

**Introduction to Creative Writing: Fiction & Poetry**  
**Powerful Women**

Course Number: CRWRI-UA 815-023 (7795)

Instructor: Alisson Wood

Meeting Time: Mondays & Wednesdays, January 22<sup>nd</sup>- May 7<sup>th</sup>  
12:30-1:45pm

Classroom: 194 Mercer, Room 303

Office Hours: By email appointment & TBD

Email: [amw731@nyu.edu](mailto:amw731@nyu.edu)

“A word after a word after a word is power.”

-Margaret Atwood

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”

-Joan Didion

“And this: a girl is what we make her. Maybe we should look at that harder.”

-Lidia Yuknavitch

In this introductory course to fiction and poetry, we will spend our semester reading and discussing mostly women and non-binary conforming writers as we explore the art of storytelling, character, and perspective; power, gender, and sexuality in literature; and the poetry of language as tools for strengthening your own creative writing.

This course will be equally focused on both the craft of writing (and reading) and the practice of workshopping your own creative work. You can expect weekly reading, in-class writing exercises, out-of-classroom “field trip” assignments, extra credit opportunities, to have your poems and short stories carefully read by your peers and myself, and a dynamic classroom environment that depends on your participation.

It will be easy to succeed in this class if you do the following simple things:

1. COME TO CLASS.
2. COME TO CLASS PREPARED (ie do your reading!).
3. PARTICIPATE IN CLASS.
4. FOLLOW DIRECTIONS.
5. TURN IN YOUR ASSIGNMENTS ON TIME.

If you are prepared to do those five things, we will have a wonderful spring together and you will do well in this course. If this already seems like I am asking a lot, this is not the class for you.

Still here? Wonderful! I’m looking forward to our time together. Please read on!

## First things first; taking care of YOU.

A healthy student is a happy and productive student, so please take your physical and mental health seriously. NYU offers lots of \*FREE\* services to support you, including the Wellness Exchange:

The Wellness Exchange is your key to accessing the University's extensive health and mental health resources designed to address your needs. **You can call a private hotline (212-443-9999), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week**, which will put you in touch with a professional who can help to address day-to-day challenges as well as other health-related concerns. These might include: *medical issues, academic stress, depression, sexual assault, anxiety, alcohol and other drug dependence, sexually transmitted infections, eating disorders...*

The hotline is also available if you just need to talk or want to call about a friend.

You can also stop by the Wellness Center right by campus:

726 Broadway

New York, NY 10003

Or email them: [wellness.exchange@nyu.edu](mailto:wellness.exchange@nyu.edu)

## On Difficult Material in Class

### In Your Work:

As this is a fiction & poetry course, unless there is specific and explicit evidence to suggest otherwise, we will assume all speakers, characters, and events in your submitted creative writing pieces are fictional. However, if there are concerning themes (murder, suicide, violence, rape, etc.) or it seems like a cry for help, I will reach out to you via email to check in. If I am still concerned, or I don't hear back from you, I will reach out on your behalf to the Wellness Center and/or your advisor. **This will only be done with the utmost respect and privacy and only out my concern for your health and safety. If you are struggling, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can help guide you to the available resources.**

### In Assigned Readings and/or Class Discussions:

As this course focuses on the writing and literature of women, femme, non-binary, LGBTQ, persons of color, and other oppressed peoples, tough subjects will come up. Misogyny is real and hard to face. As is racism, homophobia, and violence. Unfortunately, these are themes that may come up in some of our readings and discussions. I will always give you a heads up about difficult or potentially triggering themes in assigned readings, but may not be able to anticipate how a discussion will go. We're in this together.

## Course Policies

### **On Plagiarism:**

Don't. Just don't. Not only is completely against the artistic point of taking a creative writing course, it is against NYU policy and you will not only fail this class but also be reported to the department and so on.

### **On Attendance:**

You NEED to come to class. You have ONE excused absence, after which you will have to produce a doctor's note. If you are more than 15 minutes late to class, you will receive only 50% credit for attendance. If you come to class unprepared and/or do not participate (i.e. you didn't do the reading or you do not engage in class), you will receive only 50% credit for attendance. As  $50\% + 50\% = 100\%$ , two late arrivals or incidences of coming unprepared will equate to one unexcused absence. Please see the grading section for how this will negatively impact your grade.

### **On Electronic Devices:**

Nope. None of them. No phones, no iPads, no Kindles, etc. This class depends on each of us engaging with the readings, our writing, and each other. That won't happen if we have screens between us. You will get one warning about having an electronic device, after which you will not receive credit for being in class.

