Transforming Genre Conventions: Hybrid forms on the marginal and in-between

“Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.”

— Donna Haraway

“If one writes in free verse—and one should—to subvert Western civilization, surely one should write in forms to save oneself from Western civilization?”

— Agha Shahid Ali

What drives a short story versus a poem versus a personal essay? What are the parameters of genre and why are writers—especially writers of marginalized identities—drawn towards the space in between?

In this workshop, we will close read texts that don’t comfortably fit into genres: prose-poems, lyric essays, short novels, experimental films, works in translation, and multimedia work. We will engage with hybrid works that break, expand, re-define genre conventions—and question what makes a piece work. We will experiment with the ways we, as writers, move in between genre and form as we write.

Readings include works by Ocean Vuong, Anne Carson, Bhanu Kapil, Sandra Cisneros, Terrence Hayes, Marilyn Chin, Agha Shahid Ali, Franz Kafka, Claudia Rankine, Nam Le, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Jamaica Kincaid, Matsuo Bashō, Jenny Zhang and more. Through discussions of craft and readings, we will write towards a space of trust—both in our voice and in the attention given to each other’s work. In addition to weekly critical and creative writing exercises, we will workshop six pieces—two “poems,” two “fiction” pieces, and two the genre(s) of your choice—and create a final portfolio of critical responses and short works.

READINGS
- The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros
- Don’t Let Me Be Lonely, Claudia Rankine
- The Year of Blue Water, Yanyi
- Dictee, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

All other readings will be available electronically or handed out in class.

COURSE STRUCTURE
After the first three weeks, we will alternate between craft classes on Wednesdays and workshops on Fridays.
Craft class (Wednesday):
Critical responses are due on the class discussion thread (link TBA) by midnight on Tuesdays. Responses may vary in lengths but should be more than 200 words and engage thoughtfully with the assigned reading. You are also expected to respond to at least one of your classmates’ posts every week.

Workshop (Friday):
You will be divided into Group A and B and workshop every other week. On the weeks you workshop, please bring 15 copies of your piece to distribute in the previous class (on Wednesday).

You are expected to have read everyone’s pieces with care before class and write a “letter to the writer” about each piece with your feedback and edits. What was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work? Try to stay away from positive or negative value judgments such as what you liked or what was good, instead, focus on why something was working/resonated with you in the piece. Please bring 2 copies of your “letter to the writer” —one for the writer and one for me—to each workshop.

OFFICE HOURS
Office hours will be held every Friday from 2 – 5 pm at the Lillian Vernon Writer’s House (58 W 10th St). Please email me for appointments if you cannot make this time. I hope to meet with you at least twice this semester.

GRADING
Attendance and participation 30%
Active workshop participation and careful attention and engagement with each other’s work.

Reading responses 15%
Reading responses should be posted by midnight before Wednesday’s craft class and demonstrate thoughtful and rigorous engagement with the readings and other student responses.

Workshop submissions 20%
15 copies of your piece for workshop need to be pass out on Wednesday’s class. Any late submission will go down a letter grade.

Letters to the writer 10%
Along with edits written down on the writer’s workshopped piece, you should bring two copies of a “letter to the writer” to be handed back to me and the writer. The letter should

Final portfolio 25%
Your final portfolio will consist of six pieces from workshops and/or writing
exercises—you can choose the balance of genres. The pieces should be radically revised/ revisited/ reimagined. Use a reasonable font (unless a unique font is fundamental to your piece), include page numbers, a title page, and a writer’s bibliography referencing the works that have inspired you.

POLICIES
1. Attendance: Arriving more than 15 minutes late to class is considered an unexcused absence. More than two unexcused absences will lower your final grade by one mark (A becomes A-, B+ becomes B, and so on). Unless you are ill, never miss your own workshop.

2. Plagiarism: Any academic dishonesty will be reported to the department and lead to a failing grade in this class.

3. Electronics: Laptops, phones, and any other non-medical electronic devices should be turned off and put away before class.

5. Printing: Workshop depends on having hard copies of your work. Email your work to the class only if you miss a Wednesday class. Otherwise, an emailed piece automatically goes down a letter grade.

