CREATIVE WRITING: INTRO TO FICTION & POETRY
SUMMER SESSION II, 2020

CRWRI-UA.815.001
M/W 1:30pm-4:40pm
Instructor: Katie Martin
Office Hours: By appt
Contact: kmm1075@nyu.edu

Course Overview
Like painters or sculptors, writers methodically create something from nothing as they seek to fill a space that was once empty or amorphous. As with any artistic medium, writing too can be felt and engaged with more deeply by unpacking its formal and thematic elements, to uncover the cogs turning in any piece of poetry or prose. In this course, we will be examining our own work and the work of others to discern how these stylistic decisions can generate and build upon meaning. We'll learn a comprehensive vocabulary that will help us discuss our own writings and the writings of our peers in an effective, productive way. By maintaining our daily image journals and participating in in-class generative exercises, we will build a writing practice that will sustain us for years to come. In an atmosphere of mutual support, experimentation and trust, we’ll work to untangle the abstractions of poetry and fiction into something more tangible and tender, something we can get our arms around. Course readings will foreground queer, POC, and non-binary writers that have been historically excluded from the literary canon.

Course Objectives
- To generate a vocabulary we can use to evaluate and identify formal and thematic elements
- To produce thoughtful poetry and prose that earnestly depicts our voice and sensibilities
- To provide effective feedback for our peers and their work
- To consider how stylistic decisions inform meaning

Required Text(s)
Don’t Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric, Claudia Rankine (Graywolf, 2014)
Nepantla: An Anthology for Queer Poets of Color (Nightboat Books, 2018)

Course Readings
All other course readings will be made available through NYU Classes or handed out during class.

Supplies
A journal or notebook, separate from your image journal, for note-taking.
A folder or three ring binder to keep all handouts and materials — by the end of the semester, you’ll have your own anthology of fiction and poetry.

**Meat & Potatoes**
In this course, our focus will be split into two sections, poetry first and fiction second. We will spend several classes interacting with texts that might fall in-between these distinctions, discussing more nebulous or hybrid forms like the lyric essay, prose-poems, graphic novels, etc. Wednesdays will be dedicated to workshopping and Mondays to craft, with the exception of the last two weeks in which we will be exclusively workshopping. Workshops will be divided into two groups. If your group is up for workshop that week, you will be turning in a draft (with enough copies for everyone) the Monday before your Wednesday workshop so that we will have time to sit with your writing. Regardless of which group you are in, you will be required to turn in a draft every Monday — if you’re not scheduled to be workshopped, you only need to bring one copy for me.

For the first week of our poetry section and, later, our fiction section, we will spend a considerable amount of time acclimating ourselves with a critical vocabulary, formal terminologies and effective methods for unpacking the medium at hand.

Each student will be expected to enter our class sessions with an open heart and curious mind, to contribute meaningfully to class discussions, to provide thoughtful critiques for the work of your peers, to maintain your image journal with care, and to turn in drafts for workshop. You will also be turning in written responses (Reading Responses) to the assigned “craft” essays as well as typed up critiques for workshop submissions.

At the end of the semester, you’ll assemble a Chapbook that will hold all your revised final drafts.

**Reading Responses**
On Mondays, you will be required to turn in a brief writing assignment (5 - 7 sentences, typed, double spaced) that responds to several questions I will prompt you with, to help guide your reading, at the end of the day on Wednesdays. This will help inform a productive discussion of the reading, whether it is an essay on craft or assigned poems or stories.

**Workshop Submissions**
Regardless of whether or not your group is up for workshop that week, you will be turning in a draft of a poem or a story every Monday. Workshops will be held on Wednesdays, but your drafts need to be turned in on Monday — “turned in” means bringing enough printed copies to class for all of us. This way, we’ll have time to engage with your draft and formulate in-depth commentary. This means that you will be required to write approximately 5 poems and an extended story draft over the course of the semester. If it’s preferable, you could instead
turn in drafts of 3 separate short stories. Poems can be of any length or genre (barring a specific writing assignment, like sonnets) and stories can be anywhere from 10 to 15 pages — if you’re going to go the route of 3 shorter stories, the final products must total 10 to 15 pages in aggregate, not individually. You will be provided with prompts but will not be necessarily beholden to them.

**Annotating for Workshop**
You will be required to mark up the text(s) that will be workshopped that day, prior to the workshop, highlighting points of interest, line edits, more cosmetic concerns, etc. We want to give each text the attention and care it deserves — and that requires a very close reading.

**Written Feedback**
Written feedback will consist of one half page (typed, double spaced) of detailed notes about each workshop submission at hand. These pages will be addressed and formatted as if they were letters to the writer, (“Dear So and So,” etc). We will go over more explicit expectations for the type of feedback in our first few classes. You’ll bring in two copies for each text, one copy for the author and one copy that you’ll turn into me.

**Image Journal**
Please come to every class with your image journal in hand. In this journal, we will observe and record several images per day. These journals will help you locate inspiration in your day-to-day life, mundane or otherwise, and these observations will act as entry points into in-class writing exercises. At the end of this course, your journal will read like an attic of your mind — a hodgepodge of keepsakes, memories, overheard conversations, longings, favorite quotes and dreams. I will have you turn in your journal entries in class periodically, purely to make sure it’s being maintained, though your journal is a safe space and will incur no judgements. Think of this as more of a meditational practice than an assignment.