On a related note, it is required that you have hard copies of all of our assigned readings/fellow writers' writings as part of workshop assignments and to develop your close reading abilities. Electronic versions are not acceptable for our purposes.

### **Conferences:**

**It is required that you meet with me at least once during the semester.** There will be "office afternoons" throughout the semester, and I will be available via email to schedule meetings. Please do not wait until the last weeks of class to do this, as I may not be able to accommodate you. Please see the grading section for how this will negatively impact your grade.

### **Field Trip Assignment**

Each student must attend a literary reading/book launch outside of class once a semester. This will be fun! We live in the most rich and exciting literary cities in the world—take advantage! You will be expected to write a short response to the event (approx. 250-word) and post a photo of you at the event on Classes. You also must purchase one of the books being launched/an author's book. I encourage you to take a minute and have the author sign it, but that will not be part of your grade. You'll get to show off your experience/fancy autograph in class too!

### **Extra Credit Opportunities:**

There will be a few. *Do not depend on them to save your grade.* But they can help!

## How It All Works Together

This course will be equally distributed between poetry and fiction, and between workshopping your writing and substantive craft discussions. Unless otherwise noted in the syllabus, on Mondays we will discuss readings and points of craft. On Wednesdays we workshop your work.

### Readings & Craft Discussions:

Each week you have assigned reading. This might be a few poems, a book of poetry, or a short story or two, or a short novel. **You need to do the reading.** To start off our discussion, each student will ask a question in response to the reading in the beginning of class. These questions must be posted on Classes by midnight on Sunday, the night before our Monday class. This is easy; you can ask a question that came up for you as you did the readings, or a question you want to try to answer in our discussion. Please be thoughtful with your question.

Throughout the semester, there will be pop reading quizzes. They will not be tricky, they will just confirm that you did the reading.

Twice throughout the semester (once for a poet, once for a fiction author), each student will be responsible for posting on Classes a short bio of one of the assigned authors. This is easy. Just a short paragraph about their background/other writings, a photo, and photo of the cover of their most recent book. We'll have a sign-up sheet in class.

### Your Writing Assignments:

Throughout the course, everyone will workshop 3 pieces of writing: **one poem (max two pages)**, **one short story** (between 2,000-4,000 words), and **one wild card**, which can be a poem or a piece of flash fiction (under 1,000 words). 12-pt font, double spaced, normal margins.

For each student's workshop, you are expected to write a one page (at least 250 word) response; you must bring 2 hard copies to class (one for your fellow student, and one for me). This response should be kind but honest, and specify things you think are working alongside things you think are opportunities for improvement, using the ideas and tools we will be discussing during our craft days. Please do not just say you "liked" or "didn't like" it. That is not a response. While I will not be returning these with notes, I will be reading them and tracking them as part of your grade.

### On Workshops:

**You MUST attend your workshop. You MUST submit your work on time.** If you you're your workshop, your grade will suffer by one whole letter (i.e. from an A- to a B-) unless there is a *documented emergency*.

**You MUST respond to each other's work.** The one page response is not optional. To start off our discussion, each student will say one word about something that they positively responded to (ie "images!"), one line that they found moving/beautiful/haunting/etc., and one word about an opportunity for improvement (ie "plot"). Some students are more comfortable talking in

class than others, that's ok—that's where your One Page response comes in to help count for your participation grade if you're shy! Don't forget to bring two copies to class along with your peer's piece with your notes.

Out of respect for each other and your writing, you are expected to participate kindly and with integrity on workshop days (and all days!). This is an introductory course; no one's work will be perfect—That's part of the fun! **This class is a safe space.** This means that I expect you to treat each other with respect when discussing each other's work and our readings, and to bring your best self.

### **Your Final Portfolio:**

This should be a collection of your workshopped work *with edits* and a Two Page response titled "Why I Write". You may not just turn in your original pieces; no writing is perfect! Please take this opportunity to make changes and improvements to your pieces. The Two Page response should be reflective and insightful about your writing process, the impact of the readings on you, and/or how your writing may have benefitted from the course. Be proud of what you accomplished this semester! This must be in a presentation folder or thin binder with laminated pages, no folders or envelopes. This will be due in my mailbox in the basement at The Lilian Vernon Creative Writing House on 58 W. 10<sup>th</sup> St. We'll talk more about this in class.

