

In a Flash! –Alchemy & Revenge
Creative Writing: Intro to Prose & Poetry
J-Term 2023 Tuesday through Friday | 2:00 PM - 4:45 PM

Thea Matthews

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM

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In a Flash! –Alchemy & Revenge is a four-unit course during which students will understand as well as practice the alchemy of art by studying the techniques of transforming circumstances, observations, memories, and emotions into creative literary expressions that not only emanate a newfound beauty but also transcend the source of creation. Adjacent to alchemy is revenge! Author and winner of the 2020 Nobel Prize in Literature Louise Glück is quoted as saying, *Writing is a kind of revenge against circumstance too: bad luck, loss, pain. If you make something out of it, then you've no longer been bested by these events.* With alchemy and revenge, comes resiliency, a deeper sense of power found deep within the writer. With the dance of poetry, short stories, and flash fiction, students will study fundamentals in poetry and prose, as well as focus on applying learned techniques to originally drafted work.

Required Texts:

Required texts will be available through BrightSpace. We will read a host of authors including Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Gwendolyn Brooks, James Wright, Allen Ginsberg, Thomas Merton, Layli Long Soldier, Galway Kinnell, Ai, Patricia Smith, Frank Bidart, Jericho Brown, Natalie Diaz, Diana Khoi Nguyen, Terrance Hayes, Diane Seuss, Melissa Range, Bob Kaufman, Sharon Olds, Ocean Vuong, Amaud Jamaul Johnson, Brigit Pegeen Kelly, Solmaz Sharif, James Baldwin, Zora Neal Hurston, Deb Olin Unferth, George Saunders, Lucy Corin, Sofia Samatar, Jamaica Kincaid, and László Krasznahorkai.

OPTIONAL but strongly recommended:

The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth-Century American Poetry, edited by Rita Dove (Penguin, 2013)

Requirements:

Participation

Attend all classes on time, be prompt and prepared to engage in class— having read the assigned reading, as well as classmates’ creative writing on the assigned days of sharing for workshop. You are expected to participate in all of the in-class discussions, generative writing exercises, and time to provide feedback to your peers’ creative writing drafts in workshop. When your time comes for sharing original work, you are expected to bring copies of your work for the class. And if absent, it is your responsibility to get the missed assignments and notes from a classmate.

Reading Presentations

Each student will be assigned to begin the class discussion on reading(s) of the day before with at least five talking points that interweave the reading with a focus on how literary devices are used, the syntax, structure, and themes in the content. You will receive your assignments ahead of time.

Reading Responses

Based on the assigned reading, you are expected to write one full page, single-spaced, 12-sized font, Times New Roman to demonstrate your critical engagement with the text, describing in depth at least three literary devices found in the reading. The Reading Responses are due at 2:00pm each day starting Wednesday, January 4th to Wednesday, January 18th (A total of nine Reading Responses are due over the course of the class.)

Quizzes

Over the course of our time together, there will be four in-class quizzes issued to test your knowledge and retention of the literary art lexicon.

Workshop

National Book Award winner Robin Coste Lewis notes that “[t]he unspoken goal of any workshop is to help you develop your ability to observe and then offer, again, rigorous and generative criticism.”

Workshops will be in a discussion model, and I will closely guide them. The premise of workshoping is to uplift. Uplift. Uplift. And how to do that is to respectfully state what you observe, what literary devices are implemented, and what themes are found within the content. For example, the poem is arranged in quatrains, there is a strong use of *anaphora*, of *alliteration*, and there are themes of familial trauma. Then, after describing observations, you can point out where you see are potential areas of opportunity for revision to help strengthen the submitted prose/poetry as a question of curiosity.

Remember, workshop is the time for critical engagement and support, not an interrogation of how you want your peers to write. This is not a time to “defend” your work, but as the author, you get to be open to possibilities of revision and yet, you need to know what you want for your prose/poetry. This is also not a time to attack another’s work due to any fixed idea/opinion or personalization, but rather, as a listener and peer, you get to objectively observe work in order to provide help that could potentially enhance the poem’s qualities.

Workshop is great for the revision process for we are reminded of the endless possibilities for our work.

The work you submit for workshop will be generated from in-class writing exercises and prompts.

Important to Note:

Prompts are used to a diving board, not something to be enslaved by, so you are encouraged to let your poem or prose roam and deviate from the exercise if need be.

Due to class time constraints, I ask that each of you write your comments, questions, and wonders on your copy of your classmates' drafted work.

