Creative Writing: Sydney

Class code: WRTNG-UG 9501 (4)

Instructor Details:
Anna Westbrook
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Class Details:
Creative Writing
Science House

Prerequisites: None

Class Description:
In this class students are encouraged to consider the intersectional environments (natural, urban, cultural, historical etc.) that they interact with and within, and how their sensibilities differ living away from home to contemplate how a sense of place can be conveyed through writing.

We will engage with a diverse range of readings – featuring many Australian authors – and discuss technical elements and affective poetics to learn how to ‘read as a writer’. Weeks are devoted to crafting the short story, contemporary indigenous storytelling, creative nonfiction, and poetry. Students will complete weekly ‘microfiction’ homework exercises based upon images they take or find, and participate in in-class writing exercises, all of which may contribute to the writing journal submitted with the final work.

The class emphasizes the importance of embodied interaction with the city through a field trip using ‘The Disappearing’ – a downloadable app featuring over 100 site-specific poems spanning a ‘poetic map’ of Sydney, created by The Red Room Company. Students will think about the possibilities of marrying new technologies with writing as they navigate using poems as landmarks.

Students shall workshop their drafts during the course, learning how to effectively communicate critical feedback and how to be receptive to constructive critique. At the end of the course students will have the opportunity to showcase their work.

Desired Outcomes:
- To sharpen students’ analytical skills and abilities to identify the formal elements of texts in order to enhance their own writing and experience of literature.
- To develop students’ ability to produce, draft, edit and polish their own creative work, and equip them with the skills to critique each other’s writing within a supportive workshop environment.
To deepen students’ knowledge of Sydney’s cultures and histories and synthesise their own experience of place through their writing.

**Assessment Components**

Attendance, discussion, weekly writing exercises, workshop participation, writing journal (to be submitted along with Final Work): 25%

‘Reading as a Writer’ response (1500 words). This response, due in Week 7, will take the form of a personal essay on Gretchen Shirm’s *Having Cried Wolf*: 25%

Final Work - either 1 short story (4000 words maximum) or a suite of poems approx. 20 pages due in Week 14: 50%

**NYU Sydney has a strict policy about course attendance and late submission of work. Make sure you familiarise yourself with the policies on attendance and late submission of work in the NYU Sydney Student Handbook.**

**Assessment Expectations**

A: Excellent performance showing a thorough knowledge and understanding of the topics of the course; all work includes clear, logical explanations, insight, and original thought and reasoning. Creative work is of a highly sophisticated standard.

B: Good performance with general knowledge and understanding of the topics; all work includes general analysis and coherent explanations showing some independent reasoning, reading and research. Creative work is of a superior standard.

C: Satisfactory performance with some broad explanation and reasoning; the work will typically demonstrate an understanding of the course on a basic level. Creative work is of an acceptable standard.

D: Passable performance showing a general and superficial understanding of the course’s topics; work lacks satisfactory insight, analysis or reasoned explanations. Creative work is of a basic standard.

F: Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished or unsubmitted.

**Plagiarism Policy**

The academic standards of New York University apply to all coursework at NYU Sydney. NYU Sydney policies are in accordance with New York University’s plagiarism policy. The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

It is a serious academic offense to use the work of others (written, printed or in any other form) without acknowledgement. Cases of plagiarism are not dealt with by your instructor. They are referred to the Director, who will determine the appropriate penalty (up to and including failure in the course as a whole) taking into account the codes of conduct and academic standards for NYU’s various schools and colleges.
All written coursework must be submitted in hard copy AND in electronic form. All students must submit an electronic copy of each piece of written work to the plagiarism detection software Turn-it-in. Instructions will be provided to you in class.

