

## **A Myriad Consciousness: the hybrid, its tradition, innovations and radical possibilities**

Stanford University, Winter Quarter 2020

Ocean Vuong

Thursday 1:30pm – 4:20pm, Room # \_\_\_\_\_

*“Prose is a house, poetry a man in flames running quite fast through it.”*

— Anne Carson

*“I don’t try to be prophetic, as I don’t sit down to write literature. It is simply this: a writer has to take all the risk of putting down what he sees. No one can tell him about that. No one can control that reality.”*

— James Baldwin

### **Objectives:**

In this class, we will examine possibilities in textual and formal hybridity, paying close attention to how this nascent yet rich lineage of writing blurs, disrupts, and alters the boundaries of genres. What happens when a piece of writing challenges the preconceived parameters of its genre, rendering itself elusive, amorphous, and yet still insisting on its value as a means of intellectual and emotional discovery? What use are genre labels, and can these terms be modified alongside the development of inter-genre writing? How does a poet's own "hybridity" in identity relate to her intersection in formal enactments? We will read both the trailblazers and newcomers to the form, as well as try our own hand at creating a hybrid text that surprises, challenges, and confronts our own notions of what a "poem" should or should not be, and how those notions can change. The goal, in the end, is to expand and enlarge our sense of self and the potentialities within our craft through careful reading, compositional imitation, and rigorous discussion.

Poetry, if nothing else, is a bridge between two people. I thank you, from one poet to another, from one human being to another, for your willingness and commitment to using your life to build what I believe to be one of our most vital bridges: language.

### **Expectations:**

Read the assigned readings and show up to class. This class is a collaborative effort, and one of the best ways to learn about writing is by reading and discussing text together in respectful, courteous, and intelligent ways. This will train you to approach creative writing with a critical eye and also help inform your own work. When we are considerate of the work of our peers, we give ourselves a chance to be better readers, and therefore a chance to be better writers.

[Trigger Warnings: in-class discussion]

### **Tasks:**

For each text discussed in this class, we will have one or two presenters who will help jump-start our day's discussion. These will take the form of a 10-15-minute presentation on the book at hand, followed by class discourse based on the questions you pose. The presentation should help lay the groundwork for a collective engagement with the text and should entail:

- \* A brief biography of the writer's life.
- \* How did historical, cultural, or social contexts effect the writer's aesthetics and formal strategies? What problems did these contexts create, if at all, for the writer's work? How did they find solutions to contend and respond to/complicate the impacts of their contemporary moment, particularly as it relates to the work's hybridity?
- \* How did you respond personally to the text? What surprised you?
- \* Offer the class three questions relating to a specific passage/poem.
- \* Bring in copies of an adjacent text; this can be a review, essay, scholarship or another writer's personal response to the text you're presenting on.

You are encouraged to refer to notes and other critical responses relating to the text. However, I encourage you to take this opportunity to be your own professional scholar. That is, to form and advance your own conclusions/ideas on the text and to speculate as widely and openly as you can. This way, we can breach new ground in our thinking via a generous and ever-yielding mode of inquiry. You do not need to hand in a written response.

**The books you will need:**

1. *Dictee*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (University of California Press)
2. *The Lover*, Marguerite Duras (Pantheon)
3. *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Aimé Césaire (Wesleyan University Press)
4. *Leaves of Grass* [1855], Walt Whitman (Oxford 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition, 2005)
5. *One Big Self*, C.D Wright (Copper Canyon Press)
6. *Arthur Rimbaud: Complete Works*, Arthur Rimbaud (Harper Perennial Modern Classics)
7. *Autobiography of Red*, Anne Carson (Vintage)
8. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, Claudia Rankine (Graywolf)
9. *I Remember*, Joe Brainard (Penguin Books)

**Attendance:**

Attendance in class is expected and required. Two unexplained absences are permitted per semester. Any additional absences will result in a reduction in your grade for the class.

**Office Hours:**

11:00am-1:00pm (by appointment)  
223A Margaret Jacks Hall

**Class Agenda:**

- Jan 9: Introductions, poem share, presentation sign-up sheet
- Jan 16: *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman
- Jan 23: *A Season in Hell*, Arthur Rimbaud
- Jan 30: *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Aimé Césaire
- Feb 6: *The Lover*, Marguerite Duras
- Feb 13: *Dictee*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha
- Feb 20: *Autobiography of Red*, Anne Carson
- Feb 27: *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, Claudia Rankine
- Mar 5: ***No Class – To Be Rescheduled***
- TBD Make-up: *I Remember*, Joe Brainard
- Mar 12: Wrap up/ Reading Roundtable of imitations from syllabus