

New York University in Buenos Aires
Creative Writing: Argentina
Course Numbers: CRWRI-UA9815003 / WRTNG-UG9401001

Professor: Anna-Kazumi STAHL
Tues/Thurs 3:30-5:00PM
Office Hours: by appointment

Aug-Dec. 2011
Room: TBA
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Course Description & Course Objectives:

This is an introductory course in creative writing: prose predominates (literary non-fiction as well as fiction) though all genres are accepted. No previous experience is required.

Many readings and writing assignments draw specifically on being here in Buenos Aires or on experiencing a foreign culture.

Short spontaneous exercises and longer assignments combine to motivate, and refine, students' writing, both about the chronicler's main subjects (place, people, and things) and about the fiction writer's concerns (character, plot or narrative economy, and closure). Whether fiction or non-fiction, students' writing is discussed via criteria pertinent to literary work. Learning to analyze a piece of writing critically is a key component of the course. Guidelines/criteria will be provided. Students are encouraged to apply them as well as to improvise, as long as opinions are always grounded in evidence from the relevant text.

NOTE: There will be visitors and/or excursions as well as a few sessions held in conjunction with other courses (see the calendar of activities below). Adjustments to the schedule/assignments will be announced via email and Blackboard.

Course Objectives:

- explore the creative process through writing
- delve into the experience of being abroad, in Buenos Aires
- define/determine individual goals as a writer
- expand & refine vocabulary & style resources
- become familiar with the conventions of craft (specific to genre)
- learn about varied techniques of fiction, non-fiction & poetry
- learn how to critique (and be critiqued) constructively
- reinforce revising skills, not only of language but also of ideas
- prepare a portfolio of original texts (approx. 6000 words total)
- prepare a text for submission to a publisher or competition

Required Bibliography:

- * Students' original texts (accessible to all class members via Blackboard)
- * A selection of readings for analysis & discussion: fiction, non-fiction and some poetry

(Reading materials are available on Blackboard and in special cases via the copy-shop “Más Copies” at Av. Santa Fe 2653 - Local 3, downstairs. Tel: 4821-2127)

Methodology:

The primary activity is doing your own writing, i.e. sustaining a creative process in writing. The second level of activity involves reading and giving constructive criticism on your peers' writing. The third level – also a weekly commitment – is focused on learning from analytical consideration of published texts. In addition, we will explore the creative process via discussions, exercises, interviews with writers/artists, etc.

Blackboard will be our principal tool for all assignments and collective communications.

Workshop action and interaction (80% of the final grade)

This class is a workshop → hence, pro-active and candid/productive collaboration comprises the majority of the grade, in the following break-down: 50% weekly treatment of writing (your own production and your critiquing others' work), 20% active constructive contribution to in-class discussions, 10% attendance/participation).

Doing Your Own Creative Writing: Over the course of the semester students will produce at least 6000 words (approximately 25 pages) of original writing. Each student is required to present his/her writing to the workshop for constructive critiquing at least six (6) times in the 14-week semester. Presenting additional texts is voluntary as time permits (after others due to present have done so). “Basic Criteria for Constructive Criticism” & “Critique Criteria for Literary Prose” are posted on Blackboard in “Course Documents”.

Discussing the Assigned Reading: Reading is a fuel/nourishment for the writer's task → not passive reception, but reading as entering into the texts pro-actively, with incisive curiosity, and a critical perhaps even meddlesome eye. Focus points to open an analytical reading can be taken from the above-mentioned “Critique Criteria for Literary Prose.”

Critiquing Peers' Creative Writing: No “I liked it / I didn't like it”... For tips on how to critique, check the “Basic Criteria for Constructive Criticism” (BB's “Course Docs”). Fundamentally: (1) focus on specifics in the text (for example, start with identifying one strong point and one weak point) and (2) then find concrete, clear ways to explain why you sense the strong point(s) worked well or why the weak point(s) did not.

Final Portfolios (20%)

This is simply the “body of work” you have created over the course of the semester. In addition, the final portfolio must also include 1 text (of your choice) in 3 different stages of re-thinking/revision/evolution. The portfolio must have a title, and its contents should be organized as if you were presenting the collection for publication.

