

THIS IS A PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS WHICH IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING: POETRY, FICTION & MEMOIR

CRWRI-UA.815.005

Class: Fall 2022, Monday/Wednesday 2:00-3:15pm

Instructor: Stella Hayes (she/her)

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Office Hours: By appointment

What does the blank page mean to you? *I make sure I never face the blank page. And I actually give that advice to young writers, not to sit down in front of a blank page and the way I do it is that I go to the page when I already have a thought or sentence, or a note that I want to make. So it's very quickly not blank. It could be a line of dialogue, or it could be something I overheard or it could be an observation about an object, and then I come back to it later and read it over and I will revise it even if I am not intending to do anything with it at all; I want it to be as good as it can. And then I see if it could have enough substance and interest to grow into something longer.* On Facing the blank page, Lydia Davis

CLASS OVERVIEW

I believe that each person is a living document, a site/place personal & historical: of her experiences, consciousness, imagination, obsessions, heartbreak, physical wounds, traumas & sexuality. At the same time, I regard literary texts as living organisms that contribute/add to a *living canon* – a creative body of essential work – that is elusive, strange, painful, which is being redefined by new voices & ever-evolving. In this class, we will examine *what matters* to writers of poetry, fiction & memoir as we write – make up, falsify, lie, erase, make meaning or act against meaning, take linguistic risk &/or destroy literary forms. As writers – if we are successful – we are at work at *translating* to the page *what's at stake*. It may come from the imagination or observation: what we say to ourselves or what we overhear. We will make poems, short fiction & memoir as well as translate poems. We will celebrate each other & our works in-progress.

CLASS OBJECTIVE

In this class we will look at how writers break our hearts & put them back together for the sake of art; we will read the books assigned in the class like writers: closely, critically & creatively. We will learn & apply craft in poetry, fiction & memoir, and we will learn to write as well as edit our own works of art in each genre in a workshop setting. The workshop will be a safe space in which we will practice vulnerability & acceptance.

THE CLASS

Classes will be divided between ***craft on Mondays*** (exercises and readings that focus on the technical elements of poetry, fiction & memoir) and ***workshop on Wednesdays*** (critique of one another's work). For craft we will read from various writers. For class, please bring printouts of handouts that I will post on Brightspace. It is my preference that you bring printed copies to class but I respect your desire to limit paper use, in which case, you may access them electronically on

your devices in class. Workshop is a safe space where we talk about each other's work: thoughtfully & compassionately, **without rancor**, offering constructive comments & critiques. The aim is to share work, discuss how it can be made more successful & grow as a writer. Workshop groups will be assigned during the first day of class; the class will be divided into three.

THE WORKSHOP

Procedure/Etiquette

- Thirteen copies of your peers' creative works with typed up comments: 1 for me and each of your fellow writers will be due a week in advance of workshop.
- Thirteen responses to weekly readings, two paragraphs long, no more than a double spaced page, will be due weekly.

Writers

- Submit pieces that you have worked on in earnest, giving it your all, not something you *crashed* the night before. If you are struggling completing your work, that's totally fine – that's the creative process, one of self-doubt and self-criticism. Please don't get defensive as your work is critiqued, listen, take notes and you will have the chance to ask questions when your turn is up.
- I recommend that you come prepared. What do you want to know? What are you unsure of? What parts of the work most concern you? What reader responses would you like clarified?
- This is essential: you're the author of your work, it is up to you to accept or reject the workshop's critiques after you have given it much deliberation. It's okay to change your mind too!
- When possible, point to specific parts of the story or poem that exemplify your comment.
- The author should not speak during the critique. We tend to want to explain or defend the work, but the work should speak for itself. The author may ask questions at the end of the critique

Readers

- Read each work at least twice. Rereading bears clarity.
- Start your commentary with the work's strengths.
- Be specific about what worked for you, and why.
- If aspects of the work are unclear, try telling the author exactly what you read without passing judgment on it. This can be really useful to hear!
- Make notes on the manuscript. Remember that your first duty is to understand what the writer is trying to do and to help her do it more successfully. Be open to the writer's unique vision and respectful of her work. Don't assume that what the writer is trying to do has no value because it's not to your taste, and don't try to rewrite a writer's work to reflect your own preferences or style.

- If you're not sure what to talk about, here are some ideas:
Address the piece's language. What is the author doing with the sound of the words?
What voice is the piece told through? Address the characters. When did they come across as vivid and real? What aspects of the characters seemed flat or stereotypical?
Address the images. What was striking? Confusing?

