Creative Writing: Intro to Poetry and Fiction
Instructor: Matthew Tuckner
T/Th: 9:30-10:45 AM
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Office Hours: by appointment

“One must make a distinction/ however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the result is not poetry, / nor till the autocrats among us can be/ “literalists of the imagination”–above/ insolence and triviality and can present// for inspection, imaginary gardens with real toads in them, shall we have it.”

– Marianne Moore, “Poetry”

WE ARE MAKING BIRDS, NOT BIRDCAGES.”

– Dean Young, “The Art of Recklessness”

Course Objectives:

In this course, we will be reading a broad survey of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction (and uncategorizable hybrids of all of these genres) that favor imagination, creativity, and experimentation. It is my goal to expose you to works of creative writing that will expand your notion of what a story can be, what a poem can be, etc., in order to broaden your horizons when it comes time for you to sit down at your desk and start working on your own writing. What does it mean for a poem or a story to be a “bird” and not a “birdcage?” What does it mean for a piece of writing to be a “real toad in an imaginary garden?” These will be some of the fundamental questions we ask ourselves as we read the assigned work in this course.

As this course is first and foremost a workshop, we will spend half our class time workshopping creative work that you will turn in bi-weekly. Together as a class we will develop a vocabulary of respectful critique that will (and you can trust me on this) be very useful as you form your own critical relationship to your writing. All of your weekly writing will ultimately result in a (revised) portfolio that you will turn into me at the end of class, functioning as a final project.

Course Work and Grading:

Participation (40%):

Involvement in Class (20%): The beautiful thing about a literature/creative writing course is that if we ever get lost, or reach a lull in our conversation, we will always be able to return to the common text in front of us. This means that we must all come to class having read the assigned texts/your peers’ workshop pieces, ready to discuss them thoroughly and with great enthusiasm. I will be paying close attention to individual students' participation in class discussions and if I notice a habit of
silence, you can expect to be called on. If I notice there is class-wide neglect of the assigned readings, you can also expect the implementation of reading quizzes.

Attendance (20%): Attendance in this class is of the utmost importance. It will be very difficult for me to find work for individual students to do outside of class to replicate work done in class. Students will be granted two no-questions-asked absences. Any absences beyond this will result in a 5% grade reduction. Absences that include documented illness, bereavement, religious holidays, school-sponsored activities, etc. will not be included in this count so long as they are properly documented and I am notified ahead of time. Three late arrivals will count towards one free absence. Students who arrive within five minutes of the beginning of class are not considered late, as long as they do not make a habit of it.

Writing and Responses (60 %)

As mentioned before, our time in this course will be split equally between discussing the assigned reading and workshopping student work. As I am first and foremost a poet, we will spend the first half of the semester reading and writing poetry, and the second half of the semester reading and writing prose.

Writing (30 %)

Workshop (10 %): At the beginning of the semester we will split the class into two groups: Group A and Group B. Students will be workshopped on Thursday, every two weeks, with each group alternating (you can see your workshop schedule below). In order to ensure that we have enough time to read each and every piece thoroughly, it is each individual student’s responsibility to turn in their piece to me by Monday at 8 pm the week of their workshop. I will print out copies of everyone’s pieces and hand them out Tuesday morning in class. Poetry submissions (with some exceptions) should be no more than three pages single-spaced and prose submissions should be no less than four pages and no more than twelve pages double-spaced (with some exceptions).

Final Portfolio (20 %): At the end of the semester, students will be expected to hand in a final portfolio, consisting of revised versions of five of their workshopped pieces, preferably three poems and two prose pieces. Attached to this portfolio will be an artist statement that elucidates your craft choices and your different methods of revision. This artist statement need be no more than a page to two pages double-spaced.

