INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING: FICTION & POETRY

Instructor: Jamie Walters
Course Number: CRWRI-UA.815.015
Schedule: TR: 3:30 PM – 4:45 PM
Classroom: TBA
Email: jw4211@nyu.edu
Office House: By Appointment

Course Overview

In this class, we will demystify the magic of creative writing, and cultivate the enthusiasm, craft and routine necessary to becoming lifelong writers. Through readings and group discussions, we’ll identify the techniques that glue us to the page, and through in-class writing exercises, we’ll implement these strategies in our own writing. The first half of the semester will focus on the mechanics of prose—excerpts from contemporary novels, short stories, essays—and culminate in a student workshop and a midterm portfolio. The second half of the semester will focus on the possibilities of poetry, and finish with a second student workshop and a final portfolio.

Texts

All course readings will be available online or provided to you. In addition to the texts listed on the syllabus, there will be supplementary in-class readings, handouts, and peer work.

Grading

This is what an A looks like. Show up, on time. Read the assigned stories, submissions, and/or poems before class, carefully. Engage in discussions at least once per class. During workshop weeks, send the authors and me your workshop letters before class. Submit your (two) workshop pieces and (two) portfolios by the due date.

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshop Submissions</td>
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<td>Workshop Letters</td>
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<td>Writing Exercises</td>
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<td>Midterm Portfolio</td>
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<td>Final Portfolio</td>
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Note: The quality of your writing does not affect your grade. A major part of this class is accepting that first drafts are always flawed, giving ourselves permission to write anyhow, and then revising, revising, revising.

There will be at least two extra credit opportunities.
Reading

Always do it. The readings will be central to your growth as a writer, and I may call on you to summarize/analyze/discuss particulars of the text. Be prepared!

Workshops

We will be kind, always. During the prose workshop, writers will submit one piece (5-7 pages) one week in advance. During the two poetry workshops, writers will submit their poetry (1-2 poems) one class in advance. If you’re working on something shorter or longer, discuss with me. Depending on the day, we will workshop one to five students per workshop. We will begin by discussing the piece’s strongest elements and move into elements that need improvement. During this time, the author will resist speaking and take notes—there will be time for authorial questions at the end.

Workshop Letters

We will be kind, always. Everyone will submit a workshop letter to me and to each author before the beginning of workshop. Letters will be 200-300 words, begin with an overview of the piece, identify at least three successful elements, and ask at least three questions. Further guidelines will be provided in the Workshop Letter Handout. Workshop letters are worth twice as much as submissions because there are more of them and because they will help you develop a critical eye for your own work.

Portfolios

The midterm portfolio (due 3/18) will be worth 15% of your final grade and contain:

1. Six prose writing exercises (1-2 pages each)
2. One prose submission (5-7 pages)

The final portfolio (due 5/6) will be worth 20% of your final grade and contain:

1. Six prose writing exercises (1-2 pages each)
2. One revised prose submission (5-7 pages)
3. Six poetry writing exercises
4. Three revised poem submissions

Electronics

Our time together is brief and important. Please put away all devices/Internet tabs before class begins.

Office Hours

Office hours will be conducted through Zoom. Please arrange to meet with me at least once, to chat about the class, to discuss your submission, or to talk about writing in general. I am here for you.
Attendance

Your attendance is so important, especially during workshop weeks. We need you there. Of course, life can be messy—you are allowed two excused absences, free of charge. Each absence beyond that will reduce your final grade by 5%.

Two or more instances of lateness (5 minutes +) will count as an absence.

Plagiarism

Don’t do it. The purpose of this class is to write original work from your very own brain. If you plagiarize from published works or anyone else, I will report you. Please read NYU’s Academic Integrity Policy: https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policiesand-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

If you’re struggling to meet a deadline or feeling overwhelmed, talk to me. I’d rather negotiate an extension.

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 (address below):

NYU’s Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor New York, NY 10003-6675

Telephone: 212-998-4980

Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114

Web site: http://www.nyu.edu/csd

Student Wellness Policy

Unless there is explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, I 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 prompt my 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.
Provisional Fiction & Poetry Extravaganza

Week One
Thu Jan 28:  Introductions, Review Syllabus, Begin Reading “Fly Already,” by Etgar Keret
Writing Exercise #1: Bad Poem Assignment

Week Two
Tues Feb 2:  Share bad poems, Create Workshop Schedule, Craft discussion: Character Motivations in “Fly Already,” Begin Reading Ch 1 & 2 of The Days of Abandonment by Elena Ferrante
Writing Exercise #2: Burning Desires

Thu Feb 4:  Craft Discussion: Conflict in The Days of Abandonment, Begin reading Setting Handout (Opening pages of One Hundred Years of Solitude, by Gabriel García Márquez, The Tiger’s Wife, by Téa Obreht, and Americanah, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie)
Writing Exercise #3: External/Internal Obstacles

Week Three
Tues Feb 9:  Craft Discussion: Time, Place and Sensory Detail in Márquez, Obreht and Adichie, Begin reading Mock Workshop Submission, Write Mock Workshop Letter
Writing Exercise #4: Vivid, Uncomfortable Places