Editorial suggestions

- We are not expected to *fix* someone's work, or rewrite it to fit our own voice, style & aesthetic. We are looking closely at the work itself: its intentions, its successes, its possibilities, its craft.

COURSE WORK & GRADING

Participation & Attendance (30%)

Come to class on time and participate in exchange of ideas in class discussions, that's all it takes. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Each unexcused absence beyond that will drop your grade automatically a third of a grade (A to A-, B+ to B.) Showing up to class more than 20 minutes late without a care in the world and without a plausible reason counts as an unexcused absence. For excused absences and excused lateness, please let me know immediately.

Workshop Submissions & Reading Responses (30%)

- The class will be divided into three workshop groups. and each workshop group will workshop three times over the course of the semester; genre-specific: poetry, fiction and memoir. The first workshop will be on poems, the second on fiction and the third memoir. Each workshop group is expected to submit their work to the class via email the Sunday before their workshop week. You are also welcome to pass out workshop materials in class a week ahead of time.
- You will come to class every Wednesday with a short written response to the assigned reading. Please write at least 2 paragraphs, but no more than 1 double-spaced page. On days when there are two assigned readings, your response should address how they relate to each other. On days when there are more than two assigned readings, please pick two of them to compare. You may refer to these responses during our discussion, but you must hand them in at the end of the class period. They will be handed back to you at the end of term.

Office Hours Consultation (10%)

Please schedule two office hour meeting with me. This is an opportunity for you to ask me whatever you like about what we have covered in class, anything you are struggling with that pertains to craft & writing elements or wondering about. I would like to be a resource to you.

Recitation: (5%) - You will memorize a poem and then recite it for the class. It is a lost art. My Russian-speaking mother did it as a Russian Literature & Language student at university in the Urals, and at 86, she recites pages of poetry from memory. Impressive!

Outside Reading Attendance: (5%)

There are readings happening across the city every week. The NYU CWP has an outstanding reading series every semester (these readings tend to be Thursday and Friday evenings), and there are readings at bookstores in all boroughs. Attend a reading this semester and write a page about the experience, the writing you heard, and the performance you saw or you might be inspired to write a poem. **Check out this poem: KGB, the Reading, Gerald Stern on Brightspace!**

Final Portfolio (20%)

A collection of all workshop pieces, which are to be revised before the conclusion of the semester

COURSE POLICIES

Plagiarism

is unacceptable under any circumstances. Both NYU & I have zero tolerance for it. Any evidence of plagiarism will prompt disciplinary action. If you are struggling with an assignment, please reach out to me and together we will find a way out.

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 register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, or at 726 Broadway (2nd floor) or at 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.

Required Texts

The Elements of Style, Strunk & White

Lolita, Vladimir Nabokov – against censorship, the importance of a dangerous text. *(Trigger Warning: the text contains graphic, morally disturbing and reprehensible sexual content; relationship (rape, sexual assault) between an adult man and a 12-year old girl); this is mid-20th Century's crowning literary achievement in the English language and it is for that reason I am including it in the required reading texts.

Lolita in the Afterlife, Essays, edited by Jenny Minton Quigley

Required Film:

Stalker, Andrei Tarkovsky

Excerpts/Selections ON BRIGHTSPACE, HANDOUTS

First Love, Turgenev

Break it Down, Lydia Davis

The Collected Stories, Lydia Davis

The Minks, Captivity, Toi Derricotte

Gut, Amanda Larson

Why I teach Lolita, Anne Dwyer, associate professor of Russian at Pomona College. [Teaching 'Lolita' is still appropriate \(opinion\) \(insidehighered.com\)](#)

[Professor explores teaching Nabokov's 'Lolita' in the #MeToo era | College of Liberal Arts | RIT](#), Elena Rakhimova-Sommers, principal lecturer in RIT's Department of English.

