

SYLLABUS: Poetry Workshop (Writers in Paris, Summer 2022)

Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00-5:30 (24 June - 23 July)

Professor: Catherine Barnett; cb56@nyu.edu

Office hours: By appointment (students will sign up on a google doc)

In this intensive poetry workshop, students will learn to read poems (your own and others') as writers and as intimate listeners. We will practice various "acts of mind" to expand our own repertoires as poets, practicing new ways of thinking, feeling, saying, unsaying, questioning, comparing, contradicting, describing, swerving, leaping, linking, and moving in and out of time.

Students will be asked to hand in (to me, via their folder/google doc) at least two new poems/drafts each week, in response to a writing prompt/exercise. Our writing assignments will arise from class conversations. **These exercises are simply experiments**, ways to catalyze your writing and try new ways of making and revising. These drafts can be very rough and will be submitted to me via google doc for my response; do not fret! I'm not expecting these drafts to be "finished" or "good"—they are experiments in making/feeling/thinking/collaging/inventing/discovering! I'll ask you to include your own questions and thoughts about what you've made.

You are welcome to hand in to me, via your google folder, any other poems/drafts you're working on independently. (Please include your questions/concerns/observations along with each draft.) And to come meet me for conferences to go over new and previous work. I'll set up a google doc for sign-ups.

You'll have a poem workshoped each week. For your **workshop** poem you can submit anything new (ie written from today on!). It can be something you're working on independently or a draft written in response to an exercise: whatever you'd like us to respond to as a class. You'll upload your workshop poem to the workshop google folder by 11pm the night before class, and at the same time you'll send your poems to Lisa Gerard so that she can print them out for us in class.

Please respond with care and close attention to your classmates' work; to that end, let's promise to read the uploaded workshop poems **before class** so that we're all familiar with them when we meet; this will allow us to use our in-class time together more fruitfully, for shared discussion.

We'll practice improvisational writing in and out of class, taking to heart Elizabeth Bishop's notion that poetry is "thinking with feeling."

To augment our discussions and to allow for fruitful independent study, you'll each choose one debut (first-book) poet to take as a mentor (selected from the annual "Debut Poets" column published by *Poets & Writers*). Students will read the debut poet's work and ancillary texts (interviews, essays, influences, as available) and will use the selected poet as both companion and guide, handing in drafts inspired by, and informal responses to, the selected poet.

Our aim is to create a space where students feel free to take risks, try new approaches, experiment. Together we'll create a class environment of integrity, mutual respect, and vital conversation.

Please have a notebook dedicated to this class. I would like each of us to make daily entries, ideally (!) three pages of notes-towards-poems, images, memories, dreams, drafts, overheard conversations, writing exercises, etc. (If three pages a day feels like too too much, then at least one page a day.) I believe this practice deepens and extends your writing life; it also creates a rich source of the Particulars that so animate our best poems.

Reading:

In the Shape of a Human Body I Am Visiting the Earth: Poems from Far and Wide (edited by Ilya Kaminsky, Dominic Luxford, and Jesse Nathan)
"Debut Poets," from *Poets & Writers* (available online)
Handouts to be provided

Grading:

Ongoing creative and analytic work: 50%
Class participation: 50%

Provisional class schedule (to be adjusted as needed):

27 June: Introductions; in-class writing; discuss arts of description and attention
29 June: Full-class speed workshop; discuss art of association; associative logic
4 July: 1/2-class workshop; discuss metaphor/simile
6 July: 1/2-class workshop; discuss questions/questioning; knowing and not-knowing
11 July: 1/2-class workshop; discuss time/temporal shifts; point of view
13 July: 1/2-class workshop; discuss syntax
18 July: Radical Revision
20 July: Anonymous workshop; putting it all together; how to read aloud

Attendance: Because we have such a short time together, please (I implore you!) arrive promptly, complete all homework and outside reading, and turn in all assignments on time.

Difficult material: We will always assume the speaker in a poem is fictional. (As Paul Valery says, "Je est un autre": "I am an other.") Because art is a kind of deep thinking with feeling, you will surely be exposed to challenging subjects or language while reading poems. Please see me or contact me if you have any concerns, and I'll be sure to contact you if I have any concerns. And remember that the NYU Wellness Center is always there for you: the NYU Wellness Exchange Hotline can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at (212) 443-9999.

Electronics: Let's put our phones away for this brief time together. Many of the assigned readings and each other's poems will be uploaded as word docs and pdfs to our class google drive, but we'll almost always try to have paper copies to refer to/mark up in class—so that we can keep our computers out of the classroom.