

## **Special Topics in Creative Writing:**

### **Merging Forms**

ENG 241

Tuesdays 1:10-4:00 p.m.

Fisk Hall 312

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Office Hours: Mon., Tues., & Fri. by appointment

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In this introductory workshop in prose writing, students will explore hybrid forms that don't fall neatly into traditional genres such as fiction, autobiography, personal essay, critical writing, or poetry. In both the assigned readings and students' work, we will look especially closely at how form complements and amplifies content. Students will be encouraged (but not required) to combine genres in their own work.

### **Requirements and Grading**

*Six short assignments, 2 pages each: 20% of your grade*

- I will assign these in response to the readings.
- Grading is pass/fail, to encourage experimentation.
- Students agree when to present their work to the class. (Please e-mail all short manuscripts, in "rich text format," directly to me, cchase@wesleyan.edu.)

*One longer manuscript, 7-10 pages: 20% of your grade*

- This may be developed from one or more short assignments (but doesn't have to be).
- Students agree when to share work, and to make their manuscripts available one week before discussion. (Please post and retrieve manuscripts, in "rich text format," at the English 241 folder on Wesfiles—wesfiles.wesleyan.edu or through your electronic Portfolio.)

*Revision of longer manuscript: 20% of your grade*

- Revisions based on comments from the class and me.

*Final portfolio: 20% of your grade*

- This includes:
  - Your two best short pieces
  - Your revised long piece
  - A brief account of how your writing (and writing process) developed during the semester

*Participation: 20% of your grade*

- All students are expected to participate actively in the workshop process. Please come to class prepared to respond to both classmates' work and the assigned readings.
- You will be expected to provide fellow students with written comments regarding their manuscripts. (Comments may be handwritten, typed, printed out, or e-mailed to the writer.)
- More than two late manuscripts will affect your grade.
- More than two unexcused absences will affect your grade.

### **Readings**

These fall roughly into three categories: 1) autobiography merged with fiction; 2) analytical writing that combines elements of fiction or poetry; and 3) poetic prose. All readings will be distributed as PDFs on WesFiles, unless otherwise noted.

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### **Conferences**

I will meet with each of you at least once during the semester, to talk about your longer piece. You may also make an appointment with me at any point.

### **Students With Disabilities**

It is Wesleyan's policy to provide reasonable accommodation to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disabilities Services, in addition to making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at [www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html). **I encourage you to take advantage of this program if you need it, and please don't be afraid to speak up.**

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### **A Few Workshop Ground Rules**

- Please turn in each of your manuscripts on time (one week before it will be discussed). Remember, deadlines are your friend.
- On the day your manuscript is discussed, be prepared to read it aloud. (Normally I'll suggest excerpts, but sometimes I'll ask you to read the whole thing.) This is a crucial part of the workshop process, making abstractions like "voice" and "audience" palpable for both the writer and the group.
- The writer should generally remain silent during the discussion of his or her manuscript, unless the group has questions.
- Keep an open mind about what your audience has to say.
- Please stick to constructive criticism when discussing a manuscript. This isn't just being nice; it's good practice for how you critique your own writing.
- Start with what works, and why. (Even if you hate a manuscript, try to find something you like, or even a possibility in the work that interests you.)
- Next, be specific about what doesn't work, and why.

- Try to give clear suggestions for where the piece might be taken next.

### **Weekly Schedule**

This is subject to change, depending on the class's needs. Brief writing assignments will be announced each week and are due the following week. Most readings available as PDFs in the English 241 folder on Wesfiles.

#### **Sept. 7**

- Bernard Cooper, "How to Begin" (from *Truth Serum*)
- Grace Paley, "Mother" (from *Later the Same Day*)

Two imaginative memoirs nearly as compressed as poems. (Copies distributed in class.)

#### *I. Autobiography and Fiction*

#### **Sept. 14**

- Grace Paley, "A Conversation With My Father" (from *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*): autobiography mingled with fiction, plus a kind of manifesto. (Copies distributed in class.)
- *Begin discussing 2-page assignments and continue for the next several weeks.*

#### **Sept. 21**

- Maxine Hong Kingston, "No Name Woman" (from *The Woman Warrior*): memoir mixed with fiction.

*Note: Novelist Matt Sharpe is reading on Wednesday, Sept. 22, 8 p.m., at Russell House. You are encouraged to attend.*

#### **Sept. 28**

- Christopher Isherwood, excerpt from *Christopher and his Kind*: autobiography written largely in the third person.

#### *II. Non-Standard Analytical Writing*

#### **Oct. 5**

- Eduardo Galeano, excerpt from *Memory of Fire: Genesis*: politically charged historical research combined with lyrical fiction.
- *Discussion of 4 students' longer works each class for the rest of the semester.*
- *Discussion of selected 2-pagers, if time permits.*

#### **Oct. 12**

- Hilton Als, "I Am the Beauty of the World": meditation on Louise Brooks, imagined in her voice.
- John D'Agata, "Martha Graham, Audio Description of," from *Halls of Fame*: biography and

dance criticism in a prose poem-like form

*Note: John D'Agata is reading on Wednesday, Oct. 13, 8 p.m., at Russell House. You are encouraged to attend.*

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**Oct. 19** - Fall break.

**Oct. 26**

- John Haskell, "The Faces of Joan of Arc" (from *I Am Not Jackson Pollock*): fiction combined with film criticism.

- Ali Smith, "True Short Story" (from *The First Person*): memoir, fiction, and literary criticism.

*Note: Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel is reading on Tuesday, Oct. 26, 8 p.m., in the Memorial Chapel. You are encouraged to attend.*

**Nov. 2**

- Georgina Kleege, "Working the Pump" (from *Blind Rage*): fictionalized biography of Helen Keller in the form of letters to her.

*III. Poetic Prose*

**Nov. 9**

- Donald Barthelme, "Cortés and Montezuma" (from *60 Stories*): highly distilled, imaginative historical fiction, in fragments.

*Note: Essayist David Rakoff is reading on Wednesday, Nov. 10, 8 p.m., at Russell House. I encourage you to attend.*

**Nov. 16**

- Lucy Corin, "Airplane" (from *The Entire Predicament*): extravagant and poetic use of metaphor.

*Note: Lucy Corin is reading on Wednesday, Nov. 17, 8 p.m., at Russell House. I encourage you to attend.*

**Nov. 23**

- Eileen Myles, "Everyday Barf" (from *The Importance of Being Iceland*): a poet's memoir and literary manifesto; inspired rambling.

**Nov. 30**

- Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl" and "In the Night" (from *At the Bottom of the River*): super lyrical fiction.

**Dec. 7**

- Bruno Schulz, "August" (from *Street of Crocodiles*): densely lyrical reminiscence.
- Caroline Knox, "Dove": a poem created from a prose quotation.
- Frank O'Hara, "Meditations in an Emergency": prose poem.