CRWRI-UA.815.015: INTRODUCTION TO PROSE & POETRY
Fall 2021, Tues & Thurs 12:30-1:45PM

Instructor: Michelle Phuong Ting
Contact: mpt8481@nyu.edu
Office Hours: By appointment

What one word must never be said?
What two things shall never be seen?

— Muriel Rukeyser

Stop thinking about saving your face. Think of our lives and tell us your particularized world. Make up a story... We will not blame you if your reach exceeds your grasp.

— Toni Morrison

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course has two primary goals, sought through the practice of writing:
1) To cultivate the skill of deep listening
2) To form a community of writers marked by courage and generosity

Through studying poetry and prose, we will learn how to listen—to the musicality of words, to the interior voice, and to each other—aiming to develop habits of receptivity to the world within and around us. We will pay attention to how language points to meanings swimming beneath the surface of words. We will explore the capacity of poems and prose to welcome in the strange—the errant image, the unlikely metaphor, the dissident thought—and what choices are available to writers to build a world where dissonant realities coexist. Through workshop critiques, writing and revision exercises, and readings, we will interrogate the boundaries of what we believe belongs in a piece of poetry or prose and become curious about what strange, wild things exist at imagination’s edge.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Books—
Quan Barry, Asylum
Gwendolyn Brooks, Maud Martha
Jennifer S. Cheng, House A
Alexander Chee, How to Write an Autobiographical Novel
Aracelis Girmay, The Black Maria
Claudia Rankine, Citizen
Layli Long Soldier, Whereas
**Course Reader** - Excerpts from other books and individual works of poetry and prose will be distributed via PDF on specific weeks. Please print them and bring them to class.

**Journal** - Keep a notebook that you’ll use exclusively for this class—to jot down notes, to reflect on process, and to respond to in-class and take-home writing exercises designed to challenge writing habits and generate raw material.

**Folder** - Please dedicate a folder or binder to this class. You will be required to keep every handout, draft, and revisions in this folder.

**Copies** - Prepare to bring in about 12 copies of your poem or prose piece for workshop.

**GRADING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Work</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Discussion</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Activity</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participation (30%)** - This class rewards close reading and generous engagement. What you get out of the class is, in large part, what you put into it. When you give full attention to your peers’ comments, writing, and presence, you will grow as a writer. When you study the assigned readings with depth and care, coming prepared to pose questions and share insights, you will gain tools to reflect on your own work. When you feel the tug to speak, speak. The success of this class depends on our collective willingness to sound out our thinking and feeling in response to writing with courage, clarity, and curiosity. Your embodied participation in class will pay off in private; you will find that remaining engaged and open to the meandering nature of live discussion will develop the muscles required to take risks and seize openings in expression on the page. If participating in this manner is difficult, please reach out to me to discuss a solution. You are expected to come to class having completed all the readings, having prepared questions and responses to the readings, having prepared thoughtful comments on your peers’ writing*, and having made a good faith effort to prepare your own writing for workshop. If you do all these things, you will receive full credit.

*A note on workshop comments*: At minimum, you will provide observations, questions based on these observations, and a suggested radical revision (change in form, style, content, line edits).

**Creative Work (40%)** - You are expected to complete in-class and take-home writing prompts. You will submit around five new poems for workshop—written this semester. You will also submit revised poems based on workshop feedback at the end of the semester. Each revision must be accompanied by a brief, one-paragraph
statement of what you focused on in revision. In lieu of a final portfolio, you will print a chapbook of revised poems to distribute to me and your classmates. In other words: you will put your writing in the world.

**Leading Discussion (20%)** - On one day this semester, you will lead a class discussion on the week’s assigned text. This requires 1) providing a 1-2 minute overview of major thematic and formal concerns of the book, 2) briefly introducing the writer (e.g. biographical info, poetics), 3) reading aloud 1-3 poems from the book, 4) having prepared 3 questions *in advance* to facilitate discussion, and 5) one supplementary quote (e.g. from interviews or essays) that highlight the writer’s concerns and beliefs.

