POETRY WORKSHOP
English 109A, Fall 2018
Wednesdays, 2-4:50 pm

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Office: Rabb 206
Hours: Wed 11 – 1, 5 – 6 & by appointment

In this workshop and experiential learning course we will hone the tools—sound, imagery, rhythm, line, stanza & more—that help poems become vivid for readers. We will read widely and experiment wildly. We will reverse-engineer poems, searching to understand the methods that create their magic. We will practice the art of reading and responding to others’ poems with care.

Each class will be divided into time for writing, discussion of readings, and workshopping.

This is a workshop—it should help you expand your poetic range, refine poems, give and receive constructive feedback, and consider your poems in relation to published writing. Our goal is to deepen your relationship to poetry in ways that will serve you for a lifetime.

GOALS
• To listen (and better your listening skills) and respond
• To dig deep, experiment, and take risks you did not know existed
• To invent and discover forms/styles that help you sing with confidence
• To critique your own work and the work of others with honesty, openness, focus, and compassion, providing constructive feedback in the workshop forum
• To contribute actively and thoughtfully in class discussions in the quest to better understand poetic craft, literary history/communities, and literary citizenship
• To develop an understanding and appreciation for different poetic styles and subjects through a wide range of readings
• To learn to “read as writers,” developing the ability to articulate why a poem might move you (or not)

TEXTS
We will read as writers, reverse-engineering the poems of others and discovering what moves us. Please purchase/get from a library physical copies of the books (other handouts will be given in class):

...AND 2 YOU choose
1. *Bright Raft in the Afterweather*, Jennifer Elise Foerster
2. *Dangerous Goods*, Sean Hill
3. *Song*, Brigit Pegeen Kelly
4. *Rocket Fantastic*, Gabrielle Calvocoressi
5. *Bright Dead Things*, Ada Limon
6 & 7. You will also select 2 volumes of poetry to read on your own. I am happy to help you choose what might best feed your poetic practice. These books can be obtained through the library; I also have some in my office I can loan out.

**RECOMMENDED BOOKS** (good to have in your poetry library for years to come):

- *any rhyming dictionary*—they are so fun (!) and digital versions just don’t compare

**REQUIREMENTS**

All requirements work toward fostering deep engagement with poetry.

**Attendance:** This class is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis. Since we meet only once a week, attendance is crucial: **more than one absence will result in a NC grade.** If you must be absent, email me in advance. In the event of an absence, contact a classmate to catch up on class activities and assignments.

Please come **prepared** and **on time** for every class with all assigned writing/reading completed. Bring the work due on time and bring the books we’re reading to class.

**Bring a pen and writing notebook to each class!**

**WEEKLY REQUIREMENTS**

(more details will be given in class)

- **Participation:** The success of this class is dependent on **everyone’s** participation. Your voice is critical! Questions can open discussion and understanding as much as certainties. Let’s explore together. Push yourself to contribute if you’re usually silent; push yourself to listen and encourage others to speak if you often contribute.
- **Reading:** Expect to read the equivalent of one book of poetry at least one short essay per week. You should “read as a writer”—be alert to moments that surprise you. Use them to learn. Ask yourself *How did the writer do that?* We will discuss each week’s readings in class. Be prepared to share what moved you and what perplexed you. Allow time to read slowly, to read some poems aloud, and to digest what you’ve read.
• **Writing (poems):** An original poem inspired by the writer(s)/techniques we are currently studying. Many weeks, the assignment will be specific.

• **Writing (prose):** A letter to me (~2 double spaced pages) addressing a question about prosody, process, or the like (topics will be assigned). This is an opportunity for you to think what you’re reading and the art of poetry, develop your ability to talk about what moves you as a poet, and continue conversations begun in class.

• **Critiques** of two of your classmates’ poems to be shared in “triads” as well as the poems up for full-class workshopping. Maybe. We’ll see how it goes.

• *I will post each week’s assignments on Latte. You should always look there for the most current information – and email me if you have questions!*

**OTHER, NON-WEEKLY REQUIREMENTS**

(more details will be given in class)

• **ATTEND** the live public poetry event scheduled on campus and write a reflection about it. Hearing literature live is a powerful and important part of a writerly life.

