

Creative Writing: Intro to Prose & Poetry (Precollege), CRWRI-UA.815.060  
Summer Session 2: July 6 - Aug 16 (12 classes over 6 weeks)  
Tuesdays and Thursdays: 1.30–4.40 PM  
Instructor: Kechi Nomu  
knn2006@nyu.edu  
Office hours: Tuesdays 11.30AM–1PM; Location: TBD  
Classroom location: TBD

Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd.

– Voltaire

One of poetry’s great effects, through its emphasis upon feeling, association, music and image—things we recognize and respond to even before we understand why—is to guide us toward the part of ourselves so deeply buried that it borders upon the collective.

– From Tracy K. Smith’s lecture at The Library of Congress (Published by Washington Post with permission)

## **Introduction**

This course will introduce students to new ways of thinking about poetry and prose, how they work, and what close reading means. We will approach the subject of craft guided by György Lukács’ ideas in his book *Soul & Form* in which he offers a series of distinctions between the poet and the prose writer, their relationship to raw material, form, rhythm and longing. These ideas and how we align with them will inform how we think about our aesthetics concerns.

Because the class will operate on an assumption that we are new concepts such as craft, form and content, we will engage with what Lukács’ calls the consciousness from which a piece of writing is born and how the fragments unify into what we might consider a form.

In addition to these ideas about craft, in its most basic form, we will engage with craft as work that is returned to over and over again. In this way, students will be introduced to the concept of “view writing” as a way to generate language. This idea borrows from “view painting”, a genre that developed as the political dominance of Venice waned in Europe so that it became of interest more as a tourist destination in the 18th century giving rise to multiple paintings of its

iconic canals, squares and bridges. The interest here is to practice looking at things we become so used to seeing with new eyes and using this as an access point to create our own imaginary worlds.

## **Course Structure**

As we work through an understanding of craft, we will workshop our writing. On Tuesdays we will discuss craft, on Thursdays we will workshop our writing.

## **Craft Focus**

In addition to the aforementioned text by György Lukács for which the relevant sections will be made available to the class in a manner that is ethically appropriate, the texts we will focus on will mostly be available online. Before each craft class, I will make the relevant links or materials available via email to the class.

Included herein is a loose format for how craft conversations will function in class:

*We might consider what the logic of an Aria Aber poem is like, as established in “Afghan Funeral in Paris”. We might consider how the interactions and movement of the subjects through the confinement of a home and then, the confinement of a family unit drives the poem. How the speaker sees from within these areas of confinement as a person removed watching other people who might remove themselves from the scene or stay in situ. We might consider how changing any of these variables might alter the form, the tone, the mood, feelings evoked, and so on.*

To enforce some form of structure, we will take craft classes in poetry for the first half of the semester and the craft classes in fiction for the second half of the semester.

## **Workshops Focus**

The tools we acquire in craft class will be applied in workshop. Each student will submit: one work of prose no less than 4 pages and no more than 8 pages; 1 - 3 poems (no more than 5 pages long). To enforce some form of structure, we will workshop poetry submissions for the first half of the semester and focus on fiction for the second half of the semester. The format for engaging with and discussing the work of peers will be discussed in our first class but a general overview of what is expected is as follows:

- It is expected that students' engagement with each piece of writing will be rigorous.
- All students to be workshopped on a given day are expected to send in their works a week in advance.
- Ideally, read a piece once for general impressions: what pulls you in or takes you out, what topics/themes come up for you, what you sense that the writer is trying to communicate. A second read should focus on what the writer is doing with literary elements. By the third read, the student is encouraged to give informed feedback on what they think can be improved, what they think works, what literary elements enhance the piece best, and what themes should be explored some more.
- These comments should be made as annotations on the margins of a piece. Or added as comments/suggestions on Word Doc.
- These comments should be emailed to the workshopped students preferably before class and no more than three days after. (Where this is impossible, please email me with cogent reasons why this timeline is impossible for you to meet.)

## **Grading**

### **Workshop**

Submissions (20%): This will be for the poetry and prose submitted during the course of the semester and emailed in the timeline as specified above in item 2. (i.e: if you are to be workshopped on a specified date, you will be notified ahead of time in a format we will determine on the first day of class. Your submission should be emailed a week before that day.)

Critique (20%) : Based on preference, students must send critiques either via Word Doc or in print, which should be emailed to a workshopped student. I should be cc'd in this email. Or given a photocopy of critique in print.