6. Food: Since we meet late in the day, food is permitted. Please do not bring any foods that may be disruptive to the class.

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

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.
WEEK ONE
W 9/4
Introduction. Assign workshop groups.
Due: two pieces that are important to you: one written by you, and one not (bring 15 copies of each); a writer’s autobiography.

F 9/6
“Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice,” Nam Le
“The Boat”, Nam Le
“Practice Imagining Change: A workshop manifesto,” Helen Betya Rubinstein
The Black Notebooks: “Race in the Creative Writing Classrooms,” Toi Derricotte

Due: primal stories

WEEK TWO
W 9/11
The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros
In class primal stories exercise.

F 9/13
Continue The House on Mango Street, Sandra Cisneros
“A House of My Own,” Sandra Cisneros

Due: Group A & B exercise

Week Three
W 9/18
GROUP A WORKSHOP

F 9/20
GROUP B WORKSHOP
Go to a public space and record the conversations around you.

Week Four
W 9/25
“We love you Crispina,” Jenny Zhang
“A Report to an Academy,” Franz Kafka
“The Fish,” Lydia Davis
“Girl,” Jamaica Kincaid

Due: recorded dialogue, Group A writing exercise

F 9/27
GROUP A WORKSHOP
Week Five
W 10/2
“A Letter to My Mother that She Will Never Read,” Ocean Vuong
Excerpts from On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous, Ocean Vuong
“Especially Heinous, 272 Views of Law & Order: SVU,” Carmen Maria Machado

Due: Group B exercise

F 10/4
GROUP B WORKSHOP
Start keeping a dream journal.

Week Six
W 10/9
Selections from Mourning Diaries, Roland Barthes
“Pray Daddy”, Amir Denzel Hall
In-class guest speaker.

Due: Group A exercise

F 10/11
GROUP A WORKSHOP

Week Seven
W 10/16
“Muscularity and Eros: On Syntax,” Carl Phillips
“Trevor,” “Threshold,” “One Day I Will Love Ocean Vuong,” Ocean Vuong
Selections from Whereas, Layli Long Soldier
Selections from A Pillow Book, Suzanne Buffam

Due: Group B exercise

F 10/18
GROUP B WORKSHOP

Week Eight
W 10/23
The Year of Blue Water, Yanyi
In-class guest speaker.

Due: Group A exercise

F 10/25
GROUP A WORKSHOP

Week Nine
W 10/30
Selections from *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English*, Agha Shahid Ali
Selections from *Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*, Terrence Hayes

Due: Group B exercise

F 11/1
GROUP B WORKSHOP

**Week Ten**

W 11/6
Selections from *The Complete Haikus*, Matsuo Bashō
“Rhapsody in Plain Yellow,” “How I got that Name,” “From a Poet’s Notebook: Late Birthday, All Night Brush Painting,” Marilyn Chin

Due: Group A exercise

F 11/8
GROUP A WORKSHOP

**Week Eleven**

W 11/13
“The Glass Essay,” Anne Carson
Selections from *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*, Bhanu Kapil

Due: Group B exercise

F 11/15
GROUP B WORKSHOP

**Week Twelve**

W 11/20
“The Passion of Joan of Arc” (1928), Carl Theodor Dreyer
*Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*, Claudia Rankine

Due: Group A exercise

F 11/22
GROUP A WORKSHOP

**THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**WEEK THIRTEEN**

W 12/4
Excerpts from *Dictee*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha
“Measures of Distance” (1988), Mona Hatoum
“To Speak is to Blunder,” Yiyun Li

Due: Group B exercise

F 12/6
GROUP B WORKSHOP

WEEK FOURTEEN
W 12/11
“The Near Transitive Properties of the Political and Poetical: Erasure,”
Solmaz Sharif
Selections from Ghost Of, Diana Khoi Nguyen
Selections from Sand Opera, Philip Metres
Selections from RED, Chase Berggrun

F 12/13
Class party & reading.
No workshop, read from a radically revised/revisited piece.

W 12/18
Final portfolios due by 5PM
In my mailbox at the writer’s house (basement level of 58 W 10th St).