Creative Writing: Sydney

**Class code**
WRTNG-UG 9501 – 001 or CRWRI-UA 9815 – 002

**Instructor Details**
Dr Anna Westbrook  
aw93@nyu.edu  
Consultations by appointment  
Please allow at least 24 hours for your instructor to respond to your emails.

**Class Details**  
**Fall 2017**

**Creative Writing: Sydney**

Tuesday 3:30 – 6:30pm  
5 September to 12 December  
Room 202  
NYU Sydney Academic Centre  

**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 and identity can be conveyed through writing.

We will engage with a diverse range of readings – featuring many Australian authors – and discuss technical elements, literary techniques, and affective poetics to learn how to develop writing craft and explore creativity. Weeks are devoted to prose and poetry. Students will complete weekly ‘microfiction’ homework exercises based upon images they take or find, and participate in in-class exercises to refine their writing practice.

The class emphasises 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 and presented by guest lecturer Dr. Tamryn Bennett. Students will think about the possibilities of marrying new technologies with writing as they navigate using poems as landmarks.

Students workshop their drafts during the course, learning how to effectively
communicate critical feedback and how to be receptive to constructive critique. This takes the form of a discussion in-class and students are required to submit written critical feedback on their classmates’ drafts in an online forum. At the end of the course students will have the opportunity to showcase their work at a reading night to the rest of the NYU Sydney student body and invited faculty.

Desired Outcomes

As a result of successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Sharpen analytical skills and abilities to identify the formal elements of texts in order to enhance their own writing and experience of literature.
- Develop 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.
- Deepen knowledge of Sydney’s cultures and histories and synthesise their own experience of place and identity through their writing.

Assessment Components

Homework, workshop participation, and online forum peer draft critique: 20%

Submission of three (3) developed and edited writing exercises: 20% Due by 5:00pm, Week 6 on Friday 13 October, 2017.

Textual analysis (1000 words): 20%. This brief essay will take the form of a reflection on literary techniques in your choice of one (1) of the weekly readings. Due by 5:00pm, Week 8 on Friday 27 October, 2017.

Final Work: 40% - either 1 short story (4000 words maximum) OR a suite of poems approx. 20 pages due in Week 15 OR experimental work by negotiation. Due by 5:00pm, Week 15 on Friday 15 December, 2017.

Failure to submit or fulfil any required course component will result in failure of the class.

For this course your total numerical score, calculated from the components listed above, is converted to a letter grade without rounding.

Extra Credit: Site policy does not allow grading of work outside of the assignments included in the syllabus. The final grade will only be calculated from the assessment components listed here and no other work, whether additional or substituted, is permitted.

Grade 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.

Grade 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.

**Grade 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.

**Grade 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.

**Grade F:** Unsatisfactory performance in all assessed criteria. Creative work is weak, unfinished, or un-submitted.

**Grade Conversions**

This course uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94 to 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 to &lt; 94</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87 to &lt; 90</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>84 to &lt; 87</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80 to &lt; 84</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77 to &lt; 80</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74 to &lt; 77</td>
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<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70 to &lt; 74</td>
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<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67 to &lt; 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>65 to &lt; 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0 to &lt; 65</td>
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**Submission of Work**

Assignments (excluding in-class presentations and exams) must be submitted electronically via NYU Classes. It is the student’s responsibility to confirm that the work has been successfully been uploaded. In the unlikely event that a submission to Classes fails, students must immediately submit the work to the Academic Programs Coordinator via email before the original submission deadline accompanied by an explanation of the issue. All in-class presentations and exams must be completed during the scheduled class time. An assessment component is considered completed when the student has met all the terms for that assessment component as outlined by the instructor.

An assessment component completed after the deadline without an agreed extension receives a penalty of 2 points on the 100-point scale (for the assignment) for each day the work is late. Work completed beyond five weekdays after the due date without an agreed extension receives a mark of zero, and the student is not entitled to feedback for that piece of work. Because failure to submit or fulfil any required assessment component will
result in failure of the course, it is crucial for students to complete every assignment even when it will receive a mark of zero.

**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.

**Attendance Policy**

Study abroad at Global Academic Centre is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centres is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades. The class roster will be marked at the beginning of class and anyone who arrives after this time will be considered absent. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence.