(3 short critiques of peer writing are required as well, but separately from the portfolio.)

Conduct and Etiquette: This class is about both your individual creativity and a group's dynamic. Constructive interaction means being on time, staying through class, listening actively, speaking in turn, speaking civilly in all circumstances, and keeping your

integrity (on-line as well as in person). Disruptive or overly passive modes in the class meetings will result in negative effects on the corresponding student's grades.

Workshop Participation:

- we discuss what the *text/writing* achieved or fell short on (not the author/writer)
- the author doesn't speak until the group is finished critiquing his/her text
- be respectfully frank & specific (being too nice or too general/abstract is not useful)
- critique with a text's potential next evolution in mind (avoid negativity)
- silence is not a friendly gesture in a creative writing workshop – passivity will be taken as evidence of not having prepared for class (if special issues prevent you from participating actively in class, see your instructor or the Asst Dir of Acad Affairs)

Course Requirements and Grading

Credit Breakdown:

Writing assignments (creative & critical as assigned):	50%
Final Portfolio (+ 3 written critiques as assigned):	20%
Active constructive contribution to in-class discussions:	20%
Class participation and attendance:	10%

Scale:	100-93	A	76-73	C
	92-90	A-	72-70	C-
	89-87	B+	69-67	D+
	86-83	B	66-60	D
	82-80	B-	59-0	F
	79-77	C+		

NOTE: So that everyone can write as freely as possible, grades are based on your maintaining an active creative writing process as above defined. Doing the full gamut of required activities (your own writing, plus in-class discussions) responsibly & punctually is what earns an "A". Late work loses half a letter grade per class-day late.

Plagiarism/Cheating

NYU's code of academic & personal conduct will be enforced as per website details.

Attendance and Class Participation

Please note that a significant percentage of the grade depends on class participation. The attendance and participation grading policy for this course follows the guidelines in the "Academic Policies" document distributed by the NYU-BA Office. Per those directives: "The first unexcused absence is penalized by deducting 1.5% from the student's final course mark. After that, each unexcused absence is penalized by deducting 3% from the student's final course mark. Students who have perfect attendance (100%) during the semester and have fulfilled all course requirements will get extra points equivalent to 2% of the final grade." In addition, one is allowed no more than 3 excused absences in the semester for health reasons (with a doctor's certification) or other documented

impediment that would justify an absence. Excused absences must have the requisite documentation (see “Academic Policies” from NYU-BA). Even with excused absences, the student is still responsible for the class content and the assignments that were due.

Punctuality

Arriving late to class and leaving class early will negatively affect the participation portion of the grade. The “Academic Policies” hold that “three late arrivals or earlier departures (10 minutes after the starting time or before the end time) will be considered 1 absence.”

Homework and Written Work – via Blackboard (BB)

Each week, the new writing prompts will be uploaded to BB’s “Assignments” section, where you’ll also find the week’s reading material for in-class discussion.

Upload your writing to the “Discussion Board” (anonymous uploads are enabled).

Check the “Discussion Board” for new peer writing → you must have read & critically considered the new uploads by peers before class to prep for in-class critique sessions.

Please keep space available in your NYU email in-box so keep from missing unforeseen changes in assignments, readings, meetings times or places, etc.

FORMATTING:

- It’s best to use Word 97-2003 format or PDF given that many computers you’ll have access to here might have difficulty with other formats.
- Double-spaced text is easier for others to write comments on.
- Title your work. Take the titling of a piece as a part of the creative process.

Calendar of assignments/activities:

(This schedule is subject to change; relevant visitors/visits or recordings/clips may replace some items.)

Note on the organizational scheme below: critique sessions discuss writing that has responded to the previous week’s Focus & Reading issues (except for the 1st week when we work more spontaneously). Each current week’s Focus is introduced when we discuss the Reading, which has been chosen to give you concrete examples of how a piece of writing might approach that Focus.

Week 1: Aug 30 & Sept 1

FOCUS: A sense of place. First impressions: foreign context, novelty, others’ ghosts.

READING: Chejfec from *My Two Worlds* & Cozarinsky from *Urban Voodoo*

WRITING: First-impression pieces. Exercises with senses, lexical play, free association.

