Creative Writing Courses—Winter 2018

CRWR 230: INTRODUCTION TO POETRY WRITING

To write poetry means thinking, but through form, through music—music which helps, if we know how to listen. Poetry is what tries to make music of what occurs in life. —Yves Bonnefoy

CRWR 230 provides an introduction to the reading and writing of poetry. Throughout this course, we will study the elements of craft essential in writing poems, including imagery, figurative language, diction, speaker, and tone. Our learning will take two forms: first, close reading of works by many poets from different periods and backgrounds, to see how other skilled writers have crafted their poems; and, second, experience writing through in-class exercises and original poems. Via close readings, class discussions, poem-writing and the workshop, you will form an understanding of many crucial concepts in poetry and begin to forge your own poetry practice. You will also be an active participant in a community of writers—giving and receiving feedback, learning from one another, and revising your poems toward a strong final portfolio.

CRWR 240: INTRODUCTION TO FICTION WRITING

In On Becoming a Novelist, John Gardner advises young writers to read “the way a young architect looks at a building, or a medical student watches an operation, both devotedly, hoping to learn from a master, and critically alert for any possible mistake.” The purpose of this course is to develop your understanding of the craft of fiction writing; close reading is essential to this end. Over the term, we’ll discuss an array of short stories and essays, examining how writers use basic elements of craft—character, plot, point of view, etc.—to achieve particular effects. You will then apply these lessons in creative exercises and episodes, as well as to a full-length short story of your own.

CRWR 330: INTERMEDIATE POETRY WRITING

For the Eye altering alters all —William Blake’s “The Mental Traveller"

What is it about Bishop’s fish or Whitman’s blade of grass that moves us? Why do we feel at times that the materials of language fail us? How does the poet capture the world in words? With a focus on description, this course will begin to investigate these questions. We will use syntax and Mark Doty’s exploration of the sensorium as guides, and we will read selections from Elizabeth Bishop, Deborah Digges, Gjertrud Schnackenberg, Derek Walcott, Pablo Neruda, Gertrude Stein, and many more to gain an understanding of how words become poetry. Contemporary works from Claudia Emerson, Rick Barot, and Daniel Anderson will serve as models for developing our craft. Lively class discussion and workshopping will be the core components of the course; we will rely upon each other for valuable input. A willingness to read intensively and participate in class is essential for all poets. Written assignments will include brief analytical responses and a short collection of creative work.

CRWR 413: LITERATURE FOR POETS: CONTEMPORARY BRITISH AND IRISH POETRY

A reading course for aspiring writers, this class will explore contemporary British and Irish poetry. Poets in the British Isles share our language but exist within a different (and much longer) poetic history and tradition. In The Barrier of a Common Language, Dana Gioia writes, “Whatever the reason, American and British poetry have in the last forty years begun evolving into two different literatures. Their traditions still overlap, but they are no longer even approximately identical.” Our goal in the course will be to read capaciously—as writers, seeking new models and strategies—a group of poets whose work may charge our own. Willingness to read intently and participate in class discussion is essential. Written responses (poems modeled on the readings) will be required. Readings will include poetry collections by Eavan Boland, Seamus Heaney, Alice Oswald, Sinéad Morrissey, Don Paterson, Robin Robertson, and John Burnside.
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CRWR 330: INTERMEDIATE POETRY WRITING

Goals for Intermediate Poetry Writing include, but are not limited to, achieving a greater awareness regarding the creative composition process and its end results. We will explore issues of tone and diction and how they affect our notions of voice. Students are expected to demonstrate a competency in discussing both the literature in the assigned texts as well as the work handed in by their fellow students for workshop. Finally, students are required to engage in extensive revision of their own creative enterprises. Poets we will read in the class include Robert Frost, Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickinson, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, William Shakespeare, Elizabeth Bishop, and Richard Wilbur, to name a few.

