

## CRWRI-UA.815.015: INTRODUCTION TO PROSE & POETRY

Fall 2021, Tues & Thurs 12:30-1:45PM

Instructor: Michelle Phuong Ting

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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

Participation	30%
Creative Work	40%
Leading Discussion	20%
Field Activity	10%

**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."

TH, SEPT 23                    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, “[J 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"*

TH, NOV 18

Prose? Lyrical Essay? Hybridity & More

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!