**Required Text(s)**

Students will need to obtain a copy of:


The following will be made available:

Excerpts from:


*Sydney* – Delia Falconer (University of New South Wales Press, 2010)


*Rain* – Kirsty Gunn (Faber & Faber, 1994)

*Yours Truly* – edited by Marieke Hardy & Michaela McGuire, 2013)


Full text:


‘The Erl-King’ – Angela Carter (in *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, Vintage, 2006)


‘Heaven’ – Mary Gaitskill (in *Bad Behavior*, Simon & Schuster, 1988)

‘Still Here’ – Anna Krien (in *The Best Australian Stories: Ten-Year Collection*, Black Inc. 2011)


‘How to Become a Writer’ & ‘How to Talk to Your Mother (Notes)’ – Lorrie Moore (in *The Collected Stories*, Faber & Faber, 2008)


‘Five Bells’ – Kenneth Slessor (available online)

‘The Ambush’ – Donna Tartt (available online in *The Guardian*)

‘Octet’ – David Foster Wallace (in *Brief Interviews With Hideous Men*, Abacus, 2001)
Session 1

“Sydney Beginnings”

- Introduction to the course
- Create student workshopping schedule (workshops begin Session 3)
- Discussion of narrative openings: How do I begin? Discussion of microfiction with examples

Session 2

“Who’s Telling This Story?”

- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

Session 3

“Haunted Cities and the Postcolonial Uncanny”

- Student workshop
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings
- Watch the film *Bedevil*, dir. Tracey Moffatt
- **Read for next class:** ‘Heaven’ – Mary Gaitskill, ‘Bliss’ – Katherine Mansfield, ‘The Cartography of Foxes’ – Theresa Layton

Session 4

“Characterisation and Sympathy”

- Student workshop
- In-class writing exercises
• Discussion of readings

**Read for next class:** ‘Still Here’ – Anna Krien, *Rain* excerpt – Kirsty Gunn, ‘Language’ – James Wood

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**Session 5**

• “Language”

• Student workshop

• In-class writing exercises

• Discussion of readings


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**SEMESTER BREAK**

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**Session 6**

“Experimental Realities: Symbolism, Magic, and the Imaginary”

• Student workshop

• In-class writing exercises

• Discussion of readings

• **Read for next class:** break in readings due to assessment

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**Session 7**

**ASSIGNMENT ‘READING AS A WRITER’ DUE**

• “Detail, Intention, Design”

• Student workshop

• In-class writing exercises

• Read for next class: a selection of poetry TBC closer to date
Session 8
Excursion using The Red Room Company’s The Disappearing app: a poetic safari of Sydney

- Read for next class: a poetry packet will be supplied involving class contributions

Session 9
“I Have Been Eating Poetry”

- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings and excursion homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Read for next class: Yours Truly excerpt – various authors, ‘How to Talk to Your Mother (Notes)’ – Lorrie Moore, On Passion excerpt – Dorothy Porter

Session 10
“Confession, the Self, and the Epistle”

- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings
- Read for next class: TBA

Session 11
Guest lecturer TBA


Session 12
“Endings – Impressions, Resonance”

- Student workshop
- Discussion of endings: letting go.
- Read for next class: ‘What We Talk About When We Talk About Love’ & ‘Beginners’ – Raymond Carver
Session 13  “Intensive Editing”

- Troubleshooting problems in the major assignments
- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings
- Read for next class: finish *The Turning* – Tim Winton

Session 14  “Form and Adaptation”

- Discussion of *The Turning*
- Watch the film *The Turning*, various directors
- Final discussion

FINALS WORK DUE

Your Instructor

Anna Westbrook completed her PhD at the University of New South Wales where she tutors and lectures in Creative Writing. She has presented at many conferences and writer’s festivals around Australia. She was the recipient of the Sydney University prize for Best Honours thesis in Gender & Cultural Studies, a Marrickville Council Arts Development Grant, the Australian Society of Authors Mentorship award, and has been shortlisted for the Australian Vogel. Anna has been anthologized in *Herding Kites* (Affirm Press) and online in *The Disappearing*, and published in magazines *harlequin creature* (USA), *The Bastille* (France), *Voiceworks*, *Slit* and *WQ* (Australia).