Instructor: Ms. Thea Matthews [she/her]
Email: (tmm9267@nyu.edu)
Office Hours: Fridays by appointment

Writing is a kind of revenge against circumstance too: bad luck, loss, pain. If you make something out of it, then you've no longer been bested by these events.
— Louise Glück

...the only real concern of the artist, to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art.
— James Baldwin

Art is a weapon in the struggle of ideas, the class struggle.
Poetry is music, and nothing but music. Words with musical emphasis.

— Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones)

The difference between poetry and rhetoric is being ready to kill yourself instead of your children.
— Audre Lorde

Course Description:
The power of art is undeniable. Only this universal language can truly change the psyche of an individual, of a people. This introductory course to poetry and prose hopefully serves in part as the bedrock for your understanding of the fundamentals and mechanics of literary art. Now, this is an art class, and the English language is the medium. We will read. We will write. We will see the limitless possibilities of literary innovation. Lastly, students will revise and edit their own literary work; and critically engage with peers’ work on the days we workshop.

In regards to the reading, we will critically review a mere sliver of 20th and 21st century American writers. Students will learn different styles and forms, and be encouraged to incorporate such mechanics into their own work. Class discussions are expected to be lively, constructive, generative, and respectful. Attendance, participation in class discussions, and on-time completion of assignments will count significantly toward final grade. In lieu of a final exam, each student will submit a final portfolio of work written and revised over the course of the semester.
Required Texts:

THE BOOK OF FORMS: A HANDBOOK OF POETICS, by Lewis Putnam Turco
PENGUIN ANTHOLOGY OF 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN POETRY, ed by Rita Dove
THE SOUND OF POETRY: A BRIEF GUIDE by Robert Pinsky
ASSATA: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY by Assata Shakur
BELOVED by Toni Morrison
DON’T LET ME BE LONELY by Claudia Rankine
THE TRADITION by Jericho Brown

*Note: The rest of the reading material are hyperlinked to the syllabus or will be provided as a “packet” through NYU Classes.

Course Requirements:
1. Rigorous participation and contribution in class discussions
2. On-time submission of reading and writing assignments
3. For workshopping—provide written comments and suggested areas of revision to peers’ work
4. A final portfolio of six poems; and three works of flash fiction / creative non-fiction (CNF) OR one short story due December 14, 2021.

Grading:

Attendance & Participation: 40%
Final Portfolio: 30%
Reading Responses: 15%
Workshop Responses: 15%

The Givens:
Be on time for class.

Be prepared for each class, do all the readings and writing assignments.
Be sure to bring all needed textbooks with you to class.

Submit typed copies of your work for everyone in the class on the dates assignments are due.

Offer your classmates constructive criticism on their work, in both class discussions and by way of written comments.

Written comments should be prepared and brought to class. Your comments should provide evidence that you’ve read your classmates’ work carefully.

In lieu of a final exam, you are required to submit a final portfolio of your work at the end of the semester.

Lastly, in addition to your final portfolio, I expect you to attend and participate in the end-of-semester class reading. Time to celebrate!

**Plagiarism:**
There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. All instances of plagiarism, obviously, will be reported to the department, no exceptions.

**Bottomline:** DO NOT PLAGIARIZE.

**Disability Disclosure Statement:**
Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980.

NYU’s Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
726 Broadway, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003-6675
Telephone: 212-998-4980
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114 Website: http://www.nyu.edu/csd
Student Wellness Policy:
Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt the instructor’s attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such.

If you do need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please contact me. I am here and someone safe that can assist you in receiving the help you need from the NYU Wellness Center.

Office Hours (OH):
I expect you to schedule a meeting with me at least once over the course of this semester. You may sign up for a slot during my office hours, or email me to arrange an alternate time in the event of a scheduling conflict.

Reading Responses:
Over the course of the semester, there will be a total of 12 reading responses (250-500 words). For each reading response, I expect you to demonstrate your critical engagement with the assigned reading. Each reading response is to be based on what inspires you, what do you notice, what have you learned and can apply to your own work, your analytic observations as well as your understanding of what we read in (non)fiction and poetry.

