

Introduction to Creative Writing

Spring 2022 CRWRI-UA.815.006

Tues/Thurs 11:00AM - 12:15PM

Building 194 M, Room 201

Instructor: Christine Marella (she/her/hers)

Contact: cm4025@nyu.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Above all, I hope you'll not take this [course] more seriously than it is intended. Some of it, though obviously not all, is written in a sense of play. But it is play directed toward helping you with that silly, absurd, maddening, futile, enormously rewarding activity: writing poems. I don't know why we do it. We must be crazy. Welcome, fellow poet.

– Richard Hugo [with twist by me]

About This Course

This introductory course has been designed with two aims in mind. Aim #1: to prepare students for deep analysis, discussion, and appreciation of the craft of creative writing. Aim #2: to introduce students to the silly, absurd, maddening, futile, enormously rewarding endeavor of writing.

Disclaimer: This is not a lecture-based course. To create an enriching learning environment, active discussion, attention, and preparedness will be required of every student. A key element of this class is workshop, where students will share creative pieces and discuss, examine, and critique each other's work. Successful workshops demand participation. This said, no matter your prior experience with creative writing, there is a place for you in this class and your contributions are important.

Course Objectives

- 1.) **You are a writer:** The main objective of this course is to help you see yourself as a writer. "Writer" is not a magical designation reserved only for a special group of ~published~ authors. Being a writer is having a way of seeing, hearing, and processing the world and getting it down on paper. Most of the time, it's you, alone at a desk or table, figuring out *how* to say what you want to say. It is not glamorous work. In fact, as I write out this syllabus it's one o'clock in the afternoon and I'm still in my PJs. You, too, will find yourself this semester at one o'clock in the afternoon, in your PJs, writing a poem or finishing a story. And you will look up and see yourself in the mirror, and you will be looking at a writer. It's that simple.
- 2.) **You are a sophisticated reader:** By the end of this course you should be able to read any piece of creative writing and identify the mechanics of craft at work. You will come away with a toolbox (a vocabulary) with which you will be equipped to engage with the reading at hand. You will be able to discuss, critique, and wonder at the methods a writer chooses to communicate their ideas or story.
- 3.) **You participated in building a writing community:** While you may write alone, you will not be alone. This class will become your writing community for the semester (and perhaps

beyond). We are not required to like each other, but we are required to treat each other, and each other's writing, with respect, kindness, and curiosity. It is my hope to introduce you to the kind of community writers can have with one another.

Required Texts

Two books are required for this course. All other readings will be either provided on paper in class or uploaded digitally for access on NYU Classes. The books I ask you purchase for class (listed below) are two craft books, one on poetry and the other on prose.

The Triggering Town - Richard Hugo

Bird by Bird - Anne Lamott

Required Materials

Please come to every class equipped with writing utensils, a folder or binder in which you'll keep your printed readings, assignments, etc, and a personal notebook. I will provide each of you with a composition book at the start of the semester which will be your commonplace book. More on that later. Please bring that, too, to class every day.

A summary of required materials:

- Writing utensils
- Folder / Binder
- Personal notebook (for taking class notes, etc)
- Commonplace book

Course Structure

- Most Tuesdays – Craft
- Most Thursdays – Workshop

Class Structure

Most classes will begin with a writing exercise. Please arrive to class a few minutes early in order to participate fully in these exercises.

On Tuesdays we will usually discuss the week's readings and how they relate to the element of craft chosen for the week. As the semester goes on, we will be talking not only about each week's craft topic in isolation, but how our readings may or may engage with elements of craft we've previously discussed. Everything we will learn this semester is cumulative.

On Thursdays when we conduct workshop, we will read and discuss student writing. My goal is that you will be workshopped 4 times throughout the semester, for 15 minutes each time. The aim of this introductory workshop is to ease you into the dynamics of critique and discussion (ie: helping you to become better, more exact readers and better, more aware writers).