CRWR 340: INTERMEDIATE FICTION WRITING: THE HABIT OF ART

You ought to be able to discover something from your stories. If you don't, probably nobody else will. —Flannery O'Connor

The great short-story writer Flannery O'Connor tells us that "fiction writing is something in which the whole personality takes part—the conscious as well as the unconscious mind." In this course, we will develop what is called "the habit of art," which means you will train yourself to think, see, and feel like a writer. Class time will be devoted to considering the small, manageable parts of published short stories (plot, characters, point of view, structure, language), as well as the less manageable (and more interesting) parts, such as aboutness, pattern, emotional plot, and hidden meaning. During the workshop portion of the course, students will receive feedback on their own writing, with an emphasis on using revision techniques to develop clear, graceful prose and well-constructed narratives.

CRWR 435: ADVANCED POETRY WRITING: SYNTAX AND THE POETIC LINE

This is an advanced workshop in poetry with a particular emphasis on poetic syntax and its intersection with the poetic line. Within the compressed lyricism of poetry, creating a varied and rich syntax is crucial; in tending to our syntax, we can make our poems more muscular, vibrant, and compelling—avoiding the pitfalls of flat or prosy writing. Similarly, a strong poetic line increases the music and authority of our poems. By discovering the ways in which syntax, sentence structure and poetic lines work together in other poets’ work, we can become more subtle and intentional in our own gestures. To that end, we’ll read many poems and essays. We’ll also write poems (based on prompts) that aim to help us
create a more supple movement in our work. Late in his life, W. B. Yeats wrote, “I never revise now except in the interests of a more passionate syntax.” We will attempt to write with a passionate syntax.

CRWR 445: ADVANCED FICTION WRITING: REALISM AND MAGICAL REALISM

Realism is not reality; the page is not a mirror but rather a representation. —Pam Morris (paraphrased)

The Magic Realist painting or short story or novel is predominantly realistic and deals with the objects of our daily life, but contains an unexpected or improbable element that creates a strange effect, leaving the viewer or reader somewhat bewildered or amazed. —Seymour Menton

Advanced Fiction Writing: Realism and Magical Realism is an advanced fiction workshop course that will focus on the writing, analysis, and revision of a work of realism or magical realism; as such, no genre fiction (i.e. science fiction, horror, romance, fan-fiction, etc.) or non-fiction (i.e. journalism, memoir, etc.) will be accepted. A fiction workshop is a guided discussion about the plot, characters, point of view, structure, and language (i.e. the "craft" or "mechanics") of student-written short stories. Your role in workshop is two-fold: 1. to help your peers edit their drafts into carefully polished revisions, worthy of publication, and 2. to develop your own clear, graceful prose and well-constructed narratives. Coursework will consist of a realist or magical realist story of 15-25 pages, a dramatic revision of that story, weekly workshop letters, leading and participating in workshop, and a presentation. Because the class meets only once weekly, attendance and participation are mandatory.

Spring 2018 — GRADUATE COURSES

CRWR 607: MFA FICTION SEMINAR: FANTASTICAL FICTION

In this seminar, we will explore stories that depart from reality as we know it. (For our purposes, we will include in one category fantastical fiction, speculative fiction, literary science fiction, and magical realism.) We will examine how this kind of fiction differs in style and effect from realism—but also, how often these stories actually do employ the tools of realism. We will discuss all the major elements of craft—character, point of view, voice, language etc.—and how these things interact with the fantastical elements of a story. We will consider to what extent certain fantastical stories can be read politically and metaphorically, but also, to what extent they may resist such readings.

CRWR 635: MFA POETRY WORKSHOP & A Miscellany of Readings

This workshop, like any other, will be a place of study, practice, artistry and devotion to poems. We will balance conversation about in-progress poems by you with readings of poems and essays by others. The readings that attend our writing this term are ones I’ve found crucial to my own knowledge—or crucial to my passion for poetry; that is, they are poems and essays I’ve found to be both excellently made and soul-giving. I hope some of the selections become foundational for you as well, as you make your way toward being a writer of striking accomplishment. With regard to the latter, you will write several new poems based on prompts and prepare a final portfolio of revisions.