### **Grading**

Workshop: 30%

(Your Workshops: 15%, Your Workshop Critiques: 15%)

Attendance & Participation: 30%

(Each unexcused absence/ not attending our conference = -5%)

Final Response & Portfolio: 20%

Reading Quizzes & Questions: 10%

Author Bio: 5%

"Field Trip" Assignment: 5%

## Course Materials

Most poems and short stories will be available for you to print out at your convenience on Canvas; hard copies are required in class. Additionally, you must purchase the following texts:

- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*
- Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*
- Warsan Shire, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*
- Ariel Gore, *We Were Witches*
- Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*
- Sarah Shun-lien Bynum, *Madeline is Sleeping*
- Author's Book from your "Field Trip"

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Week 1: Introduction to the Course & Workshopping

Monday, Jan. 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017

#### Syllabus & Questions

- Lorrie Moore, "How to Become a Writer"
- Sherman Alexie, "The Joy of Reading & Writing: Superman and Me"

Wednesday, Jan. 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017

#### Workshop Etiquette & Questions

- Rebecca Solnit, *LitHub*: "Women's Work and the Myth of the Art Monster"
- "How to Read a Poem" Handout (in class)
- Poetic Devices Handout (in class)

### Week 2: Women's Resilience in Poetry

Monday, Jan. 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Warsan Shire, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*
- Beyonce, *Lemonade* (video)
- Maya Angelo, "Still I Rise"
- Sylvia Plath, "Lady Lazarus"
- Ada Limon, "How to Triumph Like a Girl"

Wednesday, Jan. 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 1

### Week 3: Poetic Forms

Monday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art" & "Sestina"
- Margaret Atwood, "Siren Song" & "You Fit into Me"
- Sylvia Plath, "Mad Girl's Love Song"
- Emily Dickinson, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain (280)"

Wednesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 2

**Week 4: Emotional & Social Justice in Poetry**

Monday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*
- Morgan Parker, "99 Problems"
- Eileen Myles, "American Poem"
- Audre Lorde, "Power"

Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 3

**Week 5: Poetry Workshop**

Monday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017 **NO CLASS**

Wednesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 4

**Week 6: Erasure Poetry**

Monday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Jennie Baker, *Erasing Infinite* excerpt
- Rachel Stone, "The Trump-Era Boom in Erasure Poetry"
- In Class Erasures!

Wednesday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 5

**Week 7: Poetry in Prose**

Monday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Maggie Nelson, *Bluets*
- Robert Hass, "A Story about the Body"

Wednesday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- **NO CLASS; begin reading Ariel Gore & this is a great time to edit your poems**

**Week 8: SPRING BREAK**

Monday March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017 **NO CLASS**

Wednesday March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017 **NO CLASS**

### **Week 9: Feminism in the Novel Today**

Monday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Ariel Gore, *We Were Witches*

Wednesday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 1

### **Week 10: How a Story Can Break Your Heart**

Monday, March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Alice Munro, "The Bear Came Over the Mountain"
- Annie Proulx, "Brokeback Mountain"

Wednesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 2

### **Week 11: Capturing Tension, Fear, & Oppression in the Short Story**

Monday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017

- Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"
- Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"
- Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

Wednesday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 3

### **Week 12: The Hero's Journey in Fiction**

Monday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*
- Joseph Campbell, "The Hero's Journey"

Wednesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 4

### **Week 13: Fairy Tales in Fiction**

Monday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Kelly Link, "Travels with the Snow Queen"
- Carmen Maria Machado, "The Husband Stitch"

Wednesday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 5



**Week 14: What is a Novel? / Going Wild introduction**

Monday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017

- Sarah Shun-lien Bynum, *Madeline is Sleeping*

Wednesday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 1 & 2

**Week 15: Wild Card: Deconstructing the Male Gaze**

Monday, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017

- Rebecca Solnit, "Men Explain Lolita to Me"
- Alexandra Kleeman, "The Incidental Girl"
- Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* excerpt pgs. 9-18
- Edgar Allan Poe, "Annabel Lee"

Wednesday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017

- Workshop Group 3 & 4

**Week 16: Wild Card & On Women's Writing**

Monday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017 **LAST CLASS**

- Workshop Group 5
- Kristen Roupenian, "Cat Person"
- Megan Garber, *The Atlantic*: "'Cat Person' and the Impulse to Undermine Women's Fiction"

Wednesday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017 **FINAL**

**Festivities & Publishing Talk w/Guest Speaker**

- Claire Dederer, *The Paris Review*: "What Do We Do with the Art of Monstrous Men?"