

## Introduction to Fiction and Poetry

CRWRI-UA.815.013

Spring 2022, T/Th 8 - 9:15 a.m.

Room: TBD

Instructor: Blake Levario

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Office Hours: by appointment

*If nobody ever gave you permission, I'm giving it to you now. You can write your story, paint your picture, sing your song. Really. I mean, when they say it's life and death, they're lying to you, it's only life.* - Bud Smith

*The only war is the war against the imagination.* - Diane di Prima

### Course Objective

There are very few things in life as powerful as writing—take for example, every single set of lyrics written by Phoebe Bridgers. Writers have the power to alter how we see the world and how we see ourselves. In this class, you will read a variety of texts, some regarded as part of the “canon”—which is a term I find outdated and quite useless—though most of our readings will be contemporary. You will learn how to operate in the world as a writer: this means practicing observation, both of yourself and the world around you. You will learn how to discuss writing with others—respectfully! and without ego!—in a workshop setting. We will foster a sense of community and trust within the classroom—everyone is welcome here. You will leave this class a stronger reader and writer, hopefully with a group of people you can trust with your work; hopefully you fall in love with new authors and with the processes that come with being a writer.

### Structure

The semester will be broken up into two sections: poetry and fiction. The first few weeks of each section will be dedicated to craft, where we will read various texts and break down their stylistic elements. Doing this will build up a vocabulary we can use during the last half of each section—workshop—where we will offer critiques to each other's creative pieces. Workshop groups will be assigned during the first day of class.

## Course Work and Grading

### Participation and Attendance (30%)

- Attendance and participation is important both for you and your peers. Writing as an activity is generally solitary work, but your growth as a writer will hinge on being able to see things from new perspectives—this includes meeting with fellow writers to discuss craft and critique work. Trust me, I'm not a huge fan of having to wake up early, but it is what it is. Please make the effort to be on time. I understand that we live in particularly insane times and that every once in a while you need a day to yourself. If that day happens to be a class day, I would be grateful to know beforehand. I will allow two absences, but after this, any additional absence will count 5% against your final grade.

### Workshop Submissions and Feedback (20%)

- During the course of the semester you will workshop two poems (1 to 2 pages) and two fiction pieces (one flash fiction piece under 1000 words, and one short story that is 4-8 pages long). Each workshop group—1 and 2—will submit their pieces one week before they are to be workshopped—on Thursdays. This means that everyone will have one week to sit and ruminate on each other's work. Comments and critiques on your peers' work should be generous and as extensive as possible. We will discuss workshop etiquette more in class.

### Short Paper (10%)

- This will be due at some point towards the middle of the semester. I want you to pick a collection of poetry, a novel, or short story collection and write a response paper to it. This isn't meant to be an academic analysis of the work—what I'm really looking for is what you notice in the work and how it affected your own mode of thinking during and after reading it. 2-3 pages long. More details will be provided when the paper is assigned.

### Office Hours Consultation (10%)

- I would like to meet with you at least once during the semester to discuss your writing goals and to get to know you better. Additional appointments can always be made to discuss your work at any point during the semester.

### Final Portfolio and Reading Journal (30%)

- Your final portfolio will consist of all of your original workshop drafts and the revised versions of those drafts. One new piece of work, whether it be a poem or a piece of fiction, should also be included. Extensive feedback will be provided.
- Instead of weekly writing responses to our readings, I would prefer you keep a journal where you document your experience with what I have assigned to read for the given week. This does not have to be a breakdown of what we read—rather, treat it as a place to capture your thoughts and observations on the world while doing these readings. I want this to be attached at the end of your portfolio. More details to be provided in class.

## Plagiarism

Just don't do it, please. Any instance of plagiarism will result in an automatic fail.

## 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](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.

## Recommended Texts

All reading materials will be provided to you via email ahead of class. However, I am providing a list of books that I found instructive and that could serve as possible texts for your short paper.

- *Double Bird* - Bud Smith; *Revolutionary Letters* - Diane di Prima; *Ghost Of* - Diana Khoi Nguyen; *My Documents* - Alejandro Zambra; *Self-Help* - Lorrie Moore; *Calling a Wolf a Wolf* - Kaveh Akbar; *The Trees The Trees* and *What is Amazing* - Heather Christle; *Cherry* - Nico Walker; *Bed* - Tao Lin; *Frank (Sonnets)* - Diane Seuss; *You Will Never Be Forgotten* - Mary South; *Lighthouse* - Terrance Hayes; *Jesus' Son* - Denis Johnson; *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* - Claudia Rankine; *Crush* and *War of the Foxes* - Richard Siken; *In the Dream House* - Carmen Maria Machado; *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* - Ottessa Moshfegh; *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* - Joan Didion; *The Buddha of Suburbia* - Hanif Kureishi; *Norwegian Wood* - Haruki Murakami; *Space Struck* - Paige Lewis; *Citizen Illegal* - José Olivarez