Final Portfolio

Through a portfolio of originally drafted creative writing, your "final exam" will be your application of knowledge based on the reading, in-class discussions, and techniques used to unfold a story, illustrate a complex emotion/situation, and the like. The quality will be based on your intentionality and demonstrable literary devices embedded in your original work.

Ten pages will be due on Friday, January 20th. The portfolio needs to consist of three to five poems, and two to five prose or flash fiction.

Attendance:

As stated above, unless excused, students must attend every class and participate. Students must arrive to class on time and be prepared. If there is an emergency or illness, students are to email me beforehand. More than one unexcused absence will negatively impact the student's grade.

Grading:

Attendance/Participation: 25%
Reading Presentations: 25%
Reading Responses: 20%
Quizzes: 10%
Final Portfolio: 20%

NO PLAGIARISM. STUDENTS WILL BE PENALIZED. HAVE INTEGRITY.
THANK YOU. For more information, please visit [here](#).

Student Accommodations:

New York University assists in determining and providing reasonable accommodations, as well as resources to students, to provide equal educational opportunity and participation for all students. For more information, please visit [here](#).

Tentative Class Schedule:

Week 1

Tuesday, January 3

Introduction to course expectations and community agreements. Overview of the course reader. In-class reading and discussion of “Something To Do” by Zadie Smith and “What It Is I Think I’m Doing Anyhow” by Toni Cade Bambara. In-class writing exercises. Assign Reading Presentation schedule.

Wednesday, January 4

Reading Response Due

Reading Presentation and class discussion of yesterday’s text– Federico García Lorca’s “The Duende: Theory and Divertissement.” (I will lead this one to illustrate expectations). In-class reading and discussion of fundamental literary devices used in Prose and “Why I Write” by Reginald Shepherd. In-class writing exercises.

Thursday, January 5

Reading Response Due

Warm-up writing exercise. Reading Presentation and class discussion of yesterday’s text– “Sweat” by Zora Neal Hurston and “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin. In-class reading and discussion of fundamental literary devices used in Poetry and an excerpt from Baldwin’s *Jimmy’s Blues & Other Poems*. In-class writing exercises.

Friday, January 6

Reading Response Due | Quiz 1

Warm-up writing exercise. Reading Presentation and class discussion of yesterday’s text– “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid and “Likeable” by Deb Olin Unferth. In-class reading and discussion of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Marianne Moore. In-class writing exercises.

Week 2

Tuesday, January 10

Reading Response Due

Warm-up writing exercise. Reading Presentation and class discussion of yesterday’s text–Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Sharon Olds. Review the lexicon–glossary terminology–of literature. In-class reading and discussion of Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Solmaz Sharif. In-class writing exercises.

Wednesday, January 11

Reading Response Due | Quiz 2

Warm-up writing exercise. Reading Presentation and class discussion of yesterday’s text–“I Don’t Need Anything from Here” by László Krasznahorkai and “Five Stories” by Lydia Davis. In-class reading and discussion of Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg, Thomas Merton, and Bob Kaufman. In-class writing exercises.

Thursday, January 12

Reading Response Due

Warm-up writing exercise. Reading Presentation and class discussion of yesterday's text- James Wright, Galway Kinnell, and Brigit Pegeen Kelly. In-class reading and discussion of Frank Bidart, Patricia Smith, Ai, and Amaud Jamaul Johnson. In-class writing exercise. Workshop.

Friday, January 13

Reading Response Due | Quiz 3

Warm-up writing exercise. Reading Presentation and class discussion of Ocean Vuong's debut novel, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* and his poem "Aubade with Burning City." In-class reading and discussion of Layli Long Soldier, Natalie Diaz, and Diana Khoi Nguyen. In-class writing exercises. Workshop.

Week 3

Tuesday, January 17

Reading Response Due

Warm-up writing exercise. Reading Presentation and class discussion of yesterday's text- "Sticks" by George Saunders and "Miracles" by Lucy Corin. In-class reading and discussion of Wanda Coleman, Terrance Hayes, and Diane Seuss. In-class writing exercises. Workshop.

Wednesday, January 18

Reading Response Due | Quiz 4

Warm-up writing exercise. Reading Presentation and class discussion of yesterday's text- "The Huntress" by Sofia Samatar. In-class reading and discussion of Andrea Cohen, Melissa Range, and Jericho Brown. In-class writing exercises. Workshop.

Thursday, January 19

Warm-up writing exercise. Review and discuss craft choices and literary devices in prose and poetry. Workshop.

Friday, January 20

Celebrate with Lucille Clifton. In-class writing exercise. Closing discussion on class experience. Student reading—each student will read ~five minutes, either poetry, prose, or both written this semester. Turn in final portfolios.