

## CRWRI-UA.815.009: INTRODUCTION TO PROSE & POETRY

Fall 2022, Tues & Thurs 11:00 AM - 12:15 PM

Instructor: Michelle Phuong Ting

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*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

*Deep listening is the kind of listening that can help relieve the suffering of another person.*

—Thich Nhat Hanh

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course has three main goals:

- 1) To cultivate the practice of deep listening in and beyond the classroom
- 2) To develop habits of close reading that privilege *encounter* over *apprehension*
- 3) To form a community of writers marked by curiosity, risk, and hospitality

Through the study of poetry and prose, we will learn how to listen—to the musicality of words, to the inner voice, and to each other—aiming to be receptive to the world within and around us. We will learn how to listen generously, seeking to encounter the mysterious, living thing swimming beneath words. We will resist correctional, carceral, and colonial impulses to tame the wild, to pin down the elusive image, to force the illegible into sense, to scorn syntax that defies the standard, to polish the ruptured utterance, to beat a draft into shape—no!

When a work of writing frustrates our ability to apprehend or offends our sensibilities, we will not rush to fix, translate, or dismiss it. We will draw near—with even greater curiosity and a closer reading. We will ask the language what it knows that we don't. We will behold what a line, image, or metaphor is doing and invite imagination for what it wants to be doing. We will trust the voice—wherever it wants to go, regardless of what storylines, self-image, agendas, or ideas of rightness we need to give up in order to follow it. Through exercises in writing, reading, workshop, and revision, we will challenge our assumptions of what belongs in a poem or work of prose and make room for the strange(r) who will most certainly appear, asking for a home.

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

Books—

Don Mee Choi, *DMZ Colony*  
Bhanu Kapil, *How To Wash a Heart*  
Kameelah Janan Rasheed, *No New Theories*  
Solmaz Sharif, *Customs*  
...plus selected readings

**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 to keep handouts, drafts, and revisions.

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

## GRADING

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

**Participation (30%)** - This class rewards close reading and generous engagement. When you give full attention to your peers' comments and writing, 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. You will be encouraged to speak and to make room for others to speak. The success of this class depends largely on our collective willingness to sound out our thinking and feeling 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 to express yourself on the page.

If participating in this manner is difficult, please reach out, and we will figure out how to make this workable for you. 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 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 poems for workshop, written this semester. You will also submit revised poems based on workshop feedback at the end of the semester. In lieu of a final portfolio, you will print a chapbook of revised poems to distribute to me and your classmates.

**Leading Discussion (20%)** - On one day this semester, you will lead a class discussion on the week's assigned text(s). This requires 1) providing a 1-2 minute overview of major thematic and formal concerns, 2) reading aloud an excerpt or poem, 3) having prepared 3 questions *in advance* to facilitate discussion, and 4) a supplementary quote (e.g. from interviews or essays) that highlights the writer's artistic concerns.

**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 write a response to what you have heard. If you miss this class session, you will be required to do this activity on your own.

## ATTENDANCE POLICY

You are allowed TWO absences. To accommodate long-term illnesses or medical situations, I can work with you in coordination with a medical professional. Missing more than two classes, unless due to unforeseen or extenuating circumstances, will result in your final grade dropping a whole letter grade (e.g. A- will become a B-). Leaving early or arriving more than 15 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

Please refrain from using electronic devices in class—including laptops, cellphones, and smart watches—unless expressly permitted or prompted by me. 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. While we may occasionally use a laptop to Zoom in a guest poet or student, or to look up information, you should come prepared with your journal, assigned texts, and a pen. This is all you will need to participate well.

## 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. Late assignments must still be printed and handed in during the following

class; I will not accept late assignments by email. If you have technical difficulties or extenuating circumstances, please reach out to notify me.

## FORMATTING

All submitted work must include, in the top-right corner, your name, your email, the date, the course number, the title, and my name. 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. Office hours will be conducted by Zoom.

## 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 classroom, you will be taken seriously as writers and encouraged to regard each other in this manner.

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 & pace)*

### WEEK ONE

#### Course Overview

TH, SEPT 1

Read: Toni Morrison, [Nobel Prize Lecture](#)  
Cristina Rivera Garza, "[Keep Writing](#)"

Next class: *Bring a piece of writing that has made a home in you.*

### WEEK TWO

#### Slowness, Lingering, Pleasure

TU, SEPT 6

Read: Kameelah Janan Rasheed, *No New Theories* excerpt

Next class: *Bring an excerpt of a non-literary text (e.g. gardening manual, scientific text, news article). Come prepared to discuss what "shimmered" to you.*

TH, SEPT 8

Demo workshop:  
Aracelis Girmay, "[The Black Maria](#)"

In-class: *What don't you want to know? Make a list of 25 Things You Don't Know About Me. Pick one from your list of "25 Things." Free write.*

### WEEK THREE Workshop

TU, SEPT 13

*Group A*

TH, SEPT 15

*Group B*

## WEEK FOUR

### Close Looking & Study

TU, SEPT 20

**Due:** Workshop comments

Read: Solmaz Sharif, *Look*, "[Vulnerability Study](#)"  
Aracelis Girmay, [Praise Song for the Donkey](#)  
Quan Barry, *Asylum*, "triage"

In-class: *Write a list poem using an anaphora (e.g. "Praise")*

Take home: *Pick a subject of study (a color, an activity, a human condition, a creature, a street corner). List at least 20 observations and associations. Include at least one surprising example. Based on your list, circle 5 of the strongest examples. Write a poem.*