• **CONFER:** Come see me! Schedule time during my office hours to discuss poems-in-progress or other things that come up in class. One-on-one discussions are one of the most productive ways to further your writing.

• **CREATE/MEMORIZE:** You will create a video poem or recite a memorized poem. This is a way to more deeply engage with a single poem and how it is made.

• **SHARE:** Discover a poetic resource that enriches your writerly life and profile a literary journal that you admire/aspire to. We will pool and share our discoveries.

• **REVIEW(s):** You will write a critical response & give brief presentation to the class of the two books you read independently.

• **REVISE:** Deep revisions of at least four of the new poems you have generated. I expect you to revise poems throughout the term, incorporating comments from workshop and things you’ve learned from discussion – revision is essential to the work of being a writer. There will be a due date for official revisions (see schedule).

• **COLLECT/CURATE** a mini-anthology of poems you love. As you read, type out (don’t copy/paste) poems that inspire, mystify, or otherwise capture you.

• **REFLECT:** A final self-evaluation/portfolio, in which you collect your poems, present your mini-anthology, and reflect on your progress and process as a writer, will be due at the end of the term.

**OTHER NOTES:**

• Please **turn off mobile phones** during class.

• If you use a laptop, do so appropriately: to read a pdf of the week’s essay, take notes, etc. Not for any of the other inappropriate uses we could name but will not.

• If you have a documented disability, please let me know.

Brandeis Four-Credit Course Expectations: Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).
QUESTIONS / IDEAS / WAYS TO SUCCEED!

I appreciate students who are proactive about their learning, and I highly encourage you to be in touch if you are feeling confused, concerned, or as if you are falling behind—or if you just want to talk more about the poetry we’re reading and writing and how the class can better serve your needs as a writer.

I’m available during my office hours each week especially to see students. For questions that can’t wait for class or office hours, I’m also happy to answer emails, and usually do so within 24 hours during the week.

Each writer’s path is unique and individual. I’ll do my best to facilitate lively discussions, meaningful workshops, and interesting activities, and I always welcome your feedback about how the class is working for you or ideas about directions we might take.

A Note on “Challenging Content” in Creative Writing

Art and literature frequently attempt to engage with dramatic situations. This may occasionally include dramatized situations that disturb due to content—political, traumatic, or otherwise. Literature seeks to make us feel, and those feelings may not always be comfortable. This class values work which moves us out of our comfort zone. We are here to learn, which is often a terrifying and life-changing experience if it is approached honestly and fully.

My promise is to never expose you to material which has no value beyond its explicit content. We will, however, encounter material that is explicit and/or challenging in other ways.

Your half of the promise is that you come into my classroom with an open heart, no matter how much the poems we are discussing might challenge you, and to make sure that writing you bring to class earns the right to push boundaries for reasons beyond mere shock value.

All discussions will be conducted with consideration and respect.

If you have particular issues with particular content, please feel free to contact me for a confidential discussion about how your needs might be accommodated.
Poetry/Literary Events on Campus This Term

Consider following @bdeiscw on Instagram and/or Brandeis Creative Writing on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Brandeiscw/ -- there, you’ll get info about Creative Writing and literary events on campus and beyond.

SEPT 25, Tues, 5:30 Chen Chen, the new Jacob Ziskind Poet-in-Residence

Chen Chen is the author of When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities (BOA Editions, 2017), which won the A. Poulin, Jr. Poetry Prize, the GLCA New Writers Award, the Thom Gunn Award for Gay Poetry, and was longlisted for the National Book Award for Poetry. His work has appeared in many journals and anthologies, including Poetry, Tin House, The Best American Poetry, and The Best American Nonrequired Reading. Recently, Poets & Writers featured him as one of “Ten Poets Who Will Change the World.”

OCT 23, Tues, 5:30: Mira T Lee

"A tender but unflinching portrayal of the bond between two sisters--one that's frayed by mental illness and stretched across continents, yet still endures..."—Celeste Ng.

