

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 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.

Readings Due: "The News" by Arda Collins, "Work Song," by Mark Levine, "Dream Songs" by John Berryman, Excerpts from *Seam*, by Tarfia Faizullah, "Poem About My Rights" by June Jordan," "Nightstick" by Joy Priest," "Am Moor" by Lucie Brock-Broido "Philomath" by Devon Walker-Figueroa, "Devouring Each Other" by Christopher Kondrich, "All they Want is My Money My Pussy My Blood" by Morgan Parker, Excerpt from *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine, excerpts from

Engine Empire by Cathy Park Hong, “Mayakovsky” by Frank O’Hara, “The Only Yak in Batesville, Virginia” by Oni Buchanan, etc.

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”

Readings Due: “Amsterdam” by Megan Fernandes, “Cape Coast Castle” by Yusef Komunyaaka, “The Yachts” by William Carlos Williams, “What the End is For” by Jorie Graham, “Skydive” by Dean Young, “Here” by Mark Strand, “Just the Wind for a Sound, Softly” by Carl Phillips,” excerpts from *Blackacre* by Monica Youn, “Hymn for Dan,” by Chessy Normile, “Nude Descending a Staircase” by Shangyang Fang, “Song,” by Brigit Pegeen Kelly, “The Fish,” by Elizabeth Bishop, “Golden Gate Park,” by Jacques Rancourt,” “Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy’s Farm” by James Wright, “What Was There to Bring Me to Delight But to Love and Be Loved?” by Paisley Rekdal, “38” by Layli Long Soldier

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 Christle, 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

Pantoum: “My Brother at 3AM” by Natalie Diaz, “September Elegies,” Randall Mann, “Descent of the Composer” by Aireya D. Matthews

Villanelle: “One Art” by Elizabeth Bishop, excerpts from *Witch House* by Kiki Petrosino, “Veteran” by Michael Dumanis

Sestina: “Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape” and “The Painter” by John Ashbery, “Sestina Where Every End Word Is Lyndon Johnson,” by Sasha Debevec-McKenney

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)**

Elegy: “Psychoanalysis: An Elegy” by Jack Spicer, “Eight Elegies” by Rick Barot, “Another Elegy” by Jericho Brown, “A Small Needful Fact” by Ross Gay, excerpt from *Elegy* by Mary Jo Bang, “The Day Lady Died” by Frank O’Hara, “Author’s Prayer” by Ilya Kaminsky, “Elegy as” poems by Jan Verberkmoes,” “Elegy” by Corey Van Landingham

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 Calvocoressi

Ekphrastic: “Orfeu Negro/Black Orpheus” by Desiree C. Bailey, “Archaic Torso of Apollo” by Rainer Maria Rilke,” “Owl Pellet” by Justin Wymer, “Voyage of the Sable Venus,” by Robin Coste Lewis, “A Stone Knife,” by James Schuyler, “Looking at Medieval Art,” by Richie Hofmann, “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” by Paul Tran

Persona Poem/Self-Portrait: excerpt from *The Wild Iris* by Louise Glück, “Skinhead” by Patricia Smith, “Final Poem as Persona,” by Phillip B. Williams, “Mirror,” by Sylvia Plath, “The Blue Terrance,” by Terrance Hayes, “Self Portrait as Vincent Van Gogh in the Asylum at Arles” by Roger Reeves

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"

Readings Due: "Rise Baby Rise!" an essay on Barthelme's "The School" by George Saunders, "The School," by Donald Barthelme, "Rondine Al Nido" by Claire Vaye Watkins, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank" by Nathan Englander, "Incarnations of Burned Children" by David Foster Wallace

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"****Readings Due:** "Slatland," by Rebecca Lee, "Car Crash while Hitchhiking" by Denis Johnson, excerpt from *Luster* by Raven Leilani, "Boys Go to Jupiter" by Danielle Evans, "Home" by George Saunders, "Brass" by Joy Williams**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"****Readings Due:** "Superking Son Scores Again" by Anthony Veasna So, "The Semplica Girl Diaries" by George Saunders, "Belles Lettres" by Nafissa Thompson-Spires, "Summer Boys" by Ethan Rutherford**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"****Readings Due:** "Zimmer Land" by Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah, "Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned," by Wells Tower, "Tributaries" by Ramona Ausubel, "Standard Loneliness Package" by Charles Yu**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”

Readings Due: “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream” by Joan Didion,” excerpts from *Field Study* by Chet’la Sebree, excerpt from *Just Us* by Claudia Rankine, excerpt from *Jane: A Murder* and *The Argonauts* by Maggie Nelson, *The Glass Essay* by Anne Carson, excerpt from *Blind Spot* by Teju Cole

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.