
Intro to Creative Writing Spring 2005 (V41.0815.005)

Monday / Wednesday 4:55-6:10, Bobst 736

Noah Michelson (noahmichelson@gmail.com)

Office Hours: Mondays, 2:30-4:00 (or by appointment) 19 University Place, RM 426

Required Materials

The majority of your readings can be found in the course packet (available at New Copy Center, 11 Waverly Place) but I will also bring handouts to class based on what we've been discussing or in order to/in hopes of adding to/fleshing out our discussions.

How the Course Works

Monday classes will be craft classes where we will discuss the reading you've done and talk about the (loosely) assigned topic for that particular week. Wednesday classes will be the workshops where we will critique the writing you've brought in.

The week before you will be workshopped (the previous Wednesday), please bring in enough copies of your poem or story for everyone in the class. All of your assignments must be turned in on time, otherwise your classmates (and myself) may not have sufficient time to develop worthwhile comments, thereby leaving you without the help you want/need, and creating an incredibly boring class.

Other Requirements

Attendance (15 percent):

Because this course depends on the participation of everyone involved, you must show up and you must be on time. If you have more than two unexcused absences you will lose a partial letter grade. If you're consistently late your grade will suffer as well.

Participation (15 percent):

Ideally this course will function more as a discussion than a class. I've picked readings that I love/am intrigued by and hope you will love (or at least not hate)/be intrigued by too, and that you'll want to talk about. Come to class with questions, anxieties, critiques, the things you loved, the things you hated, all of it.

As far as workshopping goes, even if you are not being workshopped, your presence is still crucial, and you'll be amazed the things you can learn by actively participating in a discussion of someone else's work. Believe it or not, as different as our writing styles will turn out to be, we all make the same mistakes/have the same problems/need to hear the same things once and a while.

Response Papers (15 percent):

Six ½ page to 1-page response papers are due by the end of the term, 3 poetry and 3 fiction. You can pick which readings you will respond to and when as long as I get the 3 poetry responses by the end of the poetry section and the 3 fiction by the end of the term. This does not have to be a particularly formal or difficult exercise; nor is it meant to be busy work. Instead, give some real thought to what the poem or story is doing, how it is doing it, what you liked or disliked about the work (and why), what you, personally, can take away from the poem or story that might help/influence your own work, and at least one question you had after finishing it. It'll help (or at least can't hurt) our class discussions and will give you the extra chance to consider/reconsider what the author is up to.

Poems/Stories (50 percent):

Because this is a writing workshop, you will be writing a poem or story/story exercise a week. You may not (probably won't) get to workshop everything you write this semester, but I still want you writing even if you won't be workshopped that particular week. If you want to go over work that we don't get to in class you can come and see me during office hours. At the end of the semester you will turn in a portfolio with all of the work you've done, including all drafts and revisions. Revisions are an important part of writing and I expect to see you actively attempting them (more about this in class.) In addition to any/all writing you're doing on your own I will give you a few writing assignments I expect you to complete. You can workshop these assignments in place of other work you might have written, or you can simply turn them in on their assigned due date and add them to your portfolio.

Miscellaneous:

Readings are a great way to find out about new and upcoming writers and you will be required to go to 2 readings during the semester and do a ½ page write up of the event (5 percent).

I'd also like to meet with you twice during the semester, once during the first few weeks of class, and once near the end of the term. Of course you can come to office hours whenever you want, but you must come at least twice.

Finally, my hope, first and foremost, is that you will be excited/actively involved in reading and writing for the next three months, and then beyond. When you finish the course you will have, at the very least, some of the basic tools you need to talk about poetry and fiction, as well as strategies that will help you to crack open a poem or a story and get at its insides, and if not completely (or even kind of) understand it, then at least have a few ideas about what it's doing, how it's operating, and, most importantly, a way to articulate what it makes you think about and feel. Beyond that, you will learn to

develop a critical eye which you will be able apply to others' work and your own, thereby helping your classmates and yourself to improve your writing.