**Field Activity (10%)** - In one class session, we will take a walk outdoors and practice listening out in the world, where writers live most of their lives. You will be required to pay attention to what the world might be speaking to you. You will submit a reflection in response to what you have heard. If you miss this class session, you will be required to make up this activity on your own.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

You are allowed TWO AND ONLY TWO absences. This includes absences due to unforeseen circumstances. To best accommodate long-term illnesses or medical situations, I can work with you in coordination with a medical professional. Missing more than two classes will result in your final grade dropping a whole letter grade (e.g. A- will become a B-). Leaving early or arriving more than 10 minutes late to class will count as an absence. It is your responsibility to contact a peer to follow up on missed work, including in-class writing exercises.

**TECH POLICY**

No electronics are allowed unless expressly permitted or prompted by me. No open laptops, no cell phones, no checking smart watches, no other electronic devices. This class requires that you pay close attention to those around you, and this policy trains you to minimize distractions when you’re writing on your own. Come prepared with printed work, books, your journal, and a pen. This is all you need to write.

**LATE ASSIGNMENTS**

Late assignments will not receive a grade higher than a C. This includes assignments that were completed but not printed or copied when required. I will not accept late assignments by email. They must still be printed and handed in during the following class. If you foresee technical difficulties, please reach out to a peer, or contact me *prior* to the deadline.
FORMATTING
All submitted work must include, in the top-right corner, your name, your email, the date, the course number, and my name. ALL WORK MUST BE TITLED. Please use standard, serif typefaces (e.g. Times New Roman, Garamond) in 12-point font, black ink. No Comic Sans.

OFFICE HOURS
You are encouraged to use office hours as an opportunity to get in-depth feedback on your work, ask questions about readings, request more suggested readings, or discuss any concerns, fears, or interests you have as it pertains to writing. Please make an appointment by emailing me.

TRUST
All of these requirements—participating in conversation, facilitating discussion, offering your voice, not disrupting class by being late or being on your phone—are designed to cultivate an atmosphere of trust, hospitality, and mutual responsibility. Writing is hard, and it is even harder to share our writing aloud. And to share to receive feedback. All that is shared in this class, from poems to comments, is a risk. While you are in this class, you will be treated as writers—not as students who happen to write, not as students majoring in Chemistry, History, or Political Science. Inside this classroom, you will be taken seriously as writers. I trust that you will discover that you can offer yourself to the class in a manner that reflects this.

You are encouraged to exchange contact information with your peers to continue discussions of work, life, and more outside of class. Many lifelong friendships among writers begin in workshop settings like this one.

Note: Please do not share any writing submitted by your peers to anyone outside the classroom.

STUDENT WELLNESS
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.

Before submitting work that contains the content above that might be interpreted as such, please notify me by email to put this work in context. If you do feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please don’t hesitate to reach out to me, so that I can put you in touch with the NYU Wellness Center. You may also reach out to the NYU Wellness Center Hotline: (212) 443-9999.

STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES
Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. You can register with the NYU Moses Center for Students with Disabilities by calling (212) 998-4980 or visiting 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor New York, NY 10003.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Please review NYU’s Academic Integrity guidelines, particularly on plagiarism.

COURSE SCHEDULE: WORKSHOP DATES & DEADLINES
(subject to change based on class size)

WEEK ONE
TH, SEPT 2  
Course Overview
   The Stakes of Language
   Read: Toni Morrison, Nobel Prize Lecture

WEEK TWO
TU, SEPT 7  
What Moves You
   Listen: VS Podcast
   Bring a piece of writing that has made a home in you. Come prepared to discuss why.

TH, SEPT 9  
Attention, Elegy & Odes
   Read: Aracelis Girmay, The Black Maria
   Bring an excerpt of a non-literary, mundane text (e.g. gardening manual, scientific text, NASA website). Come prepared to note what “shimmers” or speaks to you.
   in-class exercise: Write a poem that incorporates the text.

