Poetics of Love, Loss, & Desire
Joshua Marie Wilkinson

In this course, we will study poetic essays (Anne Carson, Hilton Als, Roland Barthes, Adam Phillips) as well as some cross-genre works of poetry and fiction (Maggie Nelson, Karen Green, Diane Williams), which flirt with hybridity, ekphrasis, and collaboration. Our goal will be to use Eros the Bittersweet (Anne Carson’s critical work on the figure of Eros in Ancient Greek literature) as a kind of foundation, on which we will elaborate a poetics of love, loss, and desire—through study of the subsequent texts, with the intention that those works will diverge from, complicate, and perhaps undermine our assumptions about Eros and writing. Students will write a single, final work in the genre of their choice by semester’s end—in addition to writing weekly responses to readings.

New Wine in Old Bottles
Instructor: Kate Bernheimer

This craft class borrows its name from Angela Carter’s moniker for new fairy tales, and is dedicated to the art of retelling — also sometimes known as “same language translation.” This class is suitable for writers of all sorts, along the fabled spectrum of realism to fabulism. The class will focus, via literary examples (along with some examples from visual art and film) on improving your dexterity in a very old tradition that thrives around the globe in diverse and new variations today. We will begin by accepting, for the purposes of this class, that “The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales,” as Walter Benjamin famously wrote.

Our primary texts include mainly old source tales — from which you’ll be working directly as writers — and some critical works. Titles include Max Luthi’s Fairy Tale as Art Form and Portrait of Man [sic], Edith Hamilton’s Mythology, Karen Armstrong’s A Brief History of Myth, Maria Tatar’s The Grimm Reader, Maria Tatar’s The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales, Italo Calvino’s Italian Folktales, Arab Folktales, Russian Fairy Tales, The Annotated Hans Christian Andersen, Japanese Tales, a collection of myths or fairy tales from the culture of your selection, and other individual examples of scholarship and old folklore, along
with a handful of 21st century poems, short stories, and essays. We will also read Willy Vlautin’s The Free (a post-Iraq, working class realist novel with a science fiction, dystopian love story woven throughout – Willy Vlautin reads at the Poetry Center on January 29, 2014). This book will serve as inspiration early on in the class for where this fairy-tale path might take you in a longer project someday.

You will write brief critical and creative responses to readings and select tales from among assigned readings for your own retellings. This is a multi-genre class though our primary readings are prose volumes – poets, nonfiction writers, playwrights, novelists, story writers, all welcome here.

Memoir as Culture-Making
Alison Deming

This nonfiction craft seminar will explore the memoir, major and innovative works in the genre, including some that trouble the definition of memoir. The reading list will present various conventions and inventions (in terms of voice, form, development, and the problem of the “I”) available to literary nonfiction writers with the goal of increasing each writer’s sense of the range of possibility for working in memoir. The reading list skew away from memoir as self-making towards a broadened sense of the task, the memoir as culture-making. We will read works that interrogate the self within a cultural context, books that tap memory, imagination and research in an ongoing encounter with becoming that engages with history, politics, religion, place, art and cultural identity. Students will write brief weekly response papers or stylistic imitations. A final project will be one longer work (essay, memoir, short story, poem sequence or hybrid piece). Each student will make a presentation addressing craft elements in and critical responses to one of the assigned books.

Reading list:
Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, “La Respuesta” (an epistolary essay)
Nabokov, Speak Memory
Primo Levi, Periodic Table
Annie Dillard, FOR THE TIME BEING
Wallace Stegner, WOLF WILLOW
N. Scott Momaday, THE NAMES
Peggy Pond Church, THE HOUSE AT OTOWI BRIDGE
William Kittredge, HOLE IN THE SKY
James Baldwin, NOTES OF A NATIVE SON
Patricia Hampl, THE FLORIST’S DAUGHTER
Abigail Thomas, SAFEKEEPING
Nick Flynn, THE REENACTMENTS
Alison Bechdel, ARE YOU MY MOTHER