### **Craft**

Reading Responses (10%) : Student response to assigned reading will be in this format. Upload a google doc of impressions, questions, disagreement, critiques to a folder I will create for this purpose before craft class. Deadline for this will be determined in class. Word count for this should be at least 300 words. There is no upper limit. You are required to include your name, use Times New Roman, 12pt, double-spaced, and use a one inch margin. These responses will form the basis of class conversations on craft. I will call on random students in the course of each class to lead/contribute to craft conversations.

## **Final Project (20%)**

Students get to choose based on interest what genre their final project will be on. It will take the form of a reworked cache of poems (2-5) or a reworked prose submission already workshopped in class.

## **Participation and Attendance (30%)**

I want to ensure that students are giving their best without forcing everyone to adhere to a reductive idea of what class participation looks like. What this means is, while students will be encouraged to formulate opinions about assigned text and give responses, this will be done with the utmost care and a recognition of where each student is emotionally, mentally, etc. What is important to me is that each student is carried along. That said, sloppiness will not be allowed. Your fellow students deserve better.

## **Class Etiquette**

**Timeliness:** It is expected that everyone shows up on time. Unexplained late arrivals and absences will be counted. Please respect your classmates and be on time.

**Format:** Save files in this format: surname.submissionname\_dateofsubmission. No space inbetween. With the exception of poetry submissions, all works must be Times New Roman, size 12 font, with one inch margins.

**Technology:** Depending on class format (in-person/remote), appropriate use of technology will be decided.

**Late Submissions:** No more than three missed submissions slots are allowed. Late submission of final projects will come with consequences that may take the form of losing grades.

**Sensitivity:** Workshops are an environment in which we allow ourselves to be vulnerable. A central rule with which we will approach feedback care. Comments that cross the line between helpful feedback and personal attacks ARE NOT ALLOWED.

**Plagiarism:** Please don't do it. This will get you in deep trouble with the university.

**Food:** You can eat and drink anything that will not cause distraction.

**Office hours:** I encourage meeting with me at least twice. Once in the middle of the semester to discuss your progress, and once towards the end to discuss the project you intend to submit. If you prefer additional meetings, I am open to that as well.

**Missing your own workshop:** Please do not miss your workshop.

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.

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: Note that speakers in submitted works will be assumed to be fictional except in cases where the writer makes it clear that they are, themselves, the speaker. Please send an email ahead of class if the subject in a piece of writing deals with murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress. This is to help contextualise the work ahead of class. It is also necessary to include a content warning notice while sending out work that deals with these themes. If you feel that you need to talk to someone at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

### **Final Poetry and Prose Selection**

The Flamethrowers, Rachel Kushner  
Love in the Time of Cholera, Gabriel Garcia Marquez  
Dust, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor  
But Beautiful, Geoff Dyer  
Disgrace, J.M. Coetzee  
Other People's Trades, Primo Levi  
Muse and Other Poems, Keith S Wilson  
Once Again for Thucydides, Peter Handke  
Hard Damage, Aria Aber  
Feel Free, Zadie Smith  
Dispatch, Cameron Awkward Rich  
The Poetry Home Repair Manual, Ted Kooser  
Soul & Form, György Lukács  
Meditations in an Emergency, Frank O'Hara  
Red Sorghum, Mo Yan  
Touki-Bouki & Hyenas (films); Djibril Diop Mambéty (tentative)  
Cold Pastoral, Marina Keegan

Where We Must Be, Laura van den Berg  
Nature Poem, Tommy Pico  
Postcolonial Love Poem: Poems, Natalie Diaz

### **Tentative Schedule**

Tuesday, July 6: Introductions, Syllabus Review, Intro to View Writing/Generating Language,  
György Lukács

Thursday, July 8: Students 1,2, 3, 4, and 5 Poetry Workshop.

Tuesday, July 13: Keith S Wilson, Aria Aber, Ted Kooser, Natalie Diaz

Thursday, July 15: Students 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 Poetry Workshop

Tuesday, July 20: Frank O'Hara, Cameron Awkward Rich, Tommy Pico

Thursday, July 22: Students 11, 12,13,14, and 15 Poetry Workshop

Tuesday, July 27: Rachel Kushner, J.M. Coetzee, Marina Keegan, Zadie Smith

Thursday, July 29: Students 1,2,3,4, and 5 Fiction Workshop

Tuesday, August 3: Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Geoff Dyer, Peter  
Handke

Thursday, August 5: Students 6,7,8,9, and 10 Fiction Workshop

Tuesday, August 10: Primo Levi, Mo Yan, Laura van den Berg, Djibril Diop Mambéty  
(tentative)

Thursday, August 11: Students 11, 12,13,14, and 15 Fiction Workshop

Tuesday, August 16 : Final Class/Submission of Portfolio by 4PM EST.