we are trying to say.

Course Requirements and Grading Policy —

Workshop Submissions (30%)

Your work will be workshopped three times during the semester: first in poetry, then prose, and then an "open workshop," for which you can bring a piece in either genre or a "hybrid" work (we will discuss this at length). Fiction submissions should not exceed 25 double-spaced (12pt font) pages; poetry can be spaced however you like on the page, but be prepared to explain any untraditional aesthetic choices, and should not exceed 10 pages. Submissions are due to me (rmf9227@nyu.edu) by class time the week *before* you are being workshopped. I will distribute to the entire class the following day.

In-Class Participation and Substantive Feedback (30%)

You are expected to read your classmates' work thoroughly and thoughtfully and come to class prepared with observations, notes, and edits that you will share both in writing and during discussion. *Participation is key*, both in discussing one another's work and the craft texts.

Equally important is that we maintain a sympathetic critical eye as we read one another's work. While line edits are encouraged, **required written feedback** will take the form of a short "letter" or note that addresses your high level response to the submission and distills your primary pieces of constructive feedback, citing specific instances in the text where you see opportunity to make adjustments. These letters will be due midnight the day before workshop. If you choose to email your note, please CC me (rmf9227@nyu.edu); if you prefer to handwrite notes or print and hand-deliver, please inform me you have done so in class, as adherence to this requirement will impact your grade.

Additional Class Requirements (10%)

Students will be asked to attend a literary event of their choosing (a panel, a reading or other event — if you are curious if it counts, just ask!) during the semester and write a 1 page double-spaced response to the experience. You can describe your personal experience of the work, what you learned, what you observed about the business of being a working writer / artist, etc. Assuming the world is back up and running, I encourage you to attend (safely) in person, but zoom / online events are also acceptable. I will keep you posted weekly on events on NYU's campus and beyond. 92nd Street Y, The Center for Fiction, and most independent bookstores (McNally Jackson, Greenlight Books, Books are Magic) are excellent places to look.

For extra credit, you may attend an additional literary event and write a second response. This response will raise your grade by a third of a letter grade (B to B+, B+ to A-, etc.)

Final Portfolio (30%)

At the end of the semester, you will turn in a "final portfolio" with all of your pieces from the semester, having incorporated the edits from class discussion and workshop, along with a note describing the changes you made and why you believe they benefit the piece. If you choose not to edit or to edit in ways that differ from the recommendations made in workshop (which is entirely up to you), your note should focus on your rationale for this choice.

Attendance

You will be allowed one unexcused absence during the semester — though not on a week when you're being workshopped (if you need to reschedule your workshop, please contact me as far in advance as possible). After that, absences will result in the reduction of your letter grade by a third (A to A-, A- to B+, etc). Considerable tardiness (say, 30+ minutes) will count as absence.

Plagiarism

Don't. Really, just do not. I will have to report you and it will result in your failing the course. If you're ever fearful of missing a deadline or being unable to complete an assignment, please

[contact me](#) to discuss an extension rather than proceeding down this dark, dank path.

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>

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.

Book List: Five books are required for this class — all of which can be found at a local bookstore, or on Amazon if you so choose.

- *Citizen*, Claudia Rankine
- *Crush*, Richard Siken
- *10:04*, Ben Lerner
- *We the Animals*, Justin Torres
- *Bluets*, Maggie Nelson

Calendar

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

Wednesday, September 8th:

- Review syllabus, divide into workshop groups
- Personal introductions

Week 2: Mechanics of Poetry, Understanding “Poetics”

Monday, September 13th: What makes a poem? This week, we’ll look at these famous poems to dissect the basics of poetics: form, sound, image, diction, etc.

- To read for class:
 - [We Real Cool](#), Gwendolyn Brooks
 - [Archaic Torso of Apollo](#), Rainer Maria Rilke
 - [Lighthouse’s Guide to the Galaxy](#), Terrence Hayes
 - [What Do Women Want](#), Kim Adonizio
- Found Poems discussion: Can these tweets, bits of signage, etc that seem informed by poetic structure be considered poems? Should they be?
- Mock Workshop: I will email two anon poems for a ~30 minute mock workshop

Wednesday, September 15th:

- Poetry Workshop, Group A

Week 3: Radical Poetics

Monday, September 20th

- [Howl](#), part I, Allen Ginsberg
- [Black Art](#) (video), Amiri Baraka
- [Someone is Writing a Poem](#), Adrienne Rich essay
- Claudia Rankine, Citizen selections (TBA)

Wednesday, September 22nd: Poetry Workshop, Group B

Week 4: Contemporary Voices

Monday, September 27th

- [Boy in a Stolen Evening Gown](#), [Body and Kentucky Bourbon](#), Saeed Jones
- [alternative names for black boys](#), [dinosaurs in the hood](#) (text and vid), Danez Smith

- [All they want...](#), [Nancy Meyers and my dream of whiteness](#) (pg 23 - 25), Morgan Parker
- [Jealousy](#) (vid), Janani Balasubramanian

Wednesday, September 29th: Poetry Workshop, Group C

Week 5: Poetry of the City

Monday, October 4th

- [Meditations in an Emergency](#), Frank O'Hara
- [June](#), [More](#), Alex Dimitrov
- [Demolition](#), Mark Doty
- [Open City](#), Excerpt, Teju Cole

Wednesday, October 6th: Poetry Workshop, Group D

Week 6: Prose Poetry

Monday, October 11th — FALL BREAK: Get out, play with leaves

Wednesday, October 13th — Crush, Richard Siken

Week 7: Mechanics of Fiction

Monday, October 18th: we will discuss the basics of the short story and fiction more widely: narrative voice, character, plot, pacing

- [Where are You Going, Where Have You Been](#), Joyce Carol Oates
- [The Standard of Living](#), Dorothy Parker

Wednesday, October 20th — Fiction Workshop, Group A

Week 8: Contemporary Voices

Monday, October 25th

- [Home](#), George Saunders
- [Autofill Email to the Corner of the Kitchen](#) (a story written using the phone's auto-fill feature), Sheila Heti

- [Lost Performance](#), Carmen Maria Machado
- [The Rosary](#), Alexander Chee

Wednesday, October 27th — Fiction Workshop, Group B

Week 9: Creative Non-Fiction and The Essay

Monday, November 1st

- [On Keeping a Notebook](#), Joan Didion
- [Getting in and Getting Out](#), Zadie Smith
- [Letter to My Mother than She'll Never Read](#), Ocean Vuong
- [Priestdaddy, Excerpt](#), Patricia Lockwood

Wednesday, November 3rd — Fiction Workshop, Group C

Week 10: The Novel, Autofiction

Monday, November 8th

- Discussion: [What is Autofiction?](#)
- *10:04*, Ben Lerner (first half)

Wednesday, November 10th — Fiction Workshop, Group D

Week 11: The Novel, Autofiction

Monday, November 15th

- *10:04*, Ben Lerner (second half)

Wednesday, November 17th — Open Workshop, Group A

Week 12: Hybrid Texts

Monday, November 22nd

- *We the Animals*, Justin Torres (first half)

Wednesday, November 24th — Open Workshop, Group B

Week 13: Hybrid Texts

Monday, November 29th

- *We the Animals*, Justin Torres (second half)

Wednesday, December 1st — Open Workshop, Group C

Week 14: Hybrid Texts,

Monday, December 6th

- *Bluets*, Maggie Nelson

Wednesday, December 8th — Open Workshop, Group D

Week 15

Monday, December 13th — Class Reading and Party