

Introduction to Fiction & Poetry.

Coronavirus Lockdown as an introduction to Prison Literature and other isolation writings.

Section number: CRWRI-UA.815.024

Schedule: MW 8AM-9:15AM

Prof: Darrian H. Hopson

Email: dh3110@nyu.edu

Classroom: Tbd.

*“To achieve harmony in bad taste is the height of elegance.” - Jean Genet.*

### **The Program.**

**As much of the world continues to return to what life once was, a semblance of it, or something new, many of us are doing so after facing long periods of isolation and dormancy. This class will therefore aim to explore both fiction and poetry that comes from the realm of isolation, with hopes that we can expose ourselves to some of the most beautiful stories and language known to humankind, composed in the most disparate of conditions and in doing so find parallels in processing our own experiences and putting them to page to share with and inspire the world. This class, however, is not to suggest that the coronavirus lockdowns are akin to the experience of those incarcerated—though perhaps some you may have actually spent time in a cell, or a juvenile detention center—and if such is the case, your experience is very much welcome.**

**The structure of the class will be split between craft on Mondays and workshop on Wednesdays. Our craft sessions will be a reading smorgasbord of fiction, poetry, non-fiction and plays—with a focus on deconstructing texts, considering the voices, exploring and discussing themes, identifying form, learning structural principles—all critical to constructing a story.**

**It is a hope that you may use the exercises and assignments from our craft sessions as a springboard for your own work as we launch into workshop (more on workshop can be found in the grading portion of the syllabus). We will be discussing some themes and issues of society that may prove difficult to digest; as class instructor my door is always open for those feeling uncomfortable with any of the subject matter. If you take nothing else from this class, it is our hope that you may witness a vulnerability in the texts we plan to discuss, and be inspired to dig within and share a little humanity and truth of your own through the art of writing.**

### **The Readings.**

You will not be required to buy any books for the class. A **master reader** of all the reading materials will be provided on the NYU Classes website in PDF format.

Note: We will *not* be reading any of the following titles in their entirety.

**Reading assignments from each selection will likely no longer be more than five pages, so don't fret.**

**Girl** by Edna O'Brien  
**Orange Is the New Black** by Piper Kerman  
**Voronezh Notebooks** by Osip Mandelstam  
**The Mars Room** by Rachel Kushner  
**Miracle of the Rose** by Jean Genet  
**Our Lady of the Flowers** by Jean Genet  
**The Thief's Journal** by Jean Genet  
**Girl, Interrupted** by Susanna Kaysen  
**One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest** by Ken Kesey  
**Letter from a Birmingham Jail** by Martin Luther King, Jr.  
**Crime and Punishment** by Fyodor Dostoevsky  
**Not about Nightingales** by Tennessee Williams...  
**Pisan Cantos** by Ezra Pound  
**Man's Search for Meaning** by Viktor Frankl  
**A Place to Stand** by Jimmy Santiago Baca  
**Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison** by Shaka Senghor  
**Poems from Prison** by Etheridge Knight  
**The Ballad of Reading Gaol** by Oscar Wilde  
**Confessions of the Fox** by Jordy Rosenberg  
**Poems from Prison** by Etheridge Knight  
**Various selections** by muMs da Schemer  
**Milk and Tea** by Linda Michelle Marquardt

### **The Grading Breakdown**

**Participation/Workshops (40 percent)** – It should go without saying—given this is an introduction to fiction and poetry, including a workshop component—much of your grade will hinge on your contribution to the conversation week in and week out. Participation in class during craft discussion and workshop, as well as the depth of your workshop notes of your classmates will be taken into account. It is a goal of ours in this course to manifest inspired discussion and debate around writing and the corresponding themes—should you take this on seriously, the benefit of getting in the habit of being vulnerable on a class by class basis will serve you beyond writing, should you choose to pursue the art or not. With that said, **I'll be flexible as to how your grade should be weighted depending on the pulse of the class.**

**Writing Assignments (30 percent)** – There will be a handful of assignments throughout the semester that vary in spec—such as responses to articles, or writing exercises. These will contribute to your final portfolio, so be thoughtful in them, as they will contribute to your final grade.

**Final Portfolio (30 percent)** – **There will be no final project due for the semester**, rather a final portfolio comprising of your writing assignments and two workshop pieces. However, you may not just simply hand in the same thing and expect a final grade. Part of the experience of being a writer is the process of editing and revising—so for the final portfolio, **you will be required to rewrite/edit your pieces** based on the revisions, suggestions and edits that myself

and our classmates have given you. Again, a simple regurgitation of your initial submissions will result in a poor grade. As far as the final portfolio submission itself, either a Microsoft Word Document or a PDF featuring all your work in a socially acceptable font face, 12 point, double-spaced. Format exceptions can be made for uncanny fiction and poetry entries.