WEEK THREE
TU, SEPT 14  
Workshop
   in-class exercise: Erasure poem

TH, SEPT 16  
Workshop
   in-class exercise: Write a poem based on the smell of _____.

WEEK FOUR
TU, SEPT 21  
Image & Form
   Read: Quan Barry, Asylum
   take-home exercise: Write a poem, no more than 20 lines, that begins with “Nobody” and ends in “hair.”
Meandering & Getting Lost
Read: Ross Gay, “To the Fig Tree on 9th & Christian”
Jane Wong, “The Long Labors”
Solmaz Sharif, “Civilization Spurns the Leopard”
Field Activity: Take a walk where you don’t know where you’re going
in-class exercise: Free write in response to prompts to turn and open up your poem

WEEK FIVE
TU, SEPT 28 Sensing the Body Behind the Text
Read: Jennifer S. Cheng, House A
in-class exercise: Write a letter to a ghost.

TH, SEPT 30 Workshop
take-home assignment: 100 titles of poems you’d like to write

WEEK FIVE
TU, OCT 5 Workshop
take-home assignment: Read Bhanu Kapil’s “Twelve Questions” from The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers and respond to one of those questions.

TH, OCT 7 Radical Revisions
Bring a poem written this semester that you’d like to revise.
in-class exercise: Write a shadow poem.

WEEK SIX
TU, OCT 12 Myths & Parables
Read: Divya Victor, “I is for Jarasandha”
K-Ming Cheng, “Xiaogui”
take-home assignment: Write a short prose piece that incorporates a myth or parable, then grounds it in the “real world.” The distinctions can be blurry.

TH, OCT 14 FALL BREAK

WEEK SEVEN
TU, OCT 19 Intimacy in Public
Read: Claudia Rankine, Citizen
take-home assignment: Write a piece that recounts an encounter that where something was unspoken, left unsaid inside you, or broached the unspeakable.
TH, OCT 21 Workshop

WEEK EIGHT
TU, OCT 26 Workshop
take-home assignment: 25 Things You Don’t Know About Me

TH, OCT 28 Read: Alexander Chee, How to Write an Autobiographical Essay
take-home assignment: Pick one from your list of “25 Things.” Write an essay.

WEEK NINE
TU, NOV 2 Docu-poetics
Read: Layli Long Soldier, Whereas

TH, NOV 4 Bring a document that will serve as source material: image, government policy, legal case, interview, archival image.
in-class exercise: Respond to the document via erasure, re-telling, pairing with a seemingly unrelated personal account, or otherwise incorporating the text.

WEEK TEN
TU, NOV 9 Workshop

TH, NOV 11 Workshop

WEEK ELEVEN
TU, NOV 16 Lyrical Essay
Read: Jennifer S. Cheng, “Hikikomori: Salt Constellations”
Robin Wall Kimmerer, excerpt from Braiding Sweetgrass
take-home assignment: Write a braided essay that incorporates three “strands”

Chen Chen, “A Small Book of Questions”
francine j. harris, “Say It. Say It Anyway You Can.”

WEEK TWELVE
TU, NOV 23 Read: Solmaz Sharif, “The Master’s House”
in-class exercise: Write a litany.

TH, NOV 25  NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING (THANKSGIVING)

WEEK THIRTEEN
TU, NOV 31  The Miracle of Small Moments
Read: Gwendolyn Brooks, Maud Martha
in-class exercise: Write a scene where nothing happens.

TH, DEC 2  Manifestos
Read: Solmaz Sharif, “The Near Transitive Properties of the Political and Poetical: Erasure”

WEEK FOURTEEN
TU, DEC 7  Workshop revised work

TH, DEC 9  Workshop revised work

LAST WEEK
TU, DEC 14  Read manifestos aloud

TH, DEC 16  Chapbook distribution & party!