Experimental Autobiography and Lyric Subjectivity

Instructor: Susan