Cold calling notice: In general, discussion will be free to develop organically. However, in moments of long silence (or *ponderance*) I will cold-call students to move class along. Do not be startled by cold-calls. Perfection is not expected.

Summary of Writing Assignments

- In-class writing exercises (24 exercises)
- 16-week Commonplace Book
- 3 workshopped pieces: 1 poem, 1 story, 1 cross-genre piece
- 3 radical revisions (of each workshopped piece)
- 44 peer annotations (letters to your student authors - you will receive a Workshop Guidelines handout that will include more instruction once we begin workshops. PS: this seems like a lot, but it's not - it's just a long semester!)
- Midterm craft essay, 3-5 pages double spaced
- 2 Field Trip assignments
- Final Portfolio (includes a compilation of all the creative work completed for the semester (3 workshop pieces, their 3 radical revisions, 2 creative field trip assignments, and a final extra creative piece in the genre of your choosing)

Policies & Expectations

Attendance

Your presence (both physical and mental) is indispensable for creating a learning community. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence this semester (of which you will be required to notify me about via email *before* the beginning of class). Excused absences must be accompanied by appropriate documentation (doctor's note, etc). Absences due to religious holidays are considered excused absences but should be mentioned to me as far in advance as possible. For every unexcused absence beyond your first allowance, you will incur one-third-letter grade deductions (an A- will become a B+, and so forth). Extenuating medical circumstances will be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Note: any in class writing exercises you miss due to absence will still be expected in your final portfolio. Please contact a classmate for any prompt you may have missed.

Grading

Attendance - if you show up to every class, your grade will be neither positively nor negatively affected. If absence or tardiness becomes an issue, I've outlined how your grade will be affected (above).

- 20% Participation & Thoughtful Engagement in Class
- 20% Workshop Submissions
- 25% Reading Responses (on peer work)
- 10% Two office hours meetings - 5% each
- 20% Final portfolio
- 5% In class writing exercises

In addition, there will be several extra-credit opportunities throughout the semester. These opportunities will involve attending a literary event and sending me selfie evidence as well as a one-page response. I'll give notice for these events via email or during class.

Plagiarism

There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. This goes for academic papers and creative work. All writing should not only be original, but specific for this class. Any and all instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department. If you feel you cannot turn in an assignment on time, or are struggling in any way, please come see me.

Electronics in Class

Electronics (including watches that deliver electronic notifications) are not allowed in class. We may often designate someone to look things up if needed, like terms, concepts, history, etc. That person is not to abuse their electronic privileges.

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>

Health & Wellness

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.

We will additionally create our workshop's content alert guidelines together on the first day of class.

Schedule

Tues - Jan 25

Welcome!

Introductions, syllabus review, workshop schedule, commonplace book instructions, CW survey, content alert submissions, in-class writing assignment

Thurs - Jan 27

"Bones" - Talking Poetry: Toolkit Part 1 (line, stanza, sound, rhyme) Craft Packet

"Two Bikers Embrace on Broad Street" - Ross Gay

"That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire" - Gerard Manley Hopkins

"Garden" & "Drum" - Langston Hughes

Tues - Feb 1

"Meat" - Talking Poetry: Toolkit Part 2 (image, subject, mask/turn)

"Writing Off the Subject" - Essay, Richard Hugo

"Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm" - James Wright

"For the Eating of Swine" - Rodney Jones

"During the Middle Ages" - Camille Guthrie

Thurs - Feb 3

"The Who" - Talking Fiction: Toolkit Part 1 (point of view, character, voice, narrative)

"Character" - Essay, Anne Lamott

"How to Be a Writer" - Lorrie Moore

"Cat Person" - Kristen Roupenian

Tues - Feb 8

"The What (When/Where/How)" - Talking Fiction: Toolkit Part 2 (conflict, plot, subplot, theme, image)