[Sick, Scandalous, Spectacular: The First Reviews of Lolita Book Marks](#), Lit Hub

Excerpts from:

Lice, Mervin

The Crow, Hughes

The Naturalist, Seamus Heaney

Close to me & Closer(*The Language of Heaven and Desamere*, Alice Notley

Stolen Air Mandelstam's poetry, Chris Wiman

Imitations, Robert Lowell

Desire, Bidart

Geography III, Elizabeth Bishop

The Performance of Becoming Human, Daniel Borzutzky

Never Let Me Be Lonely, Claudia Rankine

Blood Dazzler, Patricia Smith

Cathedral, Carver

All of Us Complete Poems, Raymond Carver

Harmonium, Wallace Stevens

Lady with Lap Dog, Chekhov

Odes, Sharon Olds

The Odes, Pablo Neruda

Tape for the Turn of the Year, AR Ammons

The Sonnets, Ted Berrigan

Bonsai, Alejandro Zambra's debut novel

Lost Time, Lectures on Time Josef Czapski

Look, Solmaz Sharif

Felon, Reginald Dwayne Betts

Faithful and Virtuous Night, Louise Gluck

Never Let Me Go, Kazuo Ishiguro

Speak Memory, Nabokov

Mourning Diary, Roland Barthes

Elegy, Larry Levis

Everything and Nothing, an essay on Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Memory, short story written in 1982. Luis Borges

Nights & Days, James Merrill
The Triggering Town, Richard Hugo
Rhyme's Reason, John Hollander
The Necessary Angel, Essays on Reality and the Imagination, Wallace Stevens
Aspects of the Novel, E. M. Forster
This Craft of Verse, Jorge Luis Borges
Writers on Writing, Susan Sontag

Class Schedule

Day 1

OVERVIEW: POETRY/FICTION/MEMOIR
THE CREATIVE INSTINCT
Wednesday, September 7
Introductions, Syllabus, Workshop Groups

Readings due:

Selections from *The Triggering Town*, Richard Hugo, *Writers on Writing*, Susan Sontag, *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster
of Us, collected poems, Raymond Carver *they are narratives, or still lifes rendered with forensic scrutiny*

Week 1

Monday, September 12

COLLAGE & HISTORICAL/MYTH POEMS

Readings due: selections from, *The Sonnets*, Ted Berrigan (various collage poems), *Desire*, Frank Bidart, *The Second Hour of the Night* p.27, a long poem about a forbidden love Myrrha had for her father King Cinyras. The gods transformed her into the myrrh-tree. Out of the bark of the tree, the baby Adonis was born. It is a Greek myth that is in book 10 in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Myrrha and Cinyras. Bidart's *speaker starts with Berlioz's long opera Troyens (The Trojans)* about Aeneas & Dido from Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Email Syllabus due

Workshop Etiquette: The dos & don'ts

Wednesday, September 14

You will make a collage poem, your first creative work!

Due for today's class: in-class work. Make a collage of your own poem or someone else's. Bring cut up lines to class.

Office Hours sign up due: in office hours, we will talk about your translations and what impact it has on writing.

Week 2

Monday, September 19

Email me the original, and poems in translation.

Readings due: selections from: *Felon*, Reginald Dwayne Betts, *Faithful and Virtuous Night*, Louise Gluck, *Blood Dazzler*, Patricia Smith, *Close to me & Closer (The Language of Heaven)* and *Desamere*, Alice Notley

THE LINE (LINEATION)

THE USE OF THE LINE & USING WHITE SPACE,

ENJAMBMENT

As poet Dana Gioia, pronounced Joya, writes, “The most obvious difference between prose and verse is [the line] lineation.” The poetic [method] consists almost entirely of [using] the expressive possibilities of [the line] lineation as a formal principle to communicate and intensify meaning.

One of the three common principles of organization for the poetic line is its visual expression on the page: metrical, syntactic.

Every element in a poem — every word, line break, stanza pattern, indentation, even all punctuation—work together in the service of expressive meaning, [texture & tone].

As a chief organizing principle of verse, the line & where it breaks isn’t neutral. [It is intentional].

Wednesday, September 21

WORKSHOP GROUP 1

GROUP 2 WORKSHOP MATERIALS DUE BY EMAIL

MIDNIGHT SUNDAY 9/25 .

Week 3

Monday, September 26

Direct Speech vs. Elevated Poetic Language

Readings due: NY School, San Francisco Renaissance poem selections: Eileen Miles, Spicer, O’Hara, Schuyler

Wednesday, September 28

WORKSHOP GROUP 2

GROUP 3 WORKSHOP MATERIALS DUE BY EMAIL

MIDNIGHT SUNDAY 10/2 .

Week 4
Monday, October 3

Due reading: selections from Lowell's *Imitations, Stolen Air* Mandelstam's poetry, Chris Wiman, *Odes to Common Things*, Pablo Neruda. *Odes*, Sharon Olds. [Paris Review - The Art of Poetry No. 86 \(theparisreview.org\)](http://theparisreview.org) Richard Howard.