TH, SEPT 22

Read: Ross Gay, *The Book of Delights* excerpt  
Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* excerpt

Field activity: *Take a walk. Notice something in nature that "shimmers" to you. Free write—What associations arise? What delights you? What is it teaching you?*

Take home: *Research more about the plant, flower, tree, soil, bird, etc. Braid that strand of information and the meaning it offers into your essay.*

## WEEK FIVE

### Frictions, Frustrations & Strange Kinships

TU, SEPT 27

Discuss: Solmaz Sharif, *Customs*  
Listen: Solmaz Sharif & Douglas Kearney Q&A

Take home: *Cut up one of your poems. Rearrange the lines, trusting your intuition. Come prepared to discuss strange kinships that arose from the exercise.*

TH, SEPT 29

Discuss (cont.): Solmaz Sharif, *Customs*

Read: Chen Chen, "[A Small Book of Questions](#)"

In-class: *Respond to one of Bhanu Kapil's 12 questions from The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers.*

In-class: *Write a “shadow” poem of a poem of you’ve written.*

**WEEK SIX**                      **Workshop**

TU, OCT 4                      *Group A*

TH, OCT 6                      *Group B*

**WEEK SIX**                      **Translation, Interiority & the Burden of Speech**

TU, OCT 11                      NO CLASS (LEGISLATIVE DAY)

TH, OCT 13                      Read: Claudia Rankine, *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely* excerpts  
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* excerpts  
Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas* excerpts  
nha thuyen, [which orientation to sea](#)

In-class: *Write a piece written in the second-person “you” that recounts in excruciating detail, an encounter that left you silenced or unsettled, or an encounter you left carrying something unsaid.*

Take-home: *Revise this piece 3x, using “you,” “we,” and the appropriate third person pronoun (“she/he/they”). Come prepared to discuss how this shifted your work.*

**WEEK SEVEN**                      **Housing the Unwelcome**

TU, OCT 18                      Discuss: Bhanu Kapil, *How to Wash a Heart*

In-class: *Write about an unwelcomed / unwelcoming experience.*

Take-home: *Revise your draft into a poem, no more than 22 lines. Include at least 4 of the following:*

- a question
- an observation/reflection
- an incomplete sentence
- a metaphor/simile
- a quote said by someone else
- an imperative statement
- a concrete object

- a strong image

TH, OCT 20

Discuss (cont.): Bhanu Kapil, *How to Wash a Heart*

Read Jennifer S. Cheng, *House A* excerpts

In-class: *Write a letter to a ghost, a stranger, a person with whom you have an intimate relationship, or someone larger-than-life.*

## WEEK EIGHT

### Workshop

TU, OCT 25

*Group A*

TH, OCT 27

*Group B*

Take-home: *Write a poem, no more than 20 lines, that begins with “Nothing” and ends in “not.”*

## WEEK NINE

### Myths & Parables

TU, NOV 1

Due: Workshop comments

Read: Divya Victor, “[I is for Jarasandha](#)”  
 K-Ming Cheng, “[Xiaogui](#)”  
 Maaza Mengiste, *The Shadow King* excerpt

Take home: *Write a short prose piece that engages a myth, sign, or parable that points to both the mundane and the epic.*

TH, NOV 3

Read: Robin Coste Lewis, [The Voyage of the Sable Venus interview & excerpt](#)

Field activity: *Group visit to The Whitney. Find an artwork that speaks to you. In a poem or prose piece, speak back. Include a “turn” that transforms a signifier—either a title/caption, visual symbol, object, historical event or figure conveyed, distorted, or omitted in a portrait, etc.*

## WEEK TEN

### Workshop

TU, NOV 8

*Group A*



TH, NOV 10

*Group B*

Next class: *Bring in a document (e.g. historical image, family photo, artwork, government decree, etc.)*

**WEEK ELEVEN**

**Hybridity & History: (Re)Interpreting the Signs of the Times**

TU, NOV 15

Due: Workshop comments

Discuss: Don Mee Choi, *DMZ Colony*

Take-home: *Respond to your document with a fictionalized account of a historical event, a journal entry, a drawing, a collage, a letter, etc.*

TH, NOV 17

*Workshop Group A*

Discuss (cont.): Don Mee Choi, *DMZ Colony*

Take home: *Draw, write onto, or erase your document.*

**WEEK TWELVE**

**History & Hybridity (cont.)**

TU, NOV 22

*Workshop Group B*

Listen: Layli Long Soldier, “[38](#)”

Carmen Tafolla, [La Malinche](#) (more on [La Malinche](#))

In-class: *Write a poem or prose piece that reinterprets a historical event to afford the subject/speaker agency and power.*

TH, NOV 24

NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING (THANKSGIVING)

**WEEK THIRTEEN**

**Radical Revisions**

TU, NOV 30

Due: Workshop comments

Take-home: *Radically revise your workshop poems using the techniques offered in class.*

TH, DEC 1

Manifestos

Read: Alexander Chee, [100 Things About Writing a Novel](#)  
Solmaz Sharif, [The Near Transitive Properities of the Political and the Poetical: Erasure](#)

Take-home: *Write a manifesto about why you write and your own artistic concerns.*

**WEEK FOURTEEN**

**Workshop**

TU, DEC 6

*Workshop revised work Group A*

TH, DEC 8

*Workshop revised work Group B*

**LAST WEEK**

**Celebrate!**

TU, DEC 13

*Read manifestos aloud*

TH, DEC 15

Chapbook distribution & party!