Final Portfolio:
By the end of the semester, you will have written a lot! Congratulations! Your growing opus will be majestic by mid-December. For your “final,” I expect you to submit—

Poetry:
1. Three revised poems you submit for in-class workshop that incorporates feedback from your peers and myself.
2. Three additional (prose)poems you have drafted based on the series of in-class prompts; and revised by you. [*You are encouraged to meet me during OH to discuss these poems.]

You will show all of your work, meaning the drafts of peers’ comments and the drafted reiterations of your poems.

Prose:

1. Three revised prose pieces OR one short story you have drafted and submitted for in-class workshop that incorporates the feedback from peers and myself.
   a. Flash fiction (500 words)
   b. Short story (1500-3000 words)

Again, you will also show all of your work here, meaning the drafts of peers’ comments and myself are to be included in your final portfolio.

Submission Guidelines:

All work must be typed with your name, course, and email.

All original literary art work must have a title at the top of the page.

All submitted work must indicate the type of document: a reading response, a piece of prose, or poetry.

Schedule of Workshop Groups:

In order to ensure that each student receives ample equal time to have their submitted work be read closely and workshopped, we will workshop six students per class meeting.

The student roster will be placed into two groups, “Group A” and “Group B,” respectively.

One week, we will workshop Group A; the next, Group B, and repeat.
A Note on Workshop:
Beginning Week 4, Thursdays will typically be our workshop days. This is truly the time for your drafted work to be seen and heard and for you to see and hear your peers’ work. As author and educator Robin Coste Lewis notes, “The unspoken goal of any workshop is to help you develop your ability to observe and then offer, again, rigorous and generative criticism.” The premise of workshoping is to uplift. Uplift. Uplift. And how to do that is to respectfully state what you perceive “is working”/effective and what you see are potential areas of opportunity to help strengthen the submitted prose/poetry. Remember, workshop is THE time for critical engagement and support, not interrogation, of how (not what) you and your peers write.

Course Schedule:

PART I: NOTES ON THE CRAFT

Week 1  Class Introductions

9/2/21  Syllabus Review
Discuss class agreements for workshopping each other’s work
Writing Prompt

Toni Morrison’s You Don’t Know Anything and Other Writing Advice
“Why I Write” by Reginald Shepherd

Week 2  Form

9/7/21  Reference—
*The Book of Forms: a handbook of poetics (Turco)
*20th C Amer. Poetry Anthl.
Discuss Part I. The Elements of Poetry (pp.3-65)

Walt Whitman “I hear America Singing”
William Carlos Williams “The Red Wheelbarrow”
Lucille Clifton “sorrows” & “won’t you celebrate with me”
Gwendolyn Brooks “We Real Cool” & “The Bean Eaters”
Langston Hughes “I, too”
Writing Prompt

9/9/21  READING RESPONSE 1  “Fail better” by Zadie Smith
        DUE  “Why I Write” Joan Didion

Writing Prompt

Week 3  Style

9/14/21  *Reference—
         The Sounds of Poetry: A
         Brief Guide  Leslie Marmon Silko “In Cold Storm Light”
         Class Discussion on:
         Accent and Duration; Syntax and Line
         Writing Prompt  Robert Frost “Directive”
                          Marianne Moore “The Fish”
                          Thomas Merton “Hymn of Not Much Praise
                          for New York City”
                          Octavio Paz “Sunstone”

9/16/21  READING RESPONSE 2  Why I write George Orwell
        DUE  David Foster Wallace, "The Nature of Fun"

Writing Prompt

PART II: (NON) FICTION

Week 4  Narrative POV / Voice / Imagery
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Reading/Notebooks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/21/21</td>
<td>Discuss works</td>
<td>“A Country Doctor” by Franz Kafka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Without Inspection” by Edwidge Danticat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“My Dear You” by Rachel Khong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/23/21</td>
<td>READING RESPONSE 3 DUE</td>
<td>Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshop A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Week 5</strong> Characterization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/28/21</td>
<td>Review &amp; Discuss PDF on Character Sketches</td>
<td>“What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” by Raymond Carver (PDF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>For Esme-with Love and Squalor by J.D. Salinger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Prompt</td>
<td>Gorilla, My Love by Toni Cade Bambara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“A Flawless Silence” by Yiyun Li (The New Yorker, April 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/30/21</td>
<td>READING RESPONSE 4 DUE</td>
<td>Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshop B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Week 6</strong> Character &amp; World-building like is it believable?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/5/21</td>
<td>Review &amp; Discuss PDF on World-building</td>
<td>“There Will Come Soft Rains” by Ray Bradbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Jon” by George Saunders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10/7/21  READING RESPONSE 5 DUE  Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class

Workshop A

Week 7  Proficiency in Dialogue / Toni Toni Toni

10/12/21  NO CLASS

10/14/21  Writing Prompt  “Recitatif” by Toni Morrison
Toni Morrison’s Beloved

Week 8  Write. Revise. Edit. Repeat.