Thu Feb 11:  Group #1 Submits for 2/18, Mock Workshop, In-Class Reading: Workshop Questions (Handout), Begin Reading “Interpreter of Maladies,” by Jhumpa Lahiri
Writing Exercise #5: Character Profiles

Week Four
Tues Feb 16:  Craft Discussion: Expansion of Time in “Interpreter of Maladies,” Continue reading submissions/writing letters
Writing Exercise #6: Slow Mo’d

Thu Feb 18:  Group #2 Submits for 2/25, Workshop Group #1, *Begin Reading “Hills Like White Elephants,” by Ernest Hemingway* (subject to change)
Writing Exercise #7: Eavesdropping
Week Five
Tues Feb 23: Share Eavesdropping Assignment, In-Class Video: Good Dialogue in Film, Craft Discussion: Disagreement and Subtext in “Hills Like White Elephants,” Continue reading submissions/writing letters

Writing Exercise #8: Screenwriting Tension

Thu Feb 25: **Group #3 Submits for 3/4,** Workshop Group #2, Begin reading “Brownies,” by ZZ Packer

Writing Exercise #9: Personal Hell

Week Six

Writing Exercise #10: Locking Plans

Thu Mar 4: **Group #4 Submits for 3/11,** Workshop Group #3, Begin reading “A Regular Couple,” by Curtis Sittenfeld

Writing Exercise #11: Juggling Scenes

Week Seven
Tues Mar 9: Craft Discussion: Grand Finale of “A Regular Couple,” In-Class Activity: Midterm Q&A, Continue reading submissions/writing letters

Writing Exercise #12: Callback Ending

Thu Mar 11: Workshop Group #4, In-Class Activity: Midterm Prep, Begin reading, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” by Raymond Carver

Writing Exercise #13: Cutting, Pasting, Swapping

Week Eight
Tues Mar 16: Submit Midterm Portfolios, In-Class Reading: “Beginners,” by Raymond Carver, Craft Discussion: Revision Choices in “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” In-Class Exercise: Real-Time Prose Revision

Writing Exercise #14: Reimagining Scenes

Thu Mar 18: In-Class Reading: Forms & Examples in Mary Oliver’s *A Poetry Handbook* (Handout), Begin reading Stephen Dunn, Robert Hayden, Sharon Olds, Theodore Roethke, William E. Stafford

Writing Exercise #15: Playing with Form
Week Nine

Tues Mar 23:  In-Class Reading: Poetry Checklist (Handout), Craft Discussion: Narrative & Line Breaks, Begin reading: Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Erdrich, Galway Kinnell, Li-Young Lee, Mary Oliver

   Writing Exercise #16: Narrative Lines

Thu Mar 25:  **Group A Submits for 4/30**, Craft Discussion: Imagery & Specificity, Begin Commenting on Group A Poems

   Writing Exercise #17: Sensory Immersion

Week Ten

Tues Mar 30:  **Group B Submits for 4/1**, Workshop Group A (4-5 students), Begin reading Lucille Clifton, Billy Collins, Denise Duhamel, Thomas Luxe, Charles Simic AND Begin Commenting on Group B Poems

   Writing Exercise #18: Breaking It Up

Thu Apr 1:  **Group C Submits for 4/6**, Workshop Group B (2-3 students), Craft Discussion: Imaginative Leaps & Concrete Grounding, Begin Commenting on Group C Poems

   Writing Exercise #19: Creative Jumping

Week Eleven

Tues Apr 6:  Workshop Group C (4-5 students), Begin reading Stephen Dobyns, Tony Hoagland, Yusef Komonyukaa, Naomi Shihab Nye, Frank O’Hara

   Writing Exercise #20: Favorite Words

Thu Apr 8:  **Group A Submits for 4/13**, Craft Discussion: Tracing Movement & Poetic Turns, Begin Commenting on Group A Poems

   Writing Exercise #21: Plot Twist

Week Twelve


   Writing Exercise #22: Molded Model

Thu Apr 15:  **Group C Submits for 4/20**, Workshop Group B (2-3 students), Craft Discussion: Personal & Political, Begin Commenting on Group C Poems

   Writing Exercise #23: Political Voice
Week Thirteen

Tues Apr 20: Workshop Group C (4-5 students), Begin reading e. e. cummings, Stanley Kunitz, Pablo Neruda, William Shakespeare, Gary Soto

Writing Exercise #24: Cut, Paste, Compression


Writing Exercise #25: Romantic Angles

Week Fourteen

Tues Apr 27: Craft Discussion: Extended Metaphor & Rhythm, In-Class Exercise: Real-Time Poem Revision, In Class Activity: Final Portfolio Prep

Thu Apr 29: Publishing Q & A, Literary Magazine List (Handout), Prepare Final Portfolios

Week Fifteen

Tues May 4: Final Portfolios Due, Celebratory Student Reading

Thu May 6: No Class! Legislative Day