
INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING: A CROSS-GENRE WORKSHOP in Fall 2020 (EN2100)

Course Code	EN2100	Professor(s)	Amanda Dennis
Prerequisites	None	Office Number	G-116
Class Schedule	W: 14:30-17:55 in G-113	Office Hours	Tuesdays 2:15-3:15 p.m. & by appt.
Credits	4	Email	adennis@aup.edu
Semester	Fall 2020	Office Tel. Ext.	

Course Description

Part of the exhilaration of good literature is the way it can color our living—challenging us to look more closely, feel more fiercely. A powerful poem or work of prose can amplify reality, invigorate our way of seeing, and illuminate things we've felt but haven't found a way to name. At the same time, it may invite us to inhabit worlds, bodies, and perspectives other than our own. The aim of this course is to give you some tools and techniques (craft) for building worlds out of language, translating experience through the use of narrative, and by other means.

Through a variety of readings and regular assignments, we will explore the elements poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction, asking also what creative possibilities arise when we work between genres, or at their intersection. In poetry, we will look at visual description, figurative language, central metaphor, and rhythm and pacing. In prose, we will work on setting, characterization, voice, and dramatic structure. Above all, we will ask what makes a poem or imaginative prose piece moving, evocative, and imbued with a sense of necessity. We will discuss how obscurity, sentimentality, or problems with structure can undermine the quality of the writing and the intended effect of a piece.

Readings include Italo Calvino, Chekhov, Angela Carter, T.S. Eliot, Lydia Davis, Joan Didion, Alexander Chee, Grace Paley, NoViolet Bulawayo, and Roberto Bolaño. They center around the relationship between literature and experience, for, as James Baldwin puts it, "everything depends on how relentlessly one forces from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give." Weekly writing assignments are designed to stimulate observation, in keeping with Henry James's description of the writer as "someone on whom nothing is lost." You will present these writing assignments to the class for constructive consideration and ideas for improvement. You will also develop your critical eye and critical voice when it comes to your own and colleagues' work, increasing your awareness as a writer.

Course Learning Outcomes

To develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the art of poetry and creative prose writing through practice and analysis.

To develop skills in editing and writing strategy.

To explore the defining characteristics of poetry, fiction, and literary nonfiction and where the borders between them blur.

General Education

Course Outline

CLASS SCHEDULE: *(this schedule may change as the class's needs emerge and evolve)*

Week 1 – Sept. 23

In Class: Lydia Davis, "Outing," Grace Paley, "Mother," Ezra Pound "In A Station of the Metro." Framing images, structuring the everyday.

Reading for Next Week: Sei Shonagon, *The Pillow Book* (excerpts), Joe Brainard, *I Remember* (excerpts); Susan Sontag, *Reborn* (excerpts)

Assignment 1: Observe the space around you, take notes, then condense these observations into a sixth of their original size, using some method of organization (e.g. lists, refrain).

September 30th – last day to drop/add courses online

Week 2 – Sept. 30th

In Class: Yeats wrote that a poet "is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; [s]he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete." Does part of the difference between an artist and a person lie in structure? How does organization affect

us as readers (Shonagon, Brainard, and Sontag)? What makes a work interesting to others, worth reading, versus just a diary? Read together Francis Ponge, "The Cigarette."

Reading for Next Week: Francis Ponge, *The Voice of Things* (excerpts), Gertrude Stein *Tender Buttons* (excerpts), William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow," "This is Just to Say," H.D. "Oread," Wallace Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar."

Assignment 2: Write about two objects (250 words each).

Week 3 – Oct. 7th

In Class: Writing from objects. Is there such a thing as vibrant matter? Can a "thing" look back at you? Does it have a vital energy of its own? Using objects and materiality in writing. Imagism as escape from sentimentality.

Reading for Next Week: Elizabeth Bowen, *A House in Paris* (excerpt); NoViolet Bulawayo "Hitting Budapest"; Roberto Bolaño, "Clara."

Assignment 3: Invent a character based on a person you don't know but can see vividly (an unsuspecting stranger). Give this character something to do (a situation) and a desire.

Week 4 – Oct. 14th

In Class: What makes compelling characters? Desire, interiority, dynamism-in-situations. What makes Henrietta, Olga, Darling, and Bolano's narrator vivid and knowable? Going beyond static description; we know characters by watching them in the world—doing, acting, deciding. How much of yourself do you put into a character? Read together one of Calvino's "cities" for place.

Reading for Next Week: Italo Calvino *Invisible Cities* (pp. 1-55); Hala Alyan, "Oklahoma," "Dear Gaza."

Assignment 4: Write about a place you have lived in.

***First Reaction Paper Due* (Hardcopy in Class)**

Week 5 – Oct. 21st

In Class: Writing cities. What are the secrets to writing place—especially urban spaces? How to create mood through setting. In writing place, how do we weave emotion, specificity, memory, and research? Can place be a character?

Reading for Next Week: Chapter 1 of Aysegul Savas's *Walking on the Ceiling* and the short story, "Layover" and prepare two questions for the writer.

Assignment 5: Visit the Paris address assigned to you. Imagine that you have lived there and write about your life (or the life of an invented character or characters who have lived there). Hint: spend some time in the neighborhood.

Week 6 – Oct. 28th

In Class: Guest Visit. Aysegul Savas.

Reading for Next Week: Jamaica Kincaid "Girl," Ottessa Moshfegh, "Bettering Myself," Dostoyevsky *Notes from the Underground* (excerpt).

Assignment 6: Write a voice-driven piece, inhabiting fully a persona of your devising.