## Tentative Class Schedule

Week 1	Introductions, Syllabus, and Workshop Groups
Tuesday, 25 January	Quick lesson on Meme Poetics + meme assignment <b>In class readings:</b> “Awe and Audacity” - Bud Smith; Lydia Davis; Joan Didion
Thursday, 27 January	Where do we start? / Writing Manifestos <b>readings due:</b> “Why I Write” - George Orwell, “Personism” - Frank O’ Hara, “Responsibility” - Grace Paley Manifesto assignment given.
Week 2	
Tuesday, 1 February	Confessional Poets / Lesson on Obscurity vs. Ambiguity <b>readings due:</b> various poems by Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, James Tate, and Lucille Clifton. Excerpt from <i>Writing Poems</i> .
Thursday, 3 February	Oh wow, existing is devastating! <b>readings due:</b> various poems by Molly Brodak, Kaveh Akbar, Melissa Broder, Renee Gladman, Victoria Chang, Richard Siken.
Week 3	
Tuesday, 8 February	Revolutionary Poets (What can poetry do?) <b>readings due:</b> various poems by Diane di Prima, June Jordan, Wendy Trevino, Garous Abdolmalekian, “The Poetics of Disobedience” - Alice Notely (Online). Mock workshop / More on workshop etiquette.
Thursday, 10 February	Absurdist Poetry (Weird stuff) / Guest: Ian Fishman  <b>readings due:</b> various poems by Heather Christle, Joshua Beckman, Megan Boyle, Jeffrey McDaniel, others. <b>Group 1 poems due by midnight.</b>
Week 4	
Tuesday, 15 February	Sonnets (not Shakespeare!)

**readings due:** various sonnets by Diane Seuss, Daniel Bailey, Terrance Hayes, Kim Addonizio.

Thursday, 17 February

Workshop Group 1.

Bring in critiques for Group 1.

**Group 2 poems due by midnight.**

Week 5

Tuesday, 22 February

Triptychs, Contrapuntals, and Erasure

**readings due:** various poems by Diana Khoi Nguyen, D.A. Powell, torrin a. greathouse, others.

**Short paper assigned.**

Thursday, 24 February

Workshop Group 2.

Bring in critiques for Group 2.

**Group 1 poems due by midnight.**

Week 6

Tuesday, 1 March

Pop culture and poems

**readings due:** various poems by Frank O'Hara, Matt Mitchell, José Olivarez, Brayan Salinas, Eileen Myles.

Thursday, 3 March

Workshop Group 1.

Bring in critiques for Group 1.

**Group 2 poems due by midnight.**

Week 7

Tuesday, 8 March

Killer first lines! (Slight transition into fiction)

**reading / listening due:** various songs by Phoebe Bridgers, Vince Staples, MF DOOM. "How to Become a Writer" - Lorrie Moore.

Thursday, 10 March

Workshop Group 2.

Bring in critiques for Group 2.

(Spring Break! No class)

Week 8

Tuesday, 22 March

Intro to Flash Fiction / On Hybridity

**readings due:** various flash fiction by J.J. Peña, Carmen Maria Machado, Jamaica Kincaid, Lydia Davis. Excerpt from *Brevity*.

Thursday, 24 March

Vignettes / Capturing a moment

**readings due:** excerpts from *True Stories* by Sophie Calle; excerpts from *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* by Claudia Rankine.

**Short paper due Sunday, 27 March by midnight!**

Week 9

Tuesday, 29 March

Surrealism / Lesson on Ridiculousness

**readings due:** "Emergency" by Denis Johnson, various stories from *Double Bird* by Bud Smith.

Thursday, 31 March

Wow the modern world hurts! / Intro to Short Story

**readings due:** "frequently asked questions about your craniotomy" and "you will never be forgotten" by Mary South. "Notes on Narrative" - Darin Strauss

**Group 1 flash fiction pieces due by midnight.**

Week 10

Tuesday, 5 April

On love, or a lack of it / Character and Stakes

**readings due:** "How" - Lorrie Moore; "Thank You" - Alejandro Zambra; "Sincerity" - Tao Lin

Thursday, 7 April

Workshop Group 1.

Bring in critiques for Group 1.

**Group 2 flash fiction pieces due by midnight.**

Week 11

Tuesday, 12 April

Short story generative workshop / possible guest speaker

**readings due:** "I Smoked Very Well" - Alejandro Zambra; "Go Like This" and "How to Talk to Your Mother" - Lorrie Moore

Thursday, 14 April

Workshop Group 2.

Bring in critiques for Group 2.

Both groups continue to work on short stories.

Week 12

Tuesday, 19 April

On Affect and Embedding Emotion

readings due: “Honored Guest” - Joy Williams; “Cull the Steel Heart...” - Tao Lin; excerpt from *do you believe in lief after loev* by Kay Lovelace.

Both groups continue to work on short stories.

Thursday, 21 April

Short story generative workshop / possible guest speaker

readings due: a few stories from *Her Body and Other Parties* by Carmen Maria Machado.

Short stories from both groups due Friday, 22 April by midnight.

Week 13

Tuesday, 26 April

Begin workshop on Group 1 short stories.

Bring critiques for Group 1.

Thursday, 28 April

Finish workshop on Group 1 short stories.

Bring critiques for Group 1.

Begin to compile materials for the final portfolio.

Week 14

Tuesday, 3 May

Begin workshop on Group 2 short stories.

Bring critiques for Group 2.

Thursday, 5 May

Finish workshop on Group 2 short stories.

Bring critiques for Group 2.

Hand out “Thank you” notes.

Discuss final portfolio / answer questions / wish you all well <3

**Final Portfolios due on the 17th of May by midnight via email!**