"Plot" - Essay, Anne Lamott

"The Things They Carried" - Tim O'Brien

From "How Should a Person Be?" - Sheila Heti

"The Wavemaker Falters" - George Saunders

Thurs - Feb 10

Workshop Group A (poems)

Tues - Feb 15

Poetry Craft: TONE

"Poem (Lana Turner has collapsed)" - Frank O'Hara

"Full Moon" - Tu Fu

"YOUR BRAIN IS NOT A PRISON" - Sasha Debevec Mckenney

"I Go Back to May 1937" - Sharon Olds

Thurs - Feb 17

Workshop Group B (poems)

- Tues - Feb 22** **Fiction Craft: Tensions (& how they're created: Desire, Place, Dialogue)**
 "Dialogue" - Essay, Anne Lamott
 "Hills like White Elephants" - Ernest Hemingway
 "Roy Spivey" - Miranda July
- Thurs - Feb 24** **Workshop Group C (poems)**
- Tues - Mar 1** **Poetry Craft: Forms (sonnet, sestina, pantoum, ghazal)**
 "Sestina" - Elizabeth Bishop
 "Descent of the Composer" - Aireal Matthews
 "September Elegies" - Randall Mann
 "Hip Hop Ghazal" - Patricia Smith
 "Miscegenation" - Natasha Trethewey
- Thurs - Mar 3** **Workshop Group A (stories)**
Midterm Craft Paper Assigned
- Tues - Mar 8** **Fiction Craft: Time (pace, progression, & frozenness)**
 "Bullet to the Brain" - Tobias Wolff
 "Barn Burning" - Haruki Murakami
- Thurs - Mar 10** **Workshop Group B (stories)**
- Tues - Mar 15** **Spring Break**
- Thurs - Mar 17** **Spring Break**
- Tues - Mar 22** **Poetry Craft: Narrative Poems, Prose Poems (cross-genre)**
 "Summer Solstice, NYC" - Sharon Olds
 "Song" - Brigit Pegeen Kelly
 "The Orchestral Audition" - Jana Harris
- Thurs - Mar 24** **Workshop C (stories)**
- Tues - Mar 29** **Fiction Craft: Lyrical Essay (cross-genre)**
Midterm Craft Paper Due
 From "Bluets" - Maggie Nelson
 From "The Book of Delights" - Ross Gay
 From "The Colossus of New York" - Colson Whitehead
 From "Citizen" - Claudia Rankine
- Thurs - Mar 31** **Workshop Group A (cross-genre)**

- Tues - Apr 5** **Poetry Craft: Experimentation: erasure, found poems, ekphrasis**
 From "A Little White Shadow" - Mary Ruefle
 From "Zong!" - M. NourbeSe Philip
 "Prairie" - Wallace Stegner
 "Repentance" - Natasha Trethewey
- 30 minute in-class exercise - Erasure Poem or Found Poem
- Thurs - Apr 7** **Workshop Group B (cross-genre)**
- Tues - Apr 12** **Fiction Craft: Experimentation: short shorts, weirdness**
 "Wants" - Grace Paley
 "Teenage Punk" - Lucia Berlin
 From "Blindness" - Jose Saramago
- Thurs - Apr 14** **Workshop Group C (cross-genre)**
- Tues - Apr 19** **Field Trip to Grey Museum**
- Ekphrasis (poem)
- Thurs - Apr 21** **Field Trip to Washington Square Park**
- Overhead Conversations (put dialogue into a 2 page story)
- Tues - Apr 26** **Speed Workshop (6 students) - any genre**
- Thurs - Apr 28** **Speed Workshop (6 students) - any genre**
- Tues - May 3** **Final Project Readings and Commonplace sharing**
- Thurs - May 5** **Final Project Readings and Commonplace sharing**
- Tues - May 10** **Class Celebration!**
- Class reflections, survey

Final Portfolio Emailed to me by Friday, May 13 at 3PM