Introduction to Creative Writing

Instructor: Timothy Michalik
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T/Th 12:30pm-1:45pm
Office Hours TBD

“I’m afraid to write. It’s so dangerous. Anyone who’s tried, knows. The danger of stirring up hidden things—and the world is not on the surface, it’s hidden in its roots submerged in the depths of the sea. In order to write I must place myself in the void. In this void is where I exist intuitively.”
— Clarice Lispector

Course Overview:
Wherever you’re coming from—avid reader or writer or not—you are beyond welcome here. This course will help you establish a foundational knowledge of how prose and poetry work through readings, discussions, exercises, and workshops. This is a safe, inclusive environment for taking yourself seriously as the writer you are and will become. It will be a time to explore and expand your tastes in literature—ideally coming out with new perspectives and a nice bank of literary knowledge to pull from going forwards. What makes a story? What makes a poem? Why write? What am I supposed to do with all of this? These are the questions we will be asking and finding answers to throughout the semester. As we construct a strong foundation we will put this into practice by generating written work. And through all of that, find out what makes us us and how we can put that to words. This is a time to roll up your sleeves and try your best.

Course Structure:
This is a composite of craft and workshop—with craft we will discuss the assigned readings and break them down to see how they function and offer honest opinions and evaluations in class. You are expected to produce 4 pieces of writing for workshop (1 short story, 1 poem, and 2 of your choice) which will be workshopped by the class. This is an active reading course; reading and interacting with the assigned texts is a must. On Tuesdays we will alternate between prose and poetry, and practice various techniques and approaches through writing exercises depending on the weekly theme; Thursdays are workshops, where we will analyze and talk through student work.

You are encouraged to speak your honest opinions about the assigned readings—did you love it? Hate it? Did it make you miss a place? Do you feel connected to yourself, or likewise a stranger to yourself? Do you feel like your head has been removed and gas is leaking out of your spine? Have fun. Offer solid rebuttals. We aren’t supposed to agree on all of this—we all come from different walks of life filled with idiosyncratic experiences. This is how we learn about those, and each other.

Grading:
Attendance and Participation — 40%
Submissions — 20%
Response papers — 20%
Portfolio — 15%
Notebook — 5%
Attendance and Participation:
Fuel to a fun, elastic classroom. Showing up and participating means everything. This course uses a model of trust and expects responsibility as a reader, writer, student, and classmate. In class we can work through ideas, (through the ideas of ourselves and others about anything) ones we’ve been hanging on to, those in response to the readings and your classmate’s work. We are here to both familiarize and defamiliarize ourselves with how we experience and interact with the world.

Submissions:
You will be assigned to one of three workshop groups. You are required to submit your work to the class email chain by 8 pm on Friday before workshop. Please bring two printed copies of each piece being workshopped for that day—one for me, one for whoever is workshopping. For the assigned group, make sure you bring a copy for yourself, as you will be asked to read aloud for the class before we workshop your piece.
- Poetry — 1-2 pages
- Fiction — 4-12 pages double-spaced

Response Papers:
Each Thursday you will be required to turn in a one page response to the assigned readings. There is no required form—it can be as formal in tone as an essay, as casual as a journal or collage of thoughts, or a creative response of any kind—you name it, so long as you show you have read and engaged with the text. Be honest. You don’t have to impress anybody. This is strictly to show how you feel about the assigned readings. Remember, we are learning to be better, more critical readers all the time.

Portfolio:
Revision is everything. Over the course of the semester, you will take into consideration the critiques of your workshop pieces and revise each one for a final portfolio that you turn in the second to last week of class. You will not be graded on “quality” or “talent.” All you are required to do is thoughtfully consider your workshop pieces and tune them up before submitting them back to me.

Notebook:
Pay attention—it’s what makes good writing, noticing the minute details in everyday life. You will keep a journal over the course of the semester and each week we will use a handful of your favorite entries for in-class writing exercises. This will also give you a chance to keep a log of images, memories, overheard dialogue, etc. to use in later work.

Office Hours:
You are expected to meet with me at least once for office hours during the semester. Here we can check in with your progress as a writer and reader, but also allow you a safe space to talk about whatever’s been interesting you lately. I can meet after class on Tuesdays or Thursdays.

Attendance, Tardiness:
After two unexcused absences your grade will be marked down for every missed class and every time you’re late. Class is short. Please be on time and ready to work. I know you’re busy—college can feel
very overwhelming sometimes. If you run into a scheduling issue, just talk to me. While we all have jobs to do, we are also people, too. The last thing I want is for you to feel stressed or overwhelmed.