### **The Schedule.**

\*subject to amendments

#### *Introduction/Expectations.*

**M: Sept. 6 - Labor Day. No Class.**

**W: Sept. 8 – Hellos. “Why you are here?” Expectations, and semester breakdown.**

**Workshop order. Assignment: Write the worst piece of writing you absolutely can, due Sept. 13.**

#### *Finding your lockdown/isolation story in alienation.*

**M: Sept. 13 – Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Crime and Punishment.”**

**W: Sept. 15 – Craft.**

#### *Setting - Prisoners of Circumstance.*

**M: Sept. 20 – Rachel Kushner, “The Mars Room.” Edna O’Brien, “Girl.” Linda Michelle Marquardt, “Milk and Tea.”**

**W: Sept. 22 - Workshop.**

#### *“We want you to be rehabilitated into the society we want.” Agency and how it relates to plot.*

**M: Sept. 27 – Malcolm X, “The Autobiography of Malcolm X.” Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**“Letter from Birmingham Jail.” How did we “rehabilitate” during lockdown?**

**Assignment: Pick a character in your story and write a letter to their mother, due Oct. 4.**

**W: Sept. 29 - Workshop.**

#### *Social/Humanitarian issues from quarantine and POV.*

**M: Oct. 4 – Jordy Rosenberg, “Confessions of the Fox.” Oscar Wilde, “The Ballad of Reading Gaol.”**

**W: Oct. 6 – Workshop.**

*The lingo of forced labor, internment camps, etc., and POV Part 2.*

**M: Oct. 11 – Osip Mandelstam, “Voronezh Notebooks.” Viktor Frankl, “Man’s Search for Meaning.”**

**Assignment: Write an excerpt of poetry for the class “community poem,” due Oct. 18.**

**W: Oct. 13 – Workshop.**

*Subverting the narrative - Finding flowers amid a stark graveyard.*

**M: Oct. 18 - Jean Genet, “The Thief’s Journal,” “Our Lady of the Flowers,” “Miracle of the Rose.”**

**Assignment: Pick a story about an embarrassing or humiliating moment, and write it in the opposite tone, due Oct. 25.**

**W: Oct. 20 – Workshop.**

*Illness in Isolation.*

**M: Oct. 25 – Susanna Kaysen, “Girl, Interrupted.” Ken Kesey, “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.”**

**W: Oct. 27 – Workshop.**

*Do you feel me? Finding “your” voice in lonesome.*

**M: Nov. 1 – [Etheridge Knight](#), “Poems from Prison.”**

**W: Nov. 3 – Workshop.**

*Do you feel me? Finding “your” voice in lonesome PART 2.*

**M: Nov. 8 – Tennessee Williams, “Not About Nightingales.”**

**W: Nov. 10 – Workshop.**

*On Writer’s Block – Writing out of the void.*

**M: Nov. 15 – Shaka Senghor, “Writing My Wrongs: Life, Death, and Redemption in an American Prison.” Jimmy Santiago Baca, “A Place to Stand.”**

**Assignment: Make up a word, and write an excerpt about it (without defining it), due Nov. 22.**

**W: Nov. 17 – Workshop.**

*When our heroes suck (and what to do about it).*

**M: Nov. 22 – Ezra Pound, “Pisan Cantos.”**

**W: Nov. 24 – Workshop.**

*Prison depictions in television.*

**M: Nov. 29 – Piper Kerman, “Orange Is the New Black.” Various selections by muMs da Schemer. How will television write the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**Assignment: Write a futuristic sensationalistic story about how the COVID-19 pandemic happened, due Dec. 6.**

**W: Dec. 1 – Workshop.**

*So you want to get published? Journals, submissions, cover letters, etc.*

**M: Dec. 6 – Lecture on the business of writing.**

**W: Dec. 8 – Workshop.**

**M: Dec. 13 – Final Portfolio Due. Last Day of Class. Class readings. Sayonaras and such.**

### The Workshops.

Per the schedule, we will begin workshops on the third week of the semester, otherwise known as Wednesday Sept. 22. This will allow everyone in the class to workshop twice at minimum. Whether you’d like to submit fiction, poetry, non-fiction, flash, etc., is at your discretion. A sign-up form will be available on our class website, where you will be able to choose your date for submission on a first come, first serve basis. When submitting, **please email your piece to me no later than the Wednesday prior to your workshop day.** This will ensure that the rest of your classmates have proper time to read and consider your work. I will then distribute the piece to the class. For those workshopping their classmates’ pieces, **please have emailed them a copy of their piece with detailed notes before the day of workshop and be sure to CC me in the email as well.** For those of you attending class in-person, please bring your workshopped pieces to the class for reference. Notes may appear in the form of handwritten and scanned, or annotated on Microsoft Word or Google Docs. As it pertains to editing other students’ work in the class, “good” or “bad” simply won’t do. When editing, think less about what *you* would like to piece to be, and think more about ways to make the piece the best it can be for what it’s trying to achieve. For example, to suggest that Cinderella take revenge on her evil family by slaughtering them in a

machete-fueled rampage—while perhaps entertaining and even poetic—is not apropos for the success of the story itself.

**Keep this in mind as well as some other major points:**

*X Consider the characters and their respective purposes. Interrogate them—do they need to be there, or do we need more of them?*

*X Identify the POV. Does it bolster or weigh down the story? Could it benefit from more closeness, or distance?*

*X Read the dialogue aloud. How does it sound?*

*X Every story has a voice. What's the style of the piece?*

*X Is the setting well established? Do you feel grounded in it?*

*X The author is telling this story for a reason. Why?*

*X Where did you most connect to the piece? Locate that, and beg for more.*

**Plagiarism**

It's not good. Just don't do it. Offenses will be pursued to the highest extent.

**Attendance Policy**

If you must miss class please let me know via email as early as possible. Three unexcused absences will result in a drop in letter grade. Otherwise, please keep in mind that your classmates are committed to improving each other's work—including yours. For this reason, show up on time, we'll handle our affairs, and properly leave on time.

**Office Hours**

Upon the start of the semester, **all students are required to schedule a one on one meeting.** Throughout the semester, office hours will be on a rolling basis, and are able to be coordinated via email.

**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.