October 28th, Mid-semester

Week 7 – Nov. 4th

In Class: Discuss voice and style. What are the "natural" and "worked up" qualities of voice? The amalgam of writer's style and a character's diction/idiolect. Characterizing *your* voice as a writer. Difference between voice and character speech in dialogue.

Reading for Next Week: Donald Barthelme "The School," Angela Carter, "The Bloody Chamber," George Saunders, "Rise, Baby, Rise!"

Assignment 6: Write a scene using dialogue involving two or more people. Escalate tension.

November 11th-13th Fall Break (no classes)

Week 8 – Nov. 11th (no class)

Week 9 – Nov. 18th

In Class: Discussion of dramatic tension and the art of the scene. What makes a piece *move*? What creates suspense, tension? Is this related to structure? How are these writers (Carter, Barthelme) using repetition? Patterns? Anticipating reader's expectations. Segue into the problem of the self in autofiction (lyric essay), and how to stitch personal experience into larger political, social, and scientific contexts. Read together Rousseau's *Confessions* (excerpt).

Reading for Next Week: Aaron Peck *Letters from the Pacific* (excerpts). Come up with two questions from the writer; Leslie Jameson, "The Devil's Bait"

Assignment 7: Write a piece that takes off from an oddity you've noticed or a story you've read in the news (*fait divers*). Do the research, then fill in the dramatic situation OR Write the beginning of a lyric essay or auto-fiction, using a motif (say, from science or politics) to attach the essay to something larger than the self.

***Second Reaction Paper Due* (Hardcopy in Class)**

Week 10 – Nov. 25th

In Class: Guest Visit Aaron Peck

Reading for Next Week: Sarah Hall, "Mrs. Fox"

Assignment: Submit piece for workshop by email. DUE NOV. 28th Read and comment on texts for first group workshop.

November 27th, last day to withdraw from a course/last day to choose Credit/No Credit grading option

Week 11 – Dec. 2

WORKSHOP FIRST GROUP

In Class: Discuss departures from realism. What possibilities can be opened up by invoking the fantastic? What are some strategies for writing compelling and convincing fantasy?

Reading for Next Week: James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son"; Joan Didion "The White Album" (excerpt)

Assignment: Read and comment on texts for second group workshop.

Week 12 – Dec. 9th

WORKSHOP SECOND GROUP

In Class: How do we invent the self as persona, especially in creative non-fiction and poetry?

Discussion of timeliness in writing, and the relationship between the personal and the political.

Portfolio Due Dec. 15th; Reading/Performance Date TBA

December 11th, last day of classes

December 12th – 15th reading days

December 16th – 22nd final exams

Textbooks

This course doesn't have any textbook.

Attendance Policy

ATTENDANCE: Your success in this course requires dedication to reading as a writer, writing regularly, and developing your ability to give meaningful feedback (critique). Discussing others' work and discovering how others approach your writing is a necessary part of this development. Regular attendance is necessary to this practice-based course. If you must miss a class, contact me at adennis@aup.edu before the class. After two or more unexcused absences, you may be asked to withdraw from the course.

UNIVERSITY ATTENDANCE POLICY: Students at The American University of Paris are expected to attend all sessions. Certain absences may, however, be excused. Excused

absences fall into two categories: sickness or unforeseen emergency, and university-sponsored activities, such as study trips. When a student misses a class, he or she must present an excuse to the professor. If two consecutive classes are missed, however, the student must go to the Student Affairs Office to present third-party verification (a doctor's note, for example) in order for the absence to be excused. In all cases the responsibility for making up missed work rests solely with the student. However, the instructor may recommend administrative withdrawal of a student whose absences, excused or not, have made it impossible to continue in the course at a satisfactory level.

Covid-19 temporary amendments:

Students studying at The American University of Paris are **STILL EXPECTED TO ATTEND ALL** scheduled classes. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students will have the option of attending classes remotely when special circumstances apply. For example when students are placed under quarantine by the French authorities or by their doctor, or when students present symptoms of Covid-19 and are directed, by their doctor or the AUP Health Office, to remain home. It is still the student's responsibility to be aware of any specific attendance policy that their professor might have set in the course syllabus. In particular, Students attending remotely from distant Time Zones should check with their professors about the specific attendance policy for remote learners.

Grading Policy

REQUIREMENTS:

- **Weekly class assignments** (500 words of prose or one poem)
- **Two Reaction Papers** (500 words each)
- **Portfolio:** One 3-page work of prose, creative nonfiction or poetry, 3 revised weekly assignments (one of each of the three genres), and a 2-page essay on the creative journey, placing your work in a literary context.

GRADING:

Class participation/exercises: 30%

Two short reaction papers: 10%

Portfolio: 60%

SUBMITTING WORK:

Each week, you will submit your assignments before **Monday at 9 a.m.** Any late work risks not being read or workshopped. Email your work as a Word Document to adennis@aup.edu. Please put your name and title at the top of the document and save work as follows:

Your Name_ Assign1

Your Name_ Assign2

Your Name_Portfolio (all work for your portfolio should go in one Word Document)

Each week, before class, you will receive by email a “Mastercopy” containing the work of all students. Make sure you have this with you in class so that you can refer to a student’s text for workshop. The Mastercopy can be printed and brought to class or read on your computer. During this semester, technology will be a part of our course. Please use it responsibly.

REACTION PAPER:

A reaction paper is 500 words engaging with a literary reading in Paris or via Zoom/online or with a text that you have discovered as a result of this class (but not one on that we have discussed). If you choose to attend a literary event, take notes, write down anything you find interesting. Present your impressions in a way that is *engaging to read*. Find *your* voice, what makes you want to keep writing. Please turn these in via Blackboard (under Assignments).

Other