Workshop—Notes on Etiquette and Mutual Respect:
It cannot be stressed enough how important nurturing a safe, respectful environment is when it comes to writing workshops. This is a place where you will build trust with your peers and I. We will follow the golden rule of treating others how we wish to be treated. We will look at each other's work with a compassionate eye, approaching each individual piece with the utmost aesthetic and creative integrity. Think of this as a place to ethically discuss and dissect the complicated nature of literature that you and your peers have made.

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
Website: 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.

Plagiarism:
There is a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism—any and all instances will be immediately reported to the department.

Required Texts:
All texts will be uploaded to a Google Drive folder I will share with you in advance.

OUTLINE FOR SEMESTER:

WEEK 1: Introductions and Asking Ourselves Why We Write
T 1/24
— “On Keeping a Notebook” by Joan Didion
— “The Nature of the Fun” by David Foster Wallace
— “Why I Write” by George Orwell
— “How to Write With Style” by Kurt Vonnegut

TH 1/26
— Mock workshop

WEEK 2: The Shape of a Story
T 1/31
— “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried” by Amy Hempel
— Selections from the Collected Stories of Lydia Davis
— “Car Crash While Hitchhiking” by Denis Johnson

TH 2/2
Workshop Group 1

WEEK 3: Towards Writing Feeling
T 2/7
— poems by Eileen Myles, Ross Gay, Richard Siken, Etheridge Knight, Jenny Zhang, Hera Lindsay Bird, Frank O’Hara, Linda Gregg; selections from Maggie Nelson’s “Bluets”

TH 2/9
Workshop Group 2

WEEK 4: Prose Styling
T 2/14
— selected stories by Clarice Lispector
— excerpts from I Love Dick by Chris Kraus
— selected stories by Garielle Lutz
— excerpt from The Lover by Marguerite Duras

TH 2/16
Workshop Group 3

WEEK 5: Poetry as Autobiography
T 2/21
— poems by David Berman, Johannes Göransson, John Keene, Alejandra Pizarnik, Anne Carson, Frank Stanford, Dodie Bellamy, Joe Brainard, Diane Seuss, Lucille Clifton, Mark Turcotte

TH 2/23
Workshop Group 1

WEEK 6: Time Time Time is On My Side!
T 2/28
— “Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff
— “Garden of Forking Paths” by Jorge Luis Borges
— “Videotape” by Don DeLillo

TH 3/2

**Workshop Group 2**

**WEEK 7: Brevity I (Poetry)**
T 3/7
— poems by Lorine Neidecker, Sam Pink, Emily Dickinson, Du Fu, Robert Creeley, Gregory Orr, Sappho, Anne Carson, Robert Lax, Elaine Kahn

TH 3/9

**Workshop Group 3**

**WEEK 8: Brevity II (Prose)**
T 3/14
— selected stories by Diane Williams
— excerpts from *Aug. 9 Fog* by Kathryn Scanlan
— excerpts from *Letters to Wendy’s* by Joe Wenderoth
— “The Flowers” by Alice Walker
— “Everything is Fucked” by Zac Smith

TH 3/16

**Workshop Group 1**

**WEEK 9: Sound of Music**
T 3/21
— poems by Cathy Park Hong, Lynda Hull, Joyelle McSweeney, Aase Berg, Joshua Beckman, Graham Foust, Ariana Reines, Akasha-Mitra

TH 3/23

**Workshop Group 2**

**WEEK 10: Hypnotics / Ambient Literature**
T 3/28
— selected stories by Samuel Beckett
— excerpt from *Outline* by Rachel Cusk
— excerpt from *Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein
— excerpt from *Ghosts* by César Aira

TH 3/30

**Workshop Group 3**

**WEEK 11: Docupoetics**
T 4/4
— poems by CD Wright, CAConrad, Victoria Chang, Natalie Diaz, Don Mee Choi
TH 4/6

**Workshop Group 1**

**WEEK 12: Cinema as Literature**
T 4/11

In class free-writing exercises outside of a “textual” medium—we will view various short films and respond to them with our own written creative responses.

TH 4/13

**Workshop Group 2**

**WEEK 13: Stop Making Sense**
T 4/18

— excerpts from notable Hysterical Realism and Absurdist works. Examples will include works by Zadie Smith, David Foster Wallace, Alberto Fuguet, Phillip K Dick, etc. (TBD)

TH 4/20

**Workshop Group 3**

**WEEK 14: Translations and Experiments**
T 4/25

Translation Unit TBD

TH 4/27

**Final portfolio due**

**WEEK 15: Final Week**
T 5/2

City Sonnet Activity TBD

T 5/4

Portfolios Due; final class celebration and student reading!