Creative Writing: Introduction to Poetry & Fiction
Spring 2017
MW 12:30-1:45pm

Instructor: Dominique Béchard
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Course Objective

In this introductory course, we will investigate the ways in which a poem and short story are refined. By carefully taking note of the processes and techniques of a number of exemplary authors, we will come closer to an independent understanding of craft; each student will be guided toward developing a distinct, cultivated voice. Students are expected to participate actively in class discussions, submit weekly creative pieces and reading responses, and recite a poem of their choosing. Each student must produce a revised portfolio that exemplifies the term’s endeavours.

Craft

Every Monday we will hold craft discussions. Although I have not assigned many readings, I will expect you to have read independently, and you will be encouraged to discuss any individual poems or books you have discovered over the course of the previous week. On top of this, we will challenge the required texts, so please read everything carefully, and arrive prepared with questions and comments. Most weeks will include a short writing exercise derived from topics and readings, which we will practice in class. Over the course of the semester, you will also be required to recite one poem of choice, and lead an informal group discussion.

Workshop

Every Wednesday, we will workshop your poetry or fiction. The first seven weeks will be devoted to poetry, while the final seven will focus on short fiction. The class will likely be divided into three groups, so you will workshop once every three weeks. However, you will be required to submit at least one poem or story every week, even if you are not up for workshop. Besides, you are expected to annotate all of your peers’ workshop submissions, and participate in class discussion, commenting on both a piece’s strengths and areas in need of improvement. Before our first workshop, we will discuss proper methods of class critique, and how to provide helpful suggestions with respect and an open mind. Everybody should feel safe and respected, and there will be no tolerance for anything that evokes discomfort in your peers.

Electronics and food are not permitted in class. They can both be disrespectful. However, beverages are welcome.
**Plagiarism** is forbidden for all creative and academic work. See NYU’s policies about academic integrity for more information.

**Late Work** will likely receive grade reductions. Please let me know *ahead of time* if you are feeling overwhelmed, and we can try to work something out.

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**Grading**

- Participation  30%
- Workshop Submissions  15%
- Reading Responses  15%
- Recitation  10%
- Final Portfolio  30%

1. **Participation 30%**

You are expected to attend every class, and unexplained absences will likely result in grade deductions. If possible, please inform me ahead of time if you expect to miss a class.

*Office Hours:* You are expected to visit me in office hours at least twice during the course of the semester. One of these visits must be in regards to your final portfolio.

*Playlist:* I will post a weekly playlist (of songs) that further expands on themes, topics of interest related to each craft course. You are encouraged to provide suggestions of relevant songs for extra points. However, you will not be penalized if you choose not to participate in this.

*Presentation:* You will be required to lead a casual in-class craft discussion, touching on that week’s central topic and readings. I will pass around a sign-up sheet, and you can select your date of choice (more than one person per week is fine).

2. **Workshop Submissions 15%**

Every week, you will be required to submit at least one poem (during the first half of term), and one short story (during the second half). I will be the sole reader of submissions not presented for class workshop. For those pieces not being workshopped, poems must be a single page, and stories can be anywhere between 3-20 pages. For those up for workshop, poetry submissions must be between 3-5 pages (with no more than one poem per page), and story submissions must
be between 7-20 pages. Copies of your submission must be brought to class one week before you are up for workshop. You are permitted to workshop pieces previously submitted to me, but cannot submit pieces that have previously been workshopped. Every page must include your name and the date. I am open to fonts that are not Times New Roman, but your choice must not impede legibility or distract from the quality of your work.

3. Reading Responses 15%

You will be required to hand in a single-page, single-spaced response to that week’s readings, at the beginning of every craft class (Monday). For the poetry craft classes, you will be assigned one poem by four different poets. In your response paper, you must discuss at least two of these poets/poems. You must somehow relate your paper to that week’s topic (i.e. Music; Image; Geography; etc.), but the specifics are entirely up to you. The same applies for the fiction craft classes; you will be required to write on the assigned story, and relate it to the weekly topic.

4. Recitation 10%

You must choose one mid-length poem (fourteen lines or more) to recite to the class. You can stray from the assigned poems, but must nonetheless select a piece by one of the assigned poets.

5. Final Portfolio 30%

For your final project, you will select, revise and compile either 1) at least five of your poems from the term or 2) a fifteen-page (or longer) short story. This must be prefaced by an author’s statement, describing your process and vision for the whole. You are encouraged to meet with me before (and after) submission of the final.

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Craft Topics

Week 1: Introduction to Poetry: Music
    poems by Ken Babstock, Terrance Hayes, Michael Morse, Leonard Cohen;
    “Some Notes on Form” by Robert Hass;

Week 2: Precision & Image
    poems by William Carlos Williams, Robert Hass, Karen Solie, Brenda Hillman;

Week 3: Geography
    poems by Derek Walcott, Natasha Trethewey, A.F. Moritz, Philip Levine;

Week 4: Navigating the Line
    poems by Carl Philips, A.R. Ammons, Robert Creeley, Lucie Brock-Broido;
Week 5: Voice
   poems by Roger Reeves, Sylvia Plath, D.A. Powell, Elizabeth Bishop;

Week 6: Translation
   poems by Czeslaw Milosz, Engenio Montale, C.P. Cavafy, Guillaume Apollinaire;
   readings on translation theory, imitation & variations;

Week 7: The Elegy
   poems by Mary Jo Bang, Robert Pinsky, Natalie Diaz, James Merrill;

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Week 8: Introduction to Short Fiction: Precision
   Alice Munro, TBD;

Week 9: The Encounter, ‘Experience’
   Guy Vanderhaeghe, “The Jimi Hendrix Experience”;

Week 10: Time-Line & Pacing
   Lynn Coadie, “Mr. Hope”;

Week 11: Believable Worlds
   Gabriel Garcia Marquez, “A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings”;

Week 12: The Disquieting
   Flannery O’Connor, “Good Country People”;

Week 13: Character Relationships & Dialogue
   David Bezmozgis, “Natasha”; 

Week 14: The Novel
   excerpts from the beginnings of a few TBD novels;
   Portfolio Due