**Poetry Reading Attendance**
In New York, you almost have to go out of your way to avoid literary readings. You will be required to attend two readings over the course of the semester and to type of a brief (1 page, typed, double spaced) review of your experience there. I will be sure to give you a heads up on upcoming events but you’re welcome to research your own as well.

**Workshop Etiquette & Best Practices**
A workshop cannot be successful if there is not a mutually agreed upon atmosphere of trust, support and respect. We will be sharing ourselves and our stories with each other and that can be a very vulnerable-making act. We will consider our classmates work with the same respectful tones that we would want our own work considered. We will be sure to always refer to the narrator of the poem or
story as “the speaker” and never conflate them with the author. This will be a small, tight-knit class and we will all do well to stay mindful and attentive of how much (or how little) space any of our individual voices are taking up.

**Trigger warnings**
If your workshop submission contains themes, depictions, or turns of phrase that could conceivably make a reader uncomfortable due to their graphic or harmful nature, please implement a trigger warning in the header of your submission (above any text) with a generalized description of the triggering language below. This is a common courtesy and nonnegotiable. If you are uncertain if your piece contains triggering elements, please email it to me before submitting it for workshop.

**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.

**Absences & Tardiness**
Don’t do it. But if you must, please let me know well ahead of time. More than two unexplained absences will result in a 10% deduction from your final grade. An unexplained absence means that you have not contacted me prior to the start of class with a heads up. Chronic tardiness will not be tolerated but I am a reasonable person and understand that trains happen. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will be marked as absent.

**Conferences**
Students are required to meet with me during office hours (or by appointment) at least twice during the semester. Our first meeting should take place during the first three weeks so I can gain a better understanding of your voice, aspirations, and how I can best support you.

**Plagiarism**
NYU has a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism for both academic papers and creative pieces. All occasions of plagiarism will be reported directly to the department, without exception. That said, you are welcome (and encouraged) to reference the work of others or turn in work that is in direct conversation with another piece. I only ask that you reference or make note of this ahead of time. For a
more thorough overview of NYU’s policies on academic integrity, please consult:
http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity

**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

**Grading**

Class Participation & Conferences: 10%
Peer Responses: 15%
Reading Responses: 25%
Drafts: 25%
Final Revised Portfolios: 25%

**Course Schedule**

*Subject to change with notice*

**Week 1**

**(M) July 6th — Welcome!**
Get-to-know-you-type exercises
Review syllabus and other logistics
“Message in a Bottle” (Essay) — Ed Hirsch
Mock workshop — bring in your favorite poem!

**(W) July 8th — Ars Poetica**
Group 1 Workshop
*Art of Daring: Risks, Restlessness and Imagination* (Selections) — Carl Phillips
“For The Sake Of People’s Poetry” (Essay) — June Jordan
“won’t you celebrate with me” — Lucille Clifton
“Essay On Craft” — Ocean Vuong
*Junk* (Excerpt) — Tommy Pico
Week 2

(M) July 13th — Line as Unit
  Group 2 Workshop
  Selections from Versed — Rae Armantrout
  Selections from Black Acre — Monica Youn
  In-class writing meditation

(W) July 15th — Forms Inform Meaning
  Group 1 Workshop
  “Why Write in Form?” (Essay) — Rebecca Hazleton
  Selections from Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin — Terrance Hayes
  Selections from Bijoux in the Dark — John Yau
  In-class writing meditation (pantoums)

Week 3

(M) July 20th — Metatextual: Syntax and Structure
  Group 2 Workshop
  “Muscularity & Eros” (Essay) — Carl Phillips
  Selections from Nature Poem — Tommy Pico
  “Self Portrait” — Erika L. Sanchez
  “Elegy With My Mother’s Lipstick” — Paul Tran
  “thirst” — Franny Choi

(W) July 22nd — Sonic Landscapes
  Group 1 Workshop
  Simulacra (Selections) — Airea D. Matthews
  The Same Different (Selections) — Hannah Sanghee Park
  Jelly Roll (Selections) — Kevin Young
  In-class writing meditation (word soundscape)

Week 4

(M) July 27th — Liminal Spaces & In-Between-ness in Genre (& Otherwise)
  Group 2 Workshop
  Don’t Let Me Be Lonely — Claudia Rankine
  Excerpt from Fun Home — Alison Bechdel

(W) July 29th — Narrative Arc: Dipping Below the Axis
  Group 1 Workshop
“Reeling for the Empire” — Karen Russell
“Bloodchild” — Octavia Butler
*The Loss of All Lost Things* (Selections) — Amina Gautier

**Week 5**

(M) **August 3rd** — *Plot Diagramming*
   Group 2 Workshop
   Selections from *Grand Union* — Zadie Smith
   Selections from *Birds of America* — Lorrie Moore
   *The School* — Donald Barthelme
   *Rise, Baby, Rise!* (essay) — George Saunders
   In-class writing meditation (draft a plot diagram)

(W) **August 5th** — *Writing Into & Out of the Subconscious*
   Group 1 Workshop
   *4th Person Singular* — Nuar Al-Sadir
   Selections from *Speedboat* — Renata Adler
   In-class writing meditation (stream of consciousness)

**Week 6**

(M) **August 10th** — *Memoire & Memory*
   Group 1 & 2 Workshop
   “Phone Home” (*When the Sick Rule the World*) — Dodie Bellamy
   Excerpts from *Speak, Memory* — Vladimir Nabokov
   In-class writing meditation (split open a memory)

(W) **August 12th** — *At the end of my suffering, there was a door...*
   Chapbooks due
   Potluck!
   Dramatic reading showcase