INTRODUCTION TO PROSE FICTION AND POETRY
M/W 12:30 pm - 1:45 pm
CRWRI-UA.815.011

Instructor: Nikita Biswal (she/her)
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Office Hours: TBD

COURSE OVERVIEW

“Stories cull writers from the world. Stories reveal themselves to us. The public narrative, the private narrative – they colonize us. They commission us. They insist on being told.”

– Arundhati Roy, Ordinary Person's Guide To Empire (South End Press, 2004)

This course aims to unpack why we make certain choices when writing: Why do stories begin and end where they do? Why are they set in a particular place and time, and not elsewhere? Whose voice(s) are they told in, and why? And, most importantly for our purposes, what effect do these decisions have on us as writers? Through close reading of a rigorous selection of modern fiction and poetry, we will build and complicate our understanding of what stories are, how they work, and how they are made. ‘Story’ is holistic; it will serve as our point of departure to study, trouble, and occupy the cracks between prose and poetry, public and private, political and personal, and lived and imagined. Over the course of the semester, we will work on developing our own definitions of the concepts of form and style that this course introduces.

STRUCTURE

Classes comprise craft seminars on Mondays and workshops on Wednesdays. Craft seminars will consist of discussions of assigned reading and in-class writing exercises designed towards a theme. Please come to class prepared with thoughts and questions about the week’s materials. The reading for this class is designedly light to encourage close and thorough attention. The depth of our conversation and learning will depend on your keen engagement with the material and with your peers in class.

Each student will submit three pieces of writing over the course of the semester. While you are encouraged to submit at least one work of prose fiction and one of poetry, the third submission can take a form of your choice. As we will discover over the course of the semester, these categories are rarely as neatly
differentiated as we assume. In addition to workshop submissions, you will be required to write feedback letters to your peers each week with comments on their work.

You are encouraged to meet with me during office hours at least once during the semester.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Your attendance and active participation is key to the learning outcomes of this class. More than one unexcused absence will result in the reduction of your grade by a third. If you are running more than 5 minutes late, please notify me by email as soon as possible. Frequently joining class late may negatively impact your grade.

DISABILITY DISCLOSURE POLICY

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 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

This course provides an environment of academic honesty and curiosity to facilitate independent and original writing. There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. All instances will be reported to the department without exception. If you find yourself struggling with a submission, please get in touch with me.
GRADING

Attendance – 10%
In-Class Participation & Engagement – 40%
Workshop Submissions and Letters – 30%
Final Portfolio – 20%

Submissions will be graded for their originality, clarity, style, and risk-taking. A strong submission will reflect the writer’s investment and attention to grammar, spelling, punctuation, and formatting.

FINAL PORTFOLIO

Your final portfolio should consist of the following materials:

- A selection of three in-class writing assignments
- All three workshop submissions
- One revision of a submission

READING AND WRITING MATERIALS

You will be required to acquire two short novels for this course, Max Porter’s Lanny (Graywolf Press, 2019) and Deborah Levy’s Swimming Home (Bloomsbury, 2012). All other readings will be made available as PDFs.

Please bring something to write on and something to write with to class. While laptops are permitted, mobile phones must be turned off and kept away.

COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1 – INTRODUCTION

M – What Is a Story?
(1/23) Anuk Arudpragasam, excerpt from The Story of a Brief Marriage
Stephen Ira, ‘How to Wash Your Hands’

W – Beginning at the Beginning
(1/25) Jon McGregor, excerpt from Reservoir 13
Lorrie Moore, ‘People Like That Are the Only People Here’
WEEK 2 – IMAGES

M – *Making Visible*

(1/30) James Wright, ‘Small Frogs Killed on the Highway’
Elizabeth Bishop, ‘The Mothman’

W – *Making Strange*

(2/1) Ligaya Mishan, ‘Asian-American Cuisine’s Rise, and Triumph’
Vivek Narayanan, ‘Ravna’

WEEK 3 – BUILDING A WORLD I

M – *Setting in Place*

(2/6) Arundhati Roy, excerpt from *The God of Small Things*
Tishani Doshi, ‘Hope Is The Thing’

W – *Workshop*

(2/8)

WEEK 4 – BUILDING A WORLD II

M – *Setting in Time*

(2/13) George Saunders, ‘CommComm’
Hope Mirrlees, ‘Paris’

W – *Workshop*

(2/15)

WEEK 5

M – No class scheduled (President's Day)

(2/20)

W – *Workshop*

(2/22)

WEEK 6 – CHARACTERS

M – *We Meet*

(2/27) Julia Armfield, ‘The Great Awake’
Jeet Thayil, ‘Premonition’

W – *Workshop*

(3/1)

WEEK 7 – DIALOGUE

M – *When They Speak*
(3/6) Max Porter, *Lanny*

W – Workshop

(3/8)

SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9 – WORKSHOP

M – Workshop

(3/20)

W – Workshop

(3/22)

WEEK 10 – THE NARRATOR I

M – *Telling the Story*

(3/27) McKenzie, ‘We All Fall Down’
Zach Williams, ‘Wood Sorrel House’
Frank O’ Hara, ‘Having a Coke With You’

W – Workshop

(3/29)

WEEK 11 – THE NARRATOR II

M – *Telling the Story*

(3/27) Geetanjali Shree, excerpts from *Tomb of Sand*
Shehan Karunatilaka, excerpts from *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*

W – Workshop

(3/29)

WEEK 12 – PLOT & STRUCTURE

M – *Giving Shape*

(4/10) Lauren Groff, ‘The Wind’
Frank O’ Hara, ‘Mayakovsky’

W – Workshop

(4/12)

WEEK 13 – FORM

M – *Challenging Shape*

(4/17) Sharon Olds, ‘The Solution’
Jamaica Kincaid, ‘Girl’
W – Workshop
(4/19)

WEEK 14 – LANGUAGE

M – The Sentence Knows
(4/24) Nicole Sealey, ‘Object Permanence’
Milan Kundera, excerpts from The Unbearable Lightness of Being

W – Workshop
(4/26)

WEEK 15 – ENDINGS

M – Finding an Ending
(5/1) Deborah Levy, Swimming Home

W – Workshop
(5/3)

WEEK 16 – CONCLUDING

M – Why We Write
(5/8) Etel Adnan, ‘The Spring Flowers Own’
Anne Boyer, ‘Not Writing’

Student Readings