

POETRY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: SYLLABUS for the Craft of Poetry, Writers in Florence, Summer 2019

2 June 2019 - 29 June 2019: Wednesdays and Fridays (3:00-5:30)

Professor: Catherine Barnett; [cb56@nyu.edu](mailto:cb56@nyu.edu)

Office hours: Wednesdays 1:30-3 and by appointment

In this craft class, we will focus on the theory and practice of poetry: how *ideas* of poetry both describe and mislead us when we read the actual live poem. We'll read about the making of poems--different approaches, theories, and manifestoes drawn from poets' essays, letters, and even from the poems themselves. We'll focus primarily on international poets in translation, using their ideas and their work to challenge our own notions of the art. We'll study the tensions between Order and Adventure; between lyric and narrative; between thinking and feeling. We'll seek to understand the fruitful frictions, contradictions, and deep human urgencies that animate poems. We'll discuss theory through questions of craft: syntax, metaphor, point of view, temporal shifts, tonal shifts, contradiction, figuration, and rhetorical strategies. Using Elizabeth Bishop's notion that "poetry is thinking with feeling" and the examples provided by these international poets, we'll work to expand our own repertoires as poets, practicing new ways of thinking, feeling, saying, unsaying, questioning, comparing, contradicting, describing, swerving, leaping, linking, and moving in and out of time. We will also read a new anthology that brings contemporary American poets into conversation with poets from around the world.

Some basic experiments in translation and ekphrasis will also engage us during our weeks together.

Students will be asked to hand in at least one analytic and two creative responses each week. Students will keep a writer's notebook, translate a poem of his/her choice, and give an oral presentation. We'll visit the cafe where the Nobel prize-winning Italian poet Eugenio Montale (along with many other Italian writers and artists) met and conversed.

**Reading:**

*Ecco Anthology of International Poetry* (edited by Ilya Kaminsky and Susan Harris)

*In the Shape of a Human Body I Am Visiting the Earth: Poems from Far and Wide* (edited by Ilya Kaminsky, Dominic Luxford, and Jesse Nathan)

"Debut Poets" (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018), from *Poets & Writers* (available online)

Jennifer Grotz, *Window Left Open* (Graywolf Press), 2016.

Handouts to be provided

**Grading:**

Analytic and creative responses: 40%

Class participation: 40%

Student presentations and independent projects: 20%

**Provisional class schedule** (to be adjusted as needed):

**Week One** (5 June and 7 June):

Introductions; poems as self-portraits and as ars poetica

**Week Two** (12 June and 14 June):

Lyric vs Narrative poetry

(Visiting writer Jennifer Grotz to discuss her work and the art of translation)

The pleasures and challenges of translation (Discuss Caroline Bergvall's "Via: 48 Dante Variations"; Look at different translations of Montale (Wright, Brock, Beckett, Galassi, and *Montale in English*); Pavese (Brock, Arrowsmith, etc.); Rilke; Herbert; and Apollinaire. Practice "phonetic" translation; "translate" a poem from English into English. Translate a poem from Italian into English.

**Week Three** (19 June and 21 June):

Order vs. Adventure; Questions of Time

((Class visit to Caffè Giubbe Rosse, where Montale and other literary types often met)

**Week Four** (26 June and 28 June):

Thinking vs Feeling; the Poetics of Resistance; Compassion and the Imagination

Class reading; presentations; potluck celebration

**Attendance:** Because we have such a short time together, it is imperative that you attend every class, arrive promptly, complete all homework and outside reading, and turn in all assignments on time. If you need to be absent, you must notify me in advance; please be responsible for finding out what happened and keeping up.