Weekly Calendar

POETRY

Week 1

Wed 1/ 19

Class introduction; Poems That Begin At The Beginning

Henri Cole "Self-portrait in a Gold Kimono"

Daphne Gottlieb "Mastering the Art of Poetry"

Sharon Olds "I Go Back to May 1937"

Week 2

Mon 1/24

The Basics: Metaphor/Simile/Image/Slant

Emily Dickinson "I Heard a Buzz Fly", "Robin"

Rita Dove "Nexus" "Silos"

Brenda Hillman "Male Nipples"

Pablo Neruda "Ode to a Laboratory Technician" "Ode to My Cranium"

Wed 1/27

Workshop

Week 3

Mon 1/31

Form: The Sonnet, The Villanelle, The Sestina

Elizabeth Bishop "One Art"

Beth Ann Fennelly "Poem Not To Be Read At Your Wedding"

Bernadette Mayer "Sonnet"

Petrarch "Sonnet 134"

William Shakespeare "Sonnet 130"

Dylan Thomas "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night"

David Trinidad "Playing with Dolls"

Wed 2/2

Workshop

Week 4

Mon 2/7
Persona Poems

Ai “Child Beater” “Sleeping Beauty”
Frank Bidart “Ellen West”
Thom Gunn “Hitch-hiker” “Final Song”
Michael Ondaatje “In Boot Hill there are 400 graves”, “After shooting Gregory”, “Tilts
back to fall”, “I have seen pictures of great stars”, “Miss Sallie Chisum: On Billy”
Sylvia Plath “Lady Lazarus”

Wed 2/9
Workshop

Week 5

Mon 2/14
Language Poetry

Rae Armantrout “Wake Up” “The Mix Up”
Lisa Jarnot “Emperor Wu”
Kenneth Koch “The Pleasures of Peace”
Ann Lauterbach “On (Open)” and Interview w/Lauterbach
Harryette Mullen “Jinglejangle”
Dean Young “Bright Head” “Honeycomb”

Wed 2/ 16
Workshop

Week 6

Mon 2/21
No Class

Wed 2/23
Workshop

Week 7

Mon 2/28
Sequences

Margaret Atwood “For Three Days”, “Just Now”, “A Certain Light”, “What the Living
Do”

Marie Howe “you fit into me”, “He is a strange biological phenomenon”, “you want to go back”, “Their attitudes differ”, “Small tactics”, “What do you expect after this?”
Sharon Olds “Nullipara”, “The Glass”, “The Race”, “The Dead Body”
Adrienne Rich “21 Love Poems”

Wed 3/2
Workshop

Week 8

Mon 3/7
Dream Poems

Elizabeth Alexander “Dream #3”
Laura Jensen “Six Dreams”
Deborah Keenan “ In Florida, As Smoke Billows...”

Wed 3/9
Workshop

Week 9

Spring Break

FICTION

Week 10

Mon 3/21
Character/Setting

Emily Carter “Minneapolis”
Bret Easton Ellis “Sitting Still”
Susan Minot “Lust”
Lorrie Moore “Charades” “People Like That Are The Only People Here”

Wed 3/23
Workshop

Week 11

Mon 3/28
Suspense/Writing the Unsettling

Carol Emshwiller “The General”

Shirley Jackson "Like Mother Used to Make" "The Lottery" "Charles"
J.D. Salinger "Pretty Eyes and Green My Mouth"

Wed 3/ 30
Workshop

Week 12

Mon 4/4
Ghost Stories/Science Fiction/Fairy Tales

Ray Bradbury "Summer All Day Long"
Angela Carter "The Fall River Axe Murders"
W.W. Jacobs "The Monkey's Paw"
Edgar Allen Poe "Tell Tale Heart", "The Black Cat"

Wed 4/6
Workshop

Week 13

Mon 4/11
Flash Fiction

Kim Addonizio "Survivors"
Jonis Agee "Politics"
Roberta Allen "Daydream"
Kate Chopin "Story of An Hour"
Stuart Dybek "Flu"
Betsey Kemper "This Is How I Remember It"
Ron Wallace "Worry"

Wed 4/13
Workshop

Week 14

Mon 4/18
The Letter / Stories Taken from Real life

Bret Easton Ellis "Letters From LA"
Glen David Gold "The Tears of Squonk, and What Happened Thereafter"
Joyce Carol Oates "Unmailed, Unwritten Letters", "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"

Wed 4/20

Week 15

Mon 4/25
Memory/Memoir

Augusten Burroughs “Commercial Break”
Emily Carter “A”
David Sedaris “A Plague of Tics”

Wed 4/27
Workshop

Week 16

Mon 5/2
Final Class: Odds and Ends / Wrap up

Raymond Carver

Your Dog Dies

it gets run over by a van.
you find it at the side of the road
and bury it.
you feel bad about it.
you feel bad personally,
but you feel bad for your daughter
because it was her pet,
and she loved it so.
she used to croon to it
and let it sleep in her bed.
you write a poem about it.
you call it a poem for your daughter,
about the dog getting run over by a van
and how you looked after it,
took it out into the woods
and buried it deep, deep,
and that poem turns out so good
you're almost glad the little dog
was run over, or else you'd never
have written that good poem.
then you sit down to write
a poem about writing a poem
about the death of that dog,