For courses that meet once a week, one unexcused absence will be penalised by a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade. For courses that meet two or more times a week, the same penalty will apply to two unexcused absences. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure.

Faculty cannot excuse an absence. Requests for absences to be excused must be directed to the Academic Programs Coordinator. Students must provide appropriate documentation for their absence. In the case of illness, students must contact the Academic Programs Coordinator on the day of absence. They must provide medical documentation to Academic Programs Coordinator within three days of the absence in order to be medically excused. The note must include a medical judgment indicating that the student was unfit to attend class/work on the specific day or dates of the absence. Faculty will be informed of excused absences by the Academic Programs staff.

**Classroom Expectations**

This is a seminar subject and requires the active participation of all students. It also requires engaged discussion, including listening to and respecting other points of view. Your behaviour in class should respect your classmates’ desire to learn. It is important for you to focus your full attention on the class, for the entire class period.
- Arrive to class on time.
- Once you are in class, you are expected to stay until class ends. Leaving to make or take phone calls, to meet with classmates, or to go to an interview, is not acceptable behaviour.
- Phones, digital music players, and any other communications or sound devices are not to be used during class. That means no phone calls, no texting, no social media, no email, and no internet browsing at any time during class.
- Laptop computers and tablets are not to be used during class except in rare instances for specific class-related activity expressly approved by your instructor.
- The only material you should be reading in class is material assigned for that class. Reading anything else, such as newspapers or magazines, or doing work from another class, is not acceptable.
- Class may not be recorded in any fashion – audio, video, or otherwise – without permission in writing from the instructor.

**Diversity, Inclusion and Equity**

NYU is committed to building a culture that respects and embraces diversity, inclusion, and equity, believing that these values – in all their facets – are, as President Andrew Hamilton has said, “...not only important to cherish for their own sake, but because they are also vital for advancing knowledge, sparking innovation, and creating sustainable communities.” At NYU Sydney we are committed to creating a learning environment that:
- fosters intellectual inquiry, research, and artistic practices that respectfully and rigorously take account of a wide range of opinions, perspectives, and experiences; and
- promotes an inclusive community in which diversity is valued and every member feels they have a rightful place, is welcome and respected, and is supported in their endeavours.

**Religious Observance**

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Academic Programs Coordinator in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

**Provisions to students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in a class are encouraged to contact the Moses Centre for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see Study Away and Disability.

**Required Texts**
Weekly readings are available on NYU Classes in Resources. It is a course expectation that you have done the readings and prepared sufficiently to discuss them in class.

**Week 1  Sydney Beginnings**

**Tuesday 5 September**

**Required Reading:**
- Excerpt from *Sydney* – Delia Falconer (University of New South Wales Press, 2010)
- Excerpt from *Home* – Larissa Behrendt (University of Queensland Press, 2004)

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

**Week 2  Styles of Narration**

**Tuesday 12 September**

**Required Reading:**
- ‘Poinsettias’ – Myfanwy Collins (in *Pank* 6.06/June, 2011)
- ‘Write What Your Know’ – Rebecca Schiff (in *The Bed Moved*, JM Originals, 2016)
- ‘She Waits, Seething, Blooming’ – Dave Eggers (in *How We Are Hungry*, Penguin, 2005)

**Class Activities:**
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

**Week 3  Plot: Conflict and Suspense**

**Tuesday 19 September**

**Required Reading:**
- ‘Stone Mattress’ – Margaret Atwood (in *Stone Mattress*, Bloomsbury, 2014)
- ‘The Lottery’ – Shirley Jackson (in *The New Yorker*, 1948)

**Class Activities:**
- Student workshop
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
• Discussion of readings

**Week 4  Character**

**Tuesday 26 September**

**Required Reading:**
- ‘A Bruise the Shape and Size of a Door Handle’ – Daisy Johnson (in *Fen*, Jonathan Cape, 2016)
- ‘How to Date a Brown Girl’ – Junot Diaz (in *The New Yorker*, 1996)

**Class Activities:**
- Student workshop
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Discussion of readings

**Week 5  Language**

**Tuesday 3 October**

**Required Reading:**
- Excerpt from *Here Come the Dogs* – Omar Musa (Hamish Hamilton, 2014)

**Class Activities:**
- Student workshop
- Workshop homework
- In-class writing exercises
- Exercise based on ‘This Condition’ – Lydia Davis (in *The Collected Stories*, Picador, 2009)
- Discussion of readings

