

CRWRI-UA.815.017: Introduction to Creative Writing: Poetry & Prose

Instructor: Abigail Mengesha

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Monday, Wednesday: 9:30 AM - 10:45 AM

Room: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

“I am rooted, but I flow.”

— Virginia Woolf

## Description

*Introduction to Creative Writing* is a space for literary creativity and craft. Over the course of the semester, we will have the pleasure of growing as readers and writers. By exploring a range of contemporary pieces, we will dive into the matrix of language, observe literary techniques employed by writers, and polish our writing skills. The aim of this course is to demystify writing tools and develop a regular creative practice while participating in a synergetic workshop with peers.

## Readings

Class handouts and reading packets

## Class Structure

The first half of the semester will be dedicated to poetry and the second to prose. On *Workshop Mondays*, we will usually workshop your poems and prose. Over the course of the semester, each student will submit three poems and two short stories. Pieces for workshop will be distributed the week before. *Craft Wednesdays* will be dedicated “craft” classes, where we will analyze and discuss assigned texts. Time permitting, we will end our discussions with in-class writing exercises inspired by the readings.

## Grading

**Attendance and participation: 35%**

Attendance and punctuality are mandatory. A successful workshop relies on devoted readership and thoughtful feedbacks. For this reason, you must rigorously engage with your peers’ work while remaining respectful, compassionate, and candid. Throughout the semester, you are allowed two excused absences without penalty. Each subsequent absence will result in a letter grade deduction (i.e.

A becomes an A-, B+ becomes a B, and so on). Also note that being more than ten minutes late will affect your participation grade. Three late arrivals to class will count as one absence and will affect your grade according to the outlined policy.

### **Workshop and peer critiques: 20%**

In workshop, you will be graded on the effort you put into your writing and the rigor with which you engage with your peers. To achieve the highest grade, present your best work and produce thoughtful and respectful peer critiques. For the day of workshop, students must prepare written feedback (about 5 sentences) or an annotated copy for every writer that's being workshopped. Make sure to prepare an additional copy of your critiques to submit to me. All critiques should detail the following:

- What has been observed
- Where, how, and why certain elements serve and/or undermine the piece
- Suggestions on how to make the piece stronger

### **Weekly reading responses: 20%**

You are required to submit brief critical responses (about 5 sentences) to two of the readings assigned each week. Please note that the poems and prose pieces assigned for reading are not meant to be workshopped. Instead discuss the elements you have observed within the reading. What did you enjoy (or didn't) and why? Although you'll be responding to only two assigned readings every week, you are expected to come to class having read the whole reading packet. Each response must be submitted by Tuesday at 11:59 PM.

### **Final portfolio: 25%**

At the end of the semester, each student is expected to submit all revised poems and prose in one document.

### **Extra credit (optional)**

Write a page long book review of a poetry collection or a prose volume.

## **Late Submissions**

During this course, students are allowed two extensions on peer critiques and reading responses if you let me know before the assignment's due date. Creative submissions cannot receive any extensions due to our tight workshop schedule. If you submit any late work without any notice, it won't be accepted. If you are facing extenuating circumstances, such as an illness, an accident, or an emergency, or even if you are struggling, please email me and we can figure out an appropriate plan for you. Your wellbeing is of the utmost importance.

## **Academic Integrity**

Any form of plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you submit work that is not yours, expect a failing grade and a hearing with higher academic authorities.

## **Wellness Policy**

Some of the readings we will be doing in this workshop might cover some difficult matters. As an instructor, I want to foster an environment in which every person feels respected and comfortable. If you are feeling uneasy about certain class material, please feel free to speak out. As for workshop submissions, we are going to assume the speaker or narrator is fictional unless there is explicit evidence proving otherwise. However, if I encounter content relating to depression, suicide, murder, sexual assault, etc., I will reach out and check in. If you are submitting work that might be interpreted as such, please send me an email providing context. And depending on the situation, I may request that you remove said work from workshop.