Translations due: of 2 poems of your choice from *Odes Common Things from Spanish to English* by Pablo Neruda
Imitations, Adaptations & Replicas: What is Gained & Lost in Translation, What is an ode?

Wednesday, October 5

WORKSHOP GROUP 3
GROUP 1 WORKSHOP MATERIALS DUE BY EMAIL
MIDNIGHT SUNDAY 10/9 .

Week 5
Monday, October 10

NO CLASS
FALL BREAK CLASS MEETS THE FOLLOWING DAY,
TUESDAY OCTOBER 11

Tuesday, October 11

READINGS DUE:
selections from: Robert Lax & more poets **TDB.**

Against Meaning Making, Language poets, What is the function of the Author?

Wednesday, October 12

WORKSHOP GROUP 1
GROUP 2 WORKSHOP MATERIALS DUE BY EMAIL
MIDNIGHT SUNDAY 10/16 .

Week 6
Monday, October 17

READINGS DUE: selections from: *The Minks, Captivity*, Toi Derricotte, *Never Let Me Be Lonely*, Claudia Rankine
Elegy, Larry, Levis, *All of Us Complete Poems*, Raymond Carver

Autobiographical & Persona: Drawing from Personal Experience, Write It! Make it up or Lie. Draw from the imagination, using the tools of tools of fiction writers.

Wednesday, October 19

WORKSHOP GROUP 2
GROUP 3 WORKSHOP MATERIALS DUE BY EMAIL
MIDNIGHT SUNDAY 10/23.

Week 7

Monday, October 24

Readings due:

Eco Poetics: selections from: *Lice*, M.S. Mervin, *I Burned at the Feast*, Arseny Tarkovsky (Andrei Tarkovsky's father), *The Crow*, Hughes *The Naturalist*, Seamus Heaney

Wednesday, October 26

WORKSHOP GROUP 3
GROUP 3 WORKSHOP MATERIALS DUE BY EMAIL
MIDNIGHT SUNDAY 10/30.

Week 8

Monday, October 31

Readings due: *Break it Down*, winner of the 2013 Man Booker International Prize, Lydia Davis. One-sentence fiction (handout), "Everything and Nothing," an essay on Shakespeare. "Shakespeare's Memory," short story written in 1982. Luis Borges, Argentine short story writer, poet and essayist. "Notes on Narrative" - Darin Strauss
Metafiction & one-sentence fiction: Magical Realism – Transition to Fiction

Wednesday, November 2

WORKSHOP GROUP 1
GROUP 2 WORKSHOP MATERIALS DUE BY EMAIL
MIDNIGHT SUNDAY 11/6.

Week 9

Monday, November 7

Readings due: *Lolita*, Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita in the Afterlife*, Essays, edited by Jenny Minton Quigley
Dangerous Love, Against Censorship, reading *Lolita*, An American Girl.

Monday, November 9	WORKSHOP GROUP 2 GROUP 3 WORKSHOP MATERIALS DUE BY EMAIL MIDNIGHT SUNDAY 11/13.
Week 10 Monday, November 14	Readings due: selections from, <i>Bonsai</i> , Alejandro Zambra's debut novel, two young lovers lie to one another about having read Proust.
Wednesday, November 16	WORKSHOP GROUP 3
Week 11 Monday, November 21	Memoir Readings due: selections from: <i>Speak, Memory</i> , Vladimir Nabokov, <i>Lost Time</i> , <i>Lectures on Proust in a Soviet Prison Camp</i> by Josef Szapski, <i>the black notebooks</i> , <i>an interior journey</i> , <i>Toi Derricotte</i> , <i>Mourning Diary</i> , Roland Barthes
Wednesday, November 23	NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK
Week 12 Monday, November 28	FILM due: <i>Stalker</i> , Andrei Tarkovsky Class Discussion of the film in relation to eco-poetics, climate change, nuclear apocalypse.
Wednesday, November 30	Workshop: In-class work on Final Portfolio.
Week 13 Monday, December 5	Readings due: selections from: <i>Never Let Me Go</i> , Kazuo Ishiguro
Wednesday, December 7	In-class work on Final Portfolio.

Week 14

Monday, December 12

Readings due:

First Love, Turgenev

On Love

Wednesday, December 14th **LAST CLASS. Portfolio Readings, final questions,
CELEBRATE EACH OTHER!**

Wednesday, December 14th **Final Portfolios due by midnight via email!**