Week 2: Sept 6 (moved to 7pm with Dielecke’s course) & Sept 8

FOCUS: Local culture/codes. Case in point: tango. Discourse, class, gender, mind/body.

READING: Cortazar “Gates of Heaven” & 3 tangos (lyrics)

WRITING: Go (physically), observe (sensorially), write (transpose sensation to words).

Week 3: Sept 13 & 15 (Veronica Somlo visits)

FOCUS: creative processes

READING: V Somlo "The First Week" & excerpt Queneau *Exercises in Style* / Vonnegut excerpt from *Like Shaking Hands w/ God*

WRITING: Engage a practice of writing every day. Elaborate a text from those notes.

Week 4: Sept 20 & [NO SEPT 22] Friday Sept 23 theater outing

FOCUS: images into words & fine-tuning the word-work ('music' or 'kneading the clay')

READING: Lola Arias' *My Life After*

WRITING: Texts from exercises V Somlo proposed. Thoughts on "method."

Week 5: Sept 27 (John Michael Oro) & Sept 29

FOCUS: a writer's method

READING: Excerpt from "Yuka 24" (Oro)

WRITING: observe an individual at work → "word-snapshots"

Week 6: Oct 4 (Kate McCahill) & Oct 6

FOCUS: being a foreigner abroad, travel writing, fiction vs non-fiction

READING: excerpt from Theroux' *Old Patagonian Express* + selections from Kate McCahill's *Patagonian Road*

WRITING: hazards, aspirations and gains when writing about a foreign country

Oct 10-16 BREAK

Week 7: Oct 18 (moved to 7pm to hear a filmmaker) & Oct 20

FOCUS: action & narrative, plot motors & suspense (what is at stake?)

READING: excerpt from Cesar Aira's *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*

WRITING: dialogue that drives a scene's underlying conflict/suspense

Week 8: Oct 25 & 27 & Fri Oct 28 (Vivi Tellas on "Biodrama")

FOCUS: autobiographical writing, confessional writing

READING: Vivi Tellas interview & V Woolf excerpt from "Moments of Being"

WRITING: autobiographical piece or memory piece or chronicle

Week 9: Nov 1 (only one class)

FOCUS: critiquing others' writing... Debate: an editors' role?

READING: Raymond Carver's letters to Gordon Lish and "Beginners" vs "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love"

WRITING: prep to write on the group trip

Nov. 3-6 NYU TRIP

Week 10: Nov 8 & 10 (Maxine Swann?)

FOCUS: first person narrative in fiction

READING: Maxine Swann's *The Foreigners* (excerpt)

WRITING: take a personal risk in writing a fictional situation, seek out a nerve

Week 11: Nov 15 & 17 (excursion to Eloisa Cartonera) & Fri Nov 18

FOCUS: the anti-aesthetic, the surreal

READING: Felisberto Hernandez "The Daisy Dolls"

WRITING: nasty texts, silly texts, 'revolution' texts

Week 12. Nov 22 & 24 (Don Merritt?)

FOCUS: taboos in writing

READING: selection from Merritt's work-in-progress *And It's Only Love*

WRITING: longer work, topic is free/open (1000 words min.)

Week 13: Nov 29 & Dec 1 & Fri Dec 2 (Tamara Kamenszain)

FOCUS: translation/ writing trajectories in socio-cultural/historical context/poetry

READING: selected poems by T Kamenszain (in Spanish & English versions)

WRITING: translate untranslated poems by TK or write 3 short poems or 1 long poem or a prose poetry piece

Week 14: Tues Dec 6 (active-interactive translation workshop w/ the Borges course)

FOCUS: translation action → is translating creative/ intuitive or technical/mechanistic?

READING: selected works by Borges in bi-lingual versions (to consider ahead of time)

WRITING: in the workshop we work with a text not previously assigned

Week 15:

Exam Week:

Final Portfolios & "3 Peer Critiques" due Tues Dec 13 (2-4PM).

Bibliography

In addition to supplementary readings the instructor (or the students) may introduce spontaneously to this list, the following are the sources of selected literary readings and writing prompts for this course:

Aira, Cesar. *An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter*, NY: New Directions, 2006.