Mira T. Lee's debut novel, Everything Here is Beautiful, was selected as a Top Winter/2018 Pick by more than 30 news outlets, including The Wall Street Journal, Huffington Post, O Magazine, Poets & Writers, and New York magazine. In her previous lives, Mira has also been a graphic designer, pop-country drummer, salsa dancing fanatic, and biology graduate student. An alum of Stanford University, Mira currently lives in Cambridge, MA.

**Schedule:** Highly subject to change! Most weeks, there will be a pdf on some aspect of prosody—some are listed here, others will be folded in as the class develops.

All assignments are due at the beginning of class, printed and properly formatted.

**CHECK LATTE EACH WEEK FOR THE MOST UP-TO-DATE ASSIGNMENTS**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Readings/Assignments (subject to change)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1: Aug 29</td>
<td>- Introductions and more…&lt;br&gt;- Pinsky <em>Singing School</em> (pdf)&lt;br&gt;- Sampler of the term’s books</td>
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<td>Week 2: Sept 5</td>
<td>HAVE READ&lt;br&gt;- <em>Bright Dead Things</em>, Ada Limon&lt;br&gt;- Image/description essay (pdf)</td>
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<td>Week 3: Sept 12</td>
<td>HAVE READ&lt;br&gt;- Poem sampler on lineation (pdf)&lt;br&gt;- Lineation essay (pdf)&lt;br&gt;- <em>Chen Chen reading: 9/25 @ 5:30</em></td>
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<td>NO CLASS Sept. 19</td>
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<td>Week 4: Sept 26</td>
<td>HAVE READ&lt;br&gt;- <em>Dangerous Goods</em>, by Sean Hill&lt;br&gt;- Documentary Poetics essay (pdf)</td>
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<td>Week 5: Oct 3</td>
<td>HAVE READ&lt;br&gt;- Syntax &amp; Sound essays/portfolio (pdf)&lt;br&gt;- AND Have your first critical response book chosen/approved by Friday</td>
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<td>Week 6: Oct 10</td>
<td>HAVE READ&lt;br&gt;- Video Poem Essay&lt;br&gt;- Memorization Essay&lt;br&gt;DUE (beyond the normal weekly)&lt;br&gt;- <strong>Critical response #1 (and class presentation)</strong></td>
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<td>Week 7: Oct 17</td>
<td>HAVE READ&lt;br&gt;- <em>Song</em>, Brigit Pegeen Kelly&lt;br&gt;- Voice essay (pdf)&lt;br&gt;- AND have your video/memorization poem chosen/approved by Friday am&lt;br&gt;<strong>AHEM:</strong> Have you come by to see me during office hours? Schedule time to do so in the coming weeks. Bring poems you’re working on.</td>
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<td>Week 8: Oct 24</td>
<td>HAVE READ&lt;br&gt;- Persona Sampler/essay (pdf)&lt;br&gt;DUE (beyond the normal weekly)&lt;br&gt;- <strong>Video poem/memorized poems</strong></td>
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<td>Week 9: Nov 1</td>
<td>HAVE READ&lt;br&gt;- Form sampler/essay (pdf)&lt;br&gt;- Revision essay (pdf)&lt;br&gt;- AND Have your second critical response book chosen/approved by Friday am&lt;br&gt;DUE (beyond the normal weekly)&lt;br&gt;- <strong>Poetic resource (in shared GoogleDoc)</strong></td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>Assignment Details</td>
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| Week 10: Oct 31 | **HAVE READ**  
- *Rocket Fantastic*, Gabrielle Calvocoressi  
- Political poem sampler/essay (pdf)  
DUE (beyond the normal weekly)  
- **REVISIONS of 4 poems from the term** |
| Week 11: Nov 7   | DUE (beyond the normal weekly)  
- **Critical response #2 (and class presentation)** |
| Week 12: Nov 14  | **HAVE READ**  
- *Bright Raft in the Afterweather*, Jennifer Foerster  
- Myth/tradition essay (pdf) |
| Week 13: Nov 28  | **HAVE READ**  
- Associative poetics essay (pdf)  
- Poem sampler on associative poetics  
DUE (beyond the normal weekly)  
- **Brief journal profile (in shared GoogleDoc)** |
| Week 14: Dec. 5 | DUE (beyond the normal weekly)  
Final portfolio, essay, and “live event” writeup |