## **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. Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

## Course Outline

### *Week One*

#### **Monday, 1/24 — Introductions**

Workshop groups are assigned

#### **Wednesday, 1/26 —On Poetry**

Interviews and essays on writing poetry

Group 1 submit poems

### *Week Two*

#### **Monday, 1/31**

Workshop Group 1

#### **Wednesday, 2/2—The Senses**

“Portrait of Eve as the Anaconda” by Safiya Sinclair

“Late Summer after a Panic Attack” by Adá Limon

“Back Then” by Yusef Komunyakaa

“Before You Leave” by Ai

Group 2 submit poems

### *Week Three*

#### **Monday, 2/7**

Workshop Group 2

#### **Wednesday, 2/9—Sonic Mechanics and Echoes**

“The Bean Eaters” by Gwendolyn Brooks

“Superfluities” by Major Jackson

“Look” by Solmaz Sharif

“Black Maria” by Langston Hues

Group 1 submit poems

### *Week Four*

#### **Monday, 2/14**

Workshop Group 1

#### **Wednesday, 2/16—Cultivating Voice & Tone**

“Lady Lazarus” by Sylvia Plath

“Ode to My Whiteness” by Sharon Olds

“I am accused of tending to the past” by Lucille Clifton

“Denial” by Warsan Shire from Beyoncé’s “Hold Up” music video

Group 2 submit poems

*Week Five*

**Monday, 2/21—Presidents' Day**

No class

**Wednesday, 2/23**

Workshop Group 2

Group 1 submit poems

*Week Six*

**Monday, 2/28**

Workshop Group 1

**Wednesday, 3/2—Words and Their Order**

“One Art” by Elizabeth Bishop

“Errata” by Kevin Young

“Land” by Agha Shahid Ali

“Artless” by Brenda Shaughnessy

Group 2 submit poems

*Week Seven*

**Monday, 3/7**

Workshop Group 2

**Wednesday, 3/9—The Playful and Experimental**

“Dog Talk” by Robin Coste Lewis

Excerpt from “Ĥe Spa” by Layli Long Soldier

“From-from?” by Marwa Helal

“Ballad in A” by Cathy Park Hong

New workshop groups determined

**Spring Break**

*Week Eight*

**Monday, 3/21—Genre-bending and Bite-sized**

Excerpt from *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson

“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid

“Give It Up!” by Franz Kafka

“Seoul’s Dinner” by Kim Hyesoon

**Wednesday, 2/23—On Prose**

Interviews and essays on writing prose

Group 1 submit prose

*Week Nine*

**Monday, 3/28**

Workshop Group 1

**Wednesday, 3/30—Perspectives**

“Sweetness” by Toni Morrison

“Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

“Little Man” by Michael Cunningham

Group 2 submit prose

*Week Ten*

**Monday, 4/4**

Workshop Group 2

**Wednesday, 4/6—Individuals and Discourse**

“The Beach Boy” by Ottessa Moshfegh

Excerpts from *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong

“Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway

Group 3 submit prose

*Week Eleven*

**Monday, 4/11**

Workshop Group 3

**Wednesday, 4/13—Worlds on the Page**

“Bloodchild” by Octavia Butler

“Eyes of a Blue Dog” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

“Civil Peace” by Chinua Achebe

Group 1 submit prose

*Week Twelve*

**Monday, 4/18**

Workshop Group 1

**Wednesday, 4/20—Conflict and Progression**

“Happy Endings” by Margaret Atwood

“Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff

“My Mother’s Tongue” by Zavi Kang  
Group 2 submit prose

*Week Thirteen*

**Monday, 4/25**

Workshop Group 2

**Wednesday, 4/27—Style**

“Light” by Lesley Nneka Arimah

“Inventory” by Carmen Maria Machado

“I Will Perfect Every Line Until My Profile is Flawless” by Elissa Washuta

Group 3 submit prose

*Week Fourteen*

**Monday, 5/2**

Workshop Group 3

**Wednesday, 5/4—On Revision**

Interviews and essays on revising work

*Week Fifteen*

**Monday, 5/9—Student Readings and Celebration**

Final portfolios due