Alarcón, Daniel. *War by Candlelight*. NY: Harper Perennial, 2006.

--. *Lost City Radio*. NY: Harper Collins, 2007.

Amis, Martin. *Visiting Mrs Nabokov and other Excursions*. London: Penguin, 1993.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books, 2007.

Barthes, Roland. *The Empire of Signs*. NY: Hill & Wang, 1982.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Belknap Press, 2002.

Berger, John. *Here Is Where We Meet*. Random House, 2005.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Labyrinths*. NY: New Directions, 1962, 2007.

Borges, Jorge Luis. *This Craft of Verse: The Complete Norton Lectures delivered at Harvard University*. (4 CDs) Harvard University Press: Boston.

Borges, Jorge Luis and Adolfo Bioy Casares. *Museo: textos inéditos*. Emecé, 2002.

Chatwin, Bruce. *In Patagonia*. Penguin Classics, 2003.

Chitarroni, Luis. *Siluetas*. La Bestia Equilátera, 1994, re-printed 2010.

- Chitarroni, Luis. *Mil tazas de te*. Bs As: La Bestia Equilatera, 2008.
- Cortazar, Julio. *Blow-Up and other Stories*. (Tr.P.Blackburn) NY: Pantheon, 1967, 1985.
- Cozarinsky, Edgardo. *Urban Voodoo*. (Pref. S Sontag) NY: Lumen Books, 1990.
- Colchie, Thomas, ed. *A Whistler in a Nightworld: Short Fiction from the Latin Americas*. NY: Plume-Penguin, 2002.
- Darwin, Charles. *The Voyage of the Beagle*. Penguin Classics.
- Grossman, Edith. *Why Translation Matters*. Yale University Press, 2010.
- Delerm, Philippe. *The Small Pleasures of Life*.
- Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Riverhead Trade, 2008.
- Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skins, White Masks*. Grove Press, rev ed., 2008.
- Feiling, C. E., ed. *Confesiones de Escritores: Narradores 2: Los reportajes de The Paris Review*, transl. Mirta Rosenberg. Buenos Aires, El Ateneo, 1996.
- Grossman, Edith. *Why Translation Matters*. Yale UP, 2010.
- Hudson, William Henry. *Idle Days in Patagonia*. Echo Press, 2006.
- Iyer, Pico. *Global Soul*. 2000.
- Levinne, Suzanne Jill. *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction*. Dalkey Archive, 2009.
- Kureishi, Hanif. *Dreaming and Scheming: Reflections on Writing and Politics*. Faber and Faber: London, 2002.
- Martoccia, Maria. *Caravan* (stories). New Directions/La Bestia Equilatera, due out 2010.
- Molloy, Silvia & Enrique Pupo-Walker. *At Face Value: Autobiographical Writing in South America*. Cambridge University Press: ISBN 0521022800 (0-521-02280-0).
- Molloy, Silvia. *El común olvido* (English translation due out 2008/2009?)
- Ngugi wa Thiongo. *Decolonising the Mind*. Heinemann, 1986.
- Nouzeilles, Gabriela & Graciela Montaldo, eds. *The Argentina Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.
- The Paris Review Book ... Since 1953*. Eds *The Paris Review*. Picador: New York, 2003.
- Picon Garfield, Evelyn. *Women's Voices from Latin America: Interviews with 6 Contemporary Authors*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, 1992.
- Queneau, Raymond. *Exercises in Style*. New Directions, 1981.
- Rabassa, Gregory. *If This Be Treason, Translation & its Dyscontents*. New Dir., 2006.
- Shapard Robert & James Thomas (eds.). *New Sudden Fiction: Short-Short Stories from America and Beyond*. WW Norton, 2007.
- Swann, Maxine. *The Foreigners*. NY: Riverhead, 2011.
- Theroux, Paul. *The Old Patagonian Express: Train through the Americas*. Mariner, '79.
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- Vonnegut, Kurt & Lee Stringer. *Like Shaking Hands with God: A Conversation about Writing*. Washington Square Press, 2000.
- Woolf, Virginia. *Moments of Being*. Mariner Bks. 1985. (or any edition)