Responses (30 %)

Reading Responses (15%): Every Tuesday, we will discuss a selection of readings that are meant to inform, challenge, and confound as you move forward with your writing for the week. These will
mostly be uploaded to Brightspace in labelled PDF packets, although we will be reading one full length book midway through the course (listed below) that will force us to apply what we’ve learned about craft on a macro scale. The PDF packets will often be pretty lengthy. Try your best to read all of the assigned material, but I will point out the most important pieces that we will center our conversations around, each week. **Due at the beginning of every Tuesday class (by email) will be a response to the readings we will be discussing.** The point of this is to help you actualize your feelings about craft, while also giving us starting points for our discussion. These responses should be a page, double-spaced. As there will be several readings every week, you must respond to at least three of the readings in your response. This is meant to be a space for you to organize your thoughts, therefore I want to refrain from placing too many strictures on it.

Workshop Responses (15%): **Due every Thursday will be typed up versions (sent to me by email) of your comments on your peers’ workshop pieces.** Even if you are being workshopped, you are still required to comment thoroughly on the other pieces that are being workshopped in your group. Although I will not be asking you to print out very much material throughout the semester, I would like you to print out copies of your comments so that we can avoid laptop usage during the workshop. You can either hand your comments back directly to your peers, or send them by email.

*Quality of creative writing and “talent” will not be the basis of grading in this class. You will be graded on the aforementioned requirements only.*

**Required Reading Materials**

1. PDFs found on Brightspace (most of the readings will be listed by date here)
2. *Tenderness* by Derrick Austin

**Electronics**

During craft discussions, electronics will be allowed so that students may access online documents. However, if a student is caught engaging with non-class material, they may be asked to print out these documents for class instead. There will be no devices in use during workshop, unless permission is granted.

**Academic Honesty**

Work that is submitted for this class must be the students’ own work. Do not share work and do not plagiarize. Any violations of this will be reported.
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 register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, or at 726 Broadway (2nd floor) or at 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, or other possible cries 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.

Reading and Workshop Schedule

Week One:

**Tuesday 1/25:** First day of class!!
Introductions and General Discussion.
Read through Syllabus.
**Readings Due:** “Going for a Beer” by Robert Coover, “Poem” by Donald Justice,” and “Poetry” by Joanna Klink.
**Writing Due:** No writing due.

**Thursday 1/27:** Our first informal workshop. Everyone will come to class with a piece of writing that we will workshop in a lightning round. This will be to get a handle on the workshop format as a class.
**Readings Due:** No Readings Due
**Writing Due:** A short piece of creative writing, 1-3 pages (poetry or fiction).

Week Two:

**Tuesday 2/1:** “The Speaker?” The first day of our poetry unit.
Optional reading: “Personism” by Frank O’Hara
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 2/3: Workshop Group A
Readings Due: Group A’s poems.
Writing Due: Comments on Group A’s poems.

Week Three:

Tuesday 2/8: “Structure and “The Turn”
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 2/10-Workshop Group B
Readings Due: Group B’s Poems
Writing Due: Comments on Group B’s Poems

Week Four:

Tuesday 2/15: “Line and Syntax”
Readings Due: excerpts from Headwaters by Ellen Bryant Voigt, excerpts from Sometimes I Never Suffered by Shane McCrae, excerpts from Calling a Wolf a Wolf by Kaveh Akbar, excerpts from the true keeps calm biding its story by Rusty Morrison, excerpts from The Vault by Andrés Cerpa, excerpts from the trees, the trees by Heather Christie, excerpts from A Woman of Property by Robyn Schiff, excerpts from Observations by Marianne Moore, “Ode” by Jane Huffman, “Annunciation” by Michael Dumanis, “Single Lines Look Forward. Or One Monostich past 45” by francine j. harris, excerpts from The Art of the Poetic Line by James Longenbach, excerpts from The Art of Syntax by Ellen Bryant Voigt,
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 2/17-Workshop Group A
Readings Due: Group A’s Poems
Writing Due: Comments on Group A’s Poems
Week Five:

