

## Introduction to Prose and Poetry Spring 2024

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Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30–1:45 p.m.

18 Washington Place, Rm. LL03

“A writer is someone who pays attention to the world.”

—Susan Sontag

### Course Overview

To write, you need to read, and when you read, you start to get addicted to writing... This is a class that will serve as an introduction to many different styles of writing, from many different parts of the world and time periods. Most of the readings are excerpts or short works that will be provided by myself. We will pair these readings with a weekly workshop in which you can dive into writing poetry, prose, or anything in between. By the end of the semester, you will have been exposed to some wildly different writers, produced some work of your own, and will have heightened your own sense of paying attention to the world!

### Office Hours

I will hold weekly office hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Please email me ahead of time to schedule a session. Before the end of the semester, you are required to meet me for office hours at least once.

### Grading

Attendance: 20% Participation: 20% Midterm Assignment: 10%

Workshop Submissions: 10% Written feedback for classmates: 20%

Final Portfolio: 20%

### Attendance

In order to best respond to our peers' work, we have to be present in class. Attendance is, consequently, very important. You are allowed one unexcused absence; any unexcused absence after that will result in a lowered grade.

### Midterm Assignment

Halfway through the semester, you will turn in a midterm assignment analyzing the craft of one of the pieces we've read in class. Treat it like a book review: what do you think the goal of the writer is? How does the text support this analysis? The assignment's word count should be 1000 to 1200 words.

### Written feedback

For every workshop, please provide line edits on the page for the writer. You will also be responsible for writing a letter to the writer explaining what you think is or is not working, and suggestions and edits that might be helpful. Please keep in mind that writing can be a delicate task, and drafting especially so—be respectful, thoughtful, and engaged. You should bring two copies of your letters, one for me and one for the writer.

### **Workshop submission**

We will workshop two writers per class, so everyone can go twice this semester. I encourage you to submit once in prose and once in poetry, even if you find yourself more comfortable in one genre over the other. For prose, submissions should not exceed fifteen pages (ten to fifteen pages would be ideal). For poetry, submit two to four poems. Remember to number your pages, and please bring in paper copies for everyone in the class a week before your assigned slot.

### **Final Portfolio**

At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio composed of your two workshop submissions, your midterm, and a final assignment consisting of one 1500-to-2000-word review of a work of fiction or poetry of your choice. Like the midterm assignment, this final assignment should be approached like a book review, rather than an academic paper.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism will result in an instant failure of the class. Please refer to NYU's plagiarism policy in the student handbook for more information.

### **Technology**

In order to provide a productive and distraction-free environment, my classroom is a no-screens classroom. This means that all phones, tablets, and computers should be stowed away. We'll be working off of hard copies of the readings that I will provide, though you will be required to purchase one text and to read it in full: Georges Perec's *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. Please bring a notebook and pen or pencil for notetaking.

If you require an accommodation on this front, please let me know and we'll work out an arrangement.

### **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.

## **Week One**

Tuesday, January 23

Introductions, syllabus review, workshop overview and sign-ups.

Thursday, January 25

Form and fiction—how do we begin? What *shape* might a novel take, versus a short story? And how can we set this up from the very first page? We'll read a selection of brief, vivid beginnings excerpted from a number of works and complete an in-class exercise in which we write ten possible beginning lines.

Readings:

1. Excerpted beginning of *Madame Bovary*, Gustave Flaubert, translated by Lydia Davis (1856)
2. Excerpted beginning of *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison (1952)
3. Excerpted beginning of *The Lover*, Marguerite Duras, translated by Barbara Bray (1984)
4. Excerpted beginning of "Aloeswood Incense: The First Brazier," Eileen Chang, translated by Karen S. Kingsbury (1943)

In-class writing exercise: Compose ten first lines for possible short stories or novels.

## **Week Two**

Tuesday, January 30

Setting and physical detail—how do we capture a place? How might the physical description of a room lend meaning and weight to our writing?

Readings:

1. *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, Georges Perec, translated by Marc Lowenthal (1982)

Writing exercise: Pick an object in the classroom. Write a deep description of it, attempting to “exhaust” it.

Thursday, February 1

First workshop.

### **Week Three**

Tuesday, February 6

Characters—how do we accurately render a person on the page? In this class, we’ll examine how characters can be used in a *realistic* way or an *allegorical* way, and how that might appear in various works, by comparing and contrasting two major and very, very different twentieth-century writers.

Readings:

1. “I want to be shallow!” Elfriede Jelinek, translated by Jorn Bramann (1983)
2. Excerpt from *Aspects of the Novel*, E. M. Forster, concerning “flat” versus “round” characters (1927)
3. Excerpt from *Wonderful, Wonderful Times*, Elfriede Jelinek, translated by Michael Hulse (1980)
4. Excerpt from *Howards End*, E. M. Forster (1910)

Thursday, February 8

Workshop.

### **Week Four**

Tuesday, February 13

Point of view and voice—how do we choose between first, second, or third person in our prose? And how might this decision effect how the text itself *sounds*, *moves*, and is structured on the page?