10/19/21  More discussion on the Revision Process  Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class

Workshop B

10/21/21  READING RESPONSE 6 DUE  Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class

Workshop A

Extract from Ocean Vuong's debut novel, On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous
Week 9  The Narrative Form  
(ESPECIALLY for complicated plot sequencing)

10/26/21  Discuss text  ASSATA: *The Autobiography* by Assata Shakur

Writing Prompt

10/28/21  READING RESPONSE 7  Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class

Workshop B

PART III: POETRY

Week 10  The Power of Metaphor & Descriptions

11/2/21  Discuss Text  E.E. Cummings “in Just—,” “Buffalo Bill’s,” & “next to of course god america i”

Writing Prompt  Derek Walcott “The Light of the World”
Emily Dickenson “Hope is the thing with feathers”
John Keats “When I have fears”
Sylvia Plath “Metaphors”

11/4/21  READING RESPONSE 8  Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class

Workshop A
## Week 11  Form Part I - The Blues, Ghazal, the Duplex & Sonnet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 11/9/21| Discuss Texts in relation to *key text:       | Terrance Hayes “American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin [“I lock you in an American sonnet that is part prison”]”  
The Tradition by Jericho Brown  
American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin [“Probably twilight makes blackness dangerous”] |
|        | Writing Prompt                                | Langston Hughes “Let America Be America Again”                        |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/11/21</td>
<td>READING RESPONSE 9 DUE</td>
<td>Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Workshop B**

## Week 12  Form Part II – Tonality of Beats, Black Arts Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 11/16/21| *Key text:  
Heaven is All Goodbyes by Tongo Eisen-Martin | Bob Kaufman [Extracts from Solitudes: Crowded with Loneliness & The Ancient Rain: Poems 1956-1978]  
Amiri Baraka “An Agony. As Now” & “Black Art” |
|        | Writing Prompt                                | Ntozake Shange [extract from For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow is Enuf]  
Yusef Komunyakaa “Facing It” |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/18/21</td>
<td>READING RESPONSE 10 DUE</td>
<td>Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Workshop A**
Week 13  Form Part III. The Persona, Sestina, Syllabic Verse; i.e. the TANKA

11/23/21   Discuss Text:  
**Blood Dazzler** by P.S.  
- The Tanka series  
- Ethel’s Sestina  

“Skin Head” by Patricia Smith  
“Olive Oyl Talks to People Magazine” by Patricia Smith  
(More on Marianne Moore’s Syllabic Verse)

Writing Prompt

11/25/21   READING RESPONSE 11  DUE

NO CLASS

Week 14  More Eye of the I

11/30/21   Discuss with main text:  
**Don’t Let me be Lonely** by Claudia Rankine  

Essex Hemphill “Heavy Breathing” & “The Tomb of Sorrow” [extract from *ceremonies*]  
June Jordan “Poem About My Rights”  
Solmaz Shariff “Personal Effects” [from *Look*]  
Ross Gay “To The Fig Tree On 9th and Christian”

Writing Prompt

12/2/21   READING RESPONSE 12  DUE  
Bring appropriate number of hardcopies for class
Workshop B

PART IV: OUTRO


12/7/21  Discussion on Editing & Publishing Path
Workshop A

12/9/21  Workshop B

Week 16  Class Celebration

12/14/21  FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

NYU’S Harassment Policy
Harassment among students and faculty will not be tolerated. If you or anyone you know is experiencing harassment, speak up. Let me know, and we will follow procedures in accordance with NYU’s policies concerning the protection of student rights. If you have any questions about this, check out the following website or speak to me. A brief and useful overview of NYU’s harassment policy is available online.