“Unstoppably / life spurs out with no remedy.”
-Marina Tsvetaeva

Objective

In this class, we will take writing seriously — evaluating literature as a means of transmitting, transmuting, and constituting life. As participants in a creative writing course, our goal will be to practice analysis and production in equal measure. We will study the craft of poetry and prose to identify the mechanics of powerful work, and we will hone our skills by endeavoring to write into and beyond these literary techniques. To grow as readers and writers, you will participate in a symbiotic workshop with your peers that requires you to share writing and feedback with one another.

Structure

We will evenly divide our classes between craft and workshop. On Mondays, you will come to class prepared to discuss assigned texts. You will be responsible for writing an informal reading response for each and every craft class and turning it in to me, via email, by midnight the night before.

On Wednesdays, you must come prepared for a student workshop. In order for this workshop to run smoothly, we will read work in advance. Per this constraint, I will require that you email me the piece you plan to workshop the Wednesday prior to your workshop. The class will be split into Groups A and B; Wednesdays will alternate between Group A and Group B workshops. Students will receive their peers’ work by Monday to read and comment on before Wednesday workshop.

Note that, while you have no official journaling assignment, I recommend that you practice keeping a journal. Into this journal would go: scraps, quotes, your reading responses, observations, lines that have come to you in a dream, memories, overheards, sketches, and so much more. A journal is a generative resource for your creative work when you have a piece due for workshop, but it will also be an invaluable archive for you later.

Readings and Course Materials
This course will require you to read poems, articles, essays, and novel excerpts from an abundance of sources. I will provide reading packets for you in advance. Assigned reading may shift based on the needs and interests of the class, but you can expect to read the works and authors assigned on the course schedule included.

**Course Requirements**

You will find specific assignments and due dates on the accompanying course schedule, but in general this is everything the class will require of you.

1) *Weekly reading responses to assigned texts.* Note: Understand that I know you are capable of formal essays; I don’t want to see you perform an “academic” close reading. I want to see that you have engaged with the work and confronted it deeply and honestly. What is your **opinion**? What elements of the work moved or delighted you, and do you know why? If you hated something — tell me, and tell me why. Did the work remind you of something? Go off on tangents; go out on a limb; formulate a conspiracy theory; explore what you think and feel. There is no length requirement. Some days you will only write a paragraph; other days, you will realize you’ve written two pages by accident.

2) *Annotations on your peers’ creative work.* Mark up your peers’ work as you would any assigned text. Underline, star, highlight. Write a note when something worked for you, and why it did. Likewise, note when something confused you or detracted from the piece.

3) *Six creative pieces.* You will turn in creative work to be workshopped six times over the course of the semester, at a cadence of every two weeks excepting the first and final weeks of class.

4) *Active participation.* This means that you contribute to craft discussions and to workshop. Remember, you get out of the workshop what you put into it. In order to create a generative, stimulating workshop environment, you must rigorously engage with the work your peers turn in. “Rigorous engagement” means that you provide constructive feedback — useful and honest, but always respectful and compassionate.

5) *Two office hours appointments.* You must meet with me twice throughout the semester, at least. At these required meetings, please bring a revision of a workshopped piece. I aim to get to know you and your editing style. Please make other appointments — to discuss your work, to ask questions, or to continue a conversation from class — at your leisure.

6) *Final portfolio.* In lieu of a traditional final, you will turn in a portfolio of your work from the semester. This will include the six creative pieces you’ve produced, with demonstrated revisions.

*OPTIONAL*  
**Extra credit:** For extra credit, you may choose to read the text from which a class assignment is excerpted, or a text I have recommended to you based on your work
and your interests, in its entirety. You will write a reading response and turn it in to me to receive your due points.

**Grading**

- Creative Assignments: 30%
- Participation: 25%
- Reading Responses: 20%
- Final Portfolio: 20%
- Extra Credit: Up to 5%

**Plagiarism**

This class has a zero-tolerance for plagiarism of either critical or creative work. Any plagiarism will be immediately reported. It’s quite clear when work is not a student’s own; please don’t risk your academic future to “meet” an assignment. Email me if you’re having trouble with an assignment or need to turn something in late. Never plagiarize; it’s dishonest, it cheats you, and it has terribly severe consequences.

**Late Work Policy**

- **Extensions:** Life is terribly turbulent at the moment, and you may receive an extension (with no questions asked) on reading responses and peer annotations twice in a semester if you let me know before the due date. Generally speaking, creative work cannot receive extensions as it would alter the tight workshop schedule.
- **Late Work:** Work turned in late without notice will incur a 5% grade penalty. This goes for reading responses, annotations, and workshop submissions.
- *Note:* We are living in unprecedented times, and I care deeply about my students. Please know that the rules outlined above are general guidelines but do not pertain to extraordinary circumstances. If you are experiencing an emergency, or even if you’re just struggling, reach out to me. We can discuss a more appropriate plan for you based on your circumstances. You will not be punished in this class for circumstances outside of your control, and please prioritize your health and well-being. Those matter more to me than receiving an assignment on time.