Readings:

1. First person example: “Under the Ackee Tree,” Jonathan Escoffery (2019)
2. Second person example: Excerpt from *If on a Winter Night’s A Traveler...*, Italo Calvino, translated by William Weaver (1982)
3. Third person example: “End of a Struggle,” Amparo Dávila, translated by Matthew Gleeson and Audrey Harris (2009)

Writing exercise:

Write one paragraph of the same subject, scene, etc, but as told in first, second, and third person.

Thursday, February 15

Workshop.

## **Week Five**

Tuesday, February 20

Dialogue—how do we imitate human speech on the page? And how can dialogue work to move along a plot, reveal or veil information, or otherwise enhance a work?

Readings:

1. “Hills Like White Elephants,” Ernest Hemingway (1927)
2. Excerpt from *Three*, Ann Quin (1966)
3. Excerpt from *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Manuel Puig, translated by Thomas Colchie (1976)

Writing exercise:

Imagine you are eavesdropping on a conversation in public. Write a scene in which that dialogue reveals a crucial bit of information.

Thursday, February 22

Workshop.

Tuesday, February 27

Time in fiction—how do we render time on the page? When do we allow it to contract or expand, and how can we use time so as to heighten a moment of tension, highlight a theme, slow down on a character, and more?

Readings:

1. Excerpt from *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf (1925)
2. Excerpt from *Chinatown*, Thuan, translated by Nguyen An Ly (2022)

Thursday, February 29

Workshop.

## **Week Six**

Tuesday, March 5

Plot and structure—how do we approach the action of a story, and balance it with the other balls in the air (character, language, etc) we’re juggling as writers?

Readings:

1. “Rashomon,” Ryunosuke Akutagawa, translated by Ivan Morris (1915)
2. TK

Thursday, March 7

Workshop.

### **Week Seven**

Tuesday, March 12

Allegory, parable, and experiments—how can we use different modes of fiction to explore thematic questions, to step away from straightforward realism, and more?

Readings:

1. “A Hunger Artist,” Franz Kafka, translated by TK (1922)
2. Excerpt from *Flights*, Olga Tokarczuk, translated by Jennifer Croft (2007)
3. Excerpt from *Self-Portrait in Green*, Marie Ndiaye, translated by Jordan Stump (2005)

Thursday, March 14

Workshop. MIDTERM ASSIGNMENT DUE!

### **Week Eight**

SPRING BREAK

### **Week Nine**

Tuesday, March 26

Form and structure of a poem, part one—how does the poet decide on what form to use? How might the structure of a poem influence its meaning?

Readings:

1. “In the Station of the Metro,” Ezra Pound (1913)
2. “One Art,” Elizabeth Bishop (1976)
3. “American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin [“I lock you in an American sonnet that is part prison”],” Terrance Hayes (2017)
4. TK from *Midwood* by Jana Prikryl (2022)

Thursday, March 28

Workshop.

### **Week Ten**

Tuesday, April 2

Form and structure of a poem, part two—a continuation of looking at form.

Readings:

1. “Mantis,” Louis Zukofsky (1935)
2. “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket,” Robert Lowell (1947)
3. “Identity Check,” Hans Magnus Enzensberger, translated by the author (1980)

Thursday, April 4

Workshop.

### **Week Eleven**

Tuesday, April 9

Imagery in poems

Readings:

1. “Oread,” H. D. (1914)
2. TK by Alejandra Pizarnik, translated by Yvette Siegert (1962–1972)
3. “Eating Poetry,” Mark Strand (1979)
4. TK by Kim Hyesoon, translated by Don Mee Choi

Thursday, April 11

Workshop.

### **Week Twelve**

Tuesday, April 16

Ekphrasis—how might poetry incorporate the visual, how might words be applied to art? And what can the visual arts teach us, too?

Readings:

1. “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin, translated by TK (1935)
2. “Musée des Beaux Arts,” W. H. Auden (1938)
3. “ex patria,” Evie Shockley (2019)

Writing exercise: Choose a work of visual art from the examples I will provide in class, and write a brief poem based on or about it.

Thursday, April 18

Workshop.

### **Week Thirteen**

Tuesday, April 23

Space on the page—how does the poem *look*? How does it take advantage of a blank page and its layout?

Readings:

1. “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children,” Adrienne Rich (1968)
2. TK by Shane McCrae
3. TK by Monica Youn

Thursday, April 25

Workshop.

### **Week Fourteen**

Tuesday, April 30

Sound—what does the poem sound like when read aloud? How might a poet think of the rhythms, rhyme sequences, etc., when writing their poem? How might they incorporate musicality?

Readings:

1. “Her Kind,” Anne Sexton, paired with Sexton’s 1971 reading of the poem at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y.
2. “I Love Music (For John Coltrane),” Amiri Baraka, paired with Baraka’s 1982 recording of the poem performed with the free jazz group Air.

Thursday, May 2

Final portfolios due! Final class. We’ll celebrate!