Tuesday 2/22: A Plethora of Forms! (Pt. 1)
Readings Due:
Sonnet: Shakespeare/Petrarch, excerpts from *American Sonnets for our Past and Future Assassin* by Terrance Hayes, excerpts from *Frank* by Diane Seuss, excerpts from *The Sonnets* by Sandra Simonds.
Ghazal: “Ghazal!” and “Tonight” by Agha Shahid Ali, “Miscegenation” by Natasha Trethewey, “where are you planted” by Evie Shockley
Villanelle: “One Art” by Elizabeth Bishop, excerpts from *Witch House* by Kiki Petrosino, “Veteran” by Michael Dumanis
Abecedarian: “Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Rezervation” by Natalie Diaz, “Abecedarian “G”” and “As When Waking” by Daniel Schonning
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 2/24: Workshop Group B
Readings Due: Group B’s Poems
Writing Due: Comments on Group B’s Poems

Week Six:

Tuesday 3/1: A Plethora of Forms! (Pt.2)
Ode: “Ode to the Puritan in Me,” by Ross Gay, “Monologue for an Onion” by Suji Kwock Kim,” “Ode to Klonopin” by William Fargason, “Miss you. Would like to take a walk with you.” by Gabrielle Calvocoresi
Long Poem/Sequence: “Of the Leaves that Have Fallen” by Rickey Laurentiis, “Hymn to Life” by Timothy Donnelly
Nonce Forms: Pecha Kucha, Golden Shovel by Terrance Hayes, Duplex by Jericho Brown, the Burning Haibun by Torrin A. Greathouse, Someday I'll Learn to Love (Blank) by Frank O'Hara, Ocean Vuong, and Roger Reeves

Thursday 3/3: Workshop Group A
Readings Due: Group A's Poems
Writing Due: Comments on Group A's Poems

Week Seven:

Tuesday 3/8: Tenderness

Readings Due: Tenderness by Derrick Austin
Writing Due: Response paper

Thursday 3/10: Workshop Group B
Readings Due: Group B's Poems
Writing Due: Comments on Group B's Poems

Week Eight:

Tuesday 3/15 No Class: Spring Break
Thursday 3/17 No Class: Spring Break

Week Nine:

Tuesday 3/22: Prose Poem and the Very Short Story: beginning of prose unit!
Readings Due: excerpts from The World Doesn't End by Charles Simic, excerpts from The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis, excerpt from Collected Stories by Diane Williams, Short Talks by Anne Carson, “The Napoleon Hat” by James Tate, excerpt from Inheritance by Taylor Johnson, “Marriage” by Anne Waldman, “Fingers on a Gay Man” by Zach Linge, excerpt from The Fire Eater by Jose Hernandez Diaz, excerpts from The Age of Wire and String by Ben Marcus
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 3/24: Workshop Group A
Readings Due: Group A's Prose Pieces
Writing Due: Comments on Group A's Prose Pieces

Week Ten

Tuesday 3/29 “Narrative Tension”
Writing Due: Response Paper
Thursday 3/31 Workshop Group B  
Readings Due: Group B’s Prose Pieces
Writing Due: Comments on Group B’s Prose Pieces

Week Eleven:

Tuesday 4/5: “Voice/Style/Character”
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 4/7: Workshop Group A  
Readings Due: Group A’s Prose Pieces
Writing Due: Comments on Group A’s Prose Pieces

Week Twelve:

Tuesday 4/12: “Ways of Telling”
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 4/14 Workshop Group B  
Readings Due: Group B’s Prose Pieces
Writing Due: Comments on Group B’s Prose Pieces

Week Thirteen

Tuesday 4/19: “Speculative Worlds”
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 4/21: Workshop Group A  
Readings Due: Group A’s Prose Pieces
Writings Due: Comments on Group B’s Prose Pieces
Week Fourteen

Tuesday 4/26: “Hybrid Texts”
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 4/28: Workshop Group B
Readings Due: Group B’s Prose Pieces
Writings Due: Comments on Group B’s Prose Pieces

Week Fifteen

Tuesday 5/3: “Revision”
Readings Due: “The Progress of Love” by Alice Munro (New Yorker version), “The Progress of Love” by Alice Munro (revised version), excerpts from the website Midst
Writing Due: Response Paper

Thursday 5/5
Last day of Class! We will hear everyone read from their final portfolios.