**Attendance and Tardiness**

This class requires the participation of every workshop member. If you are not present, you cannot participate. Unexcused absences will result in a 5% deduction of your overall class grade each and every time you miss class. If you miss your workshop day due to an unexcused
absence, your workshop will not be rescheduled. **Lateness**, meaning arrival to class 5 minutes or more after it has begun, will result in a tardiness tally, and three tallies counts as an unexcused absence.

Write me in advance of class, and you will have a single **excused absence** for the semester. For more than one absence, please provide a doctor or counselor’s note explaining the absence. (Note: rare exceptions will be made at my discretion for emergencies.) If you know in advance you will have to miss class for a religious holiday, family gathering, or any other legitimate reason, let me know three weeks in advance.

**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
Web site: [http://www.nyu.edu/csd](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 feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

**Content**

1) Writing what we need to write may at times require that we speak about difficult or taboo material. Please write what compels you to write. However, if you know your work’s subject may be graphic, upsetting, or potentially re-traumatizing for your peers, provide a **content warning** so that class members may care for themselves and prepare to productively engage with your work.

2) In this space, we care for and about one another. We respect one another as artists, yes, but also fundamentally as people. Work that constitutes hate speech, or that belittles or attacks marginalized groups, individuals, or community members, will not be tolerated, and will certainly not be workshopped.
COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Week One
- Monday 2/1: *Introductions & Writing Exercise*
  - Open with a few poems
  - What is a poem?
  - Hallmarks of poetry & a discussion of poetry versus prose
  - Writing exercise
- Wednesday 2/3: *Why We Write & How to Start (Manifestos)*
  - **Readings Due:** “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” (Audre Lord), “Memory, Creation, and Writing” (Toni Morrison), and “On Beginnings” by Mary Ruefle
  - **Writing Due:** POEMS for Workshop Group A (to be workshopped next week)

Week Two
- Monday 2/8: *Saying the Unsayable*
  - **Readings Due:** “Say It, Say It Anyway You Can” and “Taking It” by Vievee Francis; “100 Bells” by Tarfia Faizullah and accompanying essay “Against Explanation;” “Super Villains” by Matthew Olzmann; “Despite My Efforts Even My Prayers Have Turned into Threats” by Kaveh Akbar; “Nathaniel” by Patrick Phillips; “One Day I’ll Love Ocean Vuong” by Ocean Vuong, and essay “The Weight of Our Living: on Hope, Fire Escapes, and Visible Desperation”
  - **Extra credit reading:** “The Rejection of Closure” by Lyn Henijian (essay)
  - **Writing Due:** Reading response
- Wednesday 2/10: *FIRST WORKSHOP GROUP A*
  - **Writing due:** annotations of Workshop Group A work + POEMS for Workshop Group B (to be workshopped next week)

Week Three
- Monday 2/15: PRESIDENTS’ DAY (no class)
- Wednesday 2/17: *FIRST WORKSHOP GROUP B*
  - **Writing Due:** annotations of Workshop Group B work + next round of POEMS by Workshop Group A

Week Four
- Monday 2/22: *Mechanics: the Poem as a Matrix of Sound, Sense, and Meaning*
  - **Readings Due:** “Line and Syntax” & “Ending the Line” by James Longenbach
  - **Writing Due:** Reading Response (work you read this weekend or anything from last week)
  - Discussion: rhythm versus meter; sound devices; figuration
    - Illustrated by “Blind Tom Plays On” sonnet crown by Tyehimba Jess
Week Five

- Monday 3/1: **Forms! A Panoply!**
  - **Readings Due (Read from at least 3 categories):**
    - Litany: “Mountain Dew Poem Disguised as a Love Poem” by Matthew Olzmann; “Litany While Reading Scripture in the Gynecologic Oncology Waiting Room” by Leila Chatti; “Magdalene — The Seven Devils” by Marie Howe; “From” by A. Van Jordan
    - Contrapuntal: excerpts from *Olio* by Tyehimba Jess; “YOLANDA & SELENA DON’T TALK ANYMORE” by Melissa Lozada-Oliva; “SCHHEHERAZADE AS NILE BRIDE” by Sara Elkamel
    - Sonnet: “SONNET XVII” by Pablo Neruda
    - Sestina: excerpt from *Quantum Lyrics* (A. Van Jordan)
    - Prose poem: “The Last Drop” by Ada Limon; “The Fire Cycle” by Zachary Schomburg
    - Ghazal: “Ghazal, After Ferguson” by Yusef Komunyakaa; “Even the Rain” by Agha Shahid Ali
    - Duplex: “Duplex,” by Jericho Brown
    - Syllabics: Shane McRae
    - **Extra credit**: bring a villanelle, pantoum, or abecedarian.
  - **Writing Due**: Reading Response

- Wednesday 3/3: **SECOND WORKSHOP GROUP B**
  - **Writing Due**: annotations of Workshop Group B work + next round of POEMS by Workshop Group A