**Week 6  Beyond Realism: Speculative Fiction and the Extraordinary**

**Tuesday 10 October**

**Required Reading:**
- ‘Mrs. Fox’ – Sarah Hall (BBC Short Fiction Prizewinner, 2013)

**Class Activities:**
• Student workshop
• In-class writing exercises
• Discussion of readings

Assignment: 3 Writing Pieces due (20%)

FALL BREAK 16 - 20 October (Week 7)

Week 8 Haunted Cities and the Postcolonial Uncanny
Tuesday 24 October

Required Reading:
• Excerpt from Swallow the Air – Tara June Winch (University of Queensland Press, 2006)
• ‘How to Write About Aboriginal Australia’ – Jennifer Mills (in Overland, 2011)
• ‘The Postcolonial Uncanny: On Reconciliation, (Dis)possession & Ghost Stories – Gelder & Jacobs (available online)

Class Activities:
• In-class writing exercises
• Discussion of readings
• Audio recording of ‘Five Bells’ – Kenneth Slessor
• Video viewing of ‘Night Cries’ – Tracey Moffatt
• Video viewing of ‘City of Shadows: Interviews’ – Peter Doyle

Assignment: Textual Analysis (20%)

Week 9 Field Trip to Sculpture by The Sea
Tuesday 31 October

Required Reading: (all texts available online)
• ‘Ode to a Grecian Urn’ – John Keats
• ‘Study of an Ox’s Heart c.1511-13’ – Sylvia Legris
• ‘Empty Chairs’ – Liu Xia
• ‘Tableaux: Four 19th Century Photographs’ – Jonathan Spaulding
• ‘Drifting’ – Shirley Kaufman

Required field trip/excursion: We will be looking at the sculptures and undertaking writing exercises to augment our discussion of ekphrasis: writing about art.

Week 10 The Disappearing: a Poetic Safari of Sydney
Tuesday 7 November
Guest lecturer: Dr Tamryn Bennett

Required Reading:
- ‘The Art of Disappearing’ – Sarah Holland-Batt (available online)
- ‘Flowers and Fever’ – Fiona Wright (available online)

Required field trip/excursion: We will be using The Red Room Company’s ‘The Disappearing’ app to take a poetic safari of Sydney’s The Rocks.

Week 11  Performance Poetry, Slam, & Spoken Word
Tuesday 14 November

Required Reading:
- READINGS FOR THIS WEEK WILL BE PROVIDED IN CLASS

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings
- Video viewings and discussion

Week 12  Plot: Compression and Epiphany
Tuesday 21 November

Required Reading:
- ‘The Ambush’ – Donna Tartt (available online in The Guardian)
- ‘Connie Bronson’ – Marilynne Robinson (in Paris Review #100 Summer/Fall, 1986)

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings

Week 13  Affect: Impressions, Resonance
Tuesday 28 November

Required Reading:

Class Activities:
- Student workshop
- Discussion of readings
Week 14     Intensive Editing
Tuesday 5 December

Required Reading:
• ‘Publishing Fiction’ – Mary Mount (in The Handbook of Creative Writing, Edinburgh University Press, 2007)

Class Activities:
• Student workshop
• Discussion of editing techniques
• In-class editing exercises
• Self-assessment

Week 15     Sydney Endings
Tuesday 12 December

Required Reading:
• Excerpt from 30 Days in Sydney – Peter Carey (Bloomsbury, 2001)
• Excerpt from On Passion – Dorothy Porter (Melbourne University Press, 2010)
• ‘The Bastards’ – Barbara Nicholson (in Macquarie Pen Anthology of Aboriginal Literature, 2008)

Class Activities:
• Course reflection
• Masterclass on writing and publishing opportunities
• Discussion of final assessment

Assignment: Final Work due (40%)

Your Instructor

Dr Anna Westbrook (Ph.D., University of New South Wales) published her debut novel Dark Fires Shall Burn in 2016. She has presented at many conferences and writer’s festivals around Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. In 2015 she taught a sold out masterclass workshop for the Sydney Writers’ Festival. 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 harlequin creature (USA), The Bastille (France), Voiceworks, Slit, Scum, Cuttings, Pony, and WQ (Australia). She has lectured at NYU Sydney since 2012.