Week Six

- Monday 3/8: **Art of the Elegy**
  - **Readings Due**: “Funeral Blues” by W. H. Auden; “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden; “Son” by Forrest Gander; “You Were You Are Elegy” by Mary Jo Bang; “I walked through the trees, mourning” by Cathy Linh Che; “The Gate” by Marie Howe; “Before the accident, and after” by Tarfia Faizullah; “My God, It’s Full of Stars” by Tracy K. Smith; “Matinee” by Patrick Phillips; “My Father’s Love Letters” by Yusef Komunyakaa; “not an elegy for Mike Brown” by Danez Smith; “To Juan Doe #234” by Eduardo C. Corral; “Rabbits and Fire” by Alberto Rios
  - **Writing Due**: Reading Response
- **Wednesday 3/10:** *THIRD WORKSHOP GROUP A*
  - **Writing Due:** annotations of Workshop Group A work + next round of POEMS by Workshop Group B

**Week Seven**
- **Monday 3/15:** *The Elusive Happy Poem? & Joy as Resistance*
  - **Readings Due:** *Magnitude and Bond* by Nicole Terez Dutton; *little prayer* by Danez Smith; *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude* by Ross Gay; *From Blossoms* by Li-Young Lee; *At Last the New Arriving* and *Hammon B3 Organ Cistern* by Gabrielle Calvocoressi; *Notes on Happiness* by Matthew Olzmann; *Fugue* by Suji Kwock Kim; *Everything Good between Men and Women* by C. D. Wright; *Owed to the Durag* and *Owed to Pedagogy* by Joshua Bennett; *How delicious to say it.* by Vievee Francis
  - **Writing Due:** Reading Response

- **Wednesday 3/17:** *THIRD WORKSHOP GROUP B*
  - **Writing due:** annotations of Workshop Group B work + next round of PROSE by Workshop Group A

**Week Eight**
- **Monday 3/22:** *Inhabiting and Reimagining Myth (Plot)* (Fiction)
  - **Readings Due:** “The Husband Stitch” by Carmen Maria Machado; excerpt of *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys
  - **Writing Due:** Reading response

- **Wednesday 3/24:** *FOURTH WORKSHOP GROUP A*
  - **Writing Due:** annotations of Group A work + next round of PROSE by Workshop Group B

**Week Nine**
- **Monday 3/29:** *Taking the Myth Back (Form and Point of View)* (Non-fiction)
  - **Readings Due:** excerpt *In the Dreamhouse* by Carmen Maria Machado; “Thesmophoria” by Melissa Febos
  - **Writing Due:** Reading response

- **Wednesday 3/31:** *FOURTH WORKSHOP GROUP B*
  - **Writing Due:** annotations of Workshop Group B work + next round of PROSE by Workshop Group A

**Week Ten**
- **Monday 4/5:** *Hybridity: Lyric Prose vs. Novelistic Verse*
- **Readings Due**: *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* by Ocean Vuong (excerpt); *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson (excerpt)
- **Writing Due**: Reading response

  ● Wednesday 4/7: *FIFTH WORKSHOP GROUP A*
  ○ **Writing Due**: annotations of Group A work + next round of PROSE by Workshop Group B

**Week Eleven**

- Monday 4/12: *The Relationship Between Autobiography and Fiction*
  - **Readings Due**: essays — “How to Write an Autobiographical Novel” and “100 Things About Writing a Novel” by Alexander Chee; *Edinburgh* (excerpt) by Alexander Chee
  - **Writing Due**: Reading response
- Wednesday 4/14: *FIFTH WORKSHOP GROUP B*
  ○ **Writing Due**: annotations of Workshop Group B work + next round of PROSE by Workshop Group A

**Week Twelve**

- Monday 4/19: LONG WEEKEND (**no class**)
- Wednesday 4/21: *SIXTH WORKSHOP GROUP A*
  ○ **Writing Due**: annotations of Group A work + next round of PROSE by Workshop Group B

**Week Thirteen**

- Monday 4/26: *Non-fictional Modes — Literary Journalism versus the Personal Essay*
  - **Readings Due**: *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich (excerpt); “The Empathy Exams” by Leslie Jamison; “On Seeing England for the First Time” by Jamaica Kincaid
  - **Writings Due**: Reading response
- Wednesday 4/28: *SIXTH WORKSHOP GROUP B*
  ○ **Writing Due**: annotations of Group B work

**Week Fourteen**

- Monday 5/3: *Chronology (Linearity and Recursion in Narrative)*
  - **Readings Due**: *Obasan* by Joy Kogawa (excerpt); *Ceremony* by Leslie Marmon Silko (excerpt)
- Wednesday 5/5: *Radical revision workshop (everyone)*
  ○ Come prepared to revise fearlessly, with abandon!
- Thursday 5/6: LEGISLATIVE DAY for Monday classes (**we are meeting!**)
○ **Readings Due:** excerpts of *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson, *Book of Delights* by Ross Gay, and *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine

○ **Writing Due:** Reading response

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**Week Fifteen**

- **Monday 5/10: (LAST DAY OF CLASS)**
  ○ **Writings Due:** FINAL PORTFOLIO
  ○ Come prepared to read a short piece of your own and a favorite poem or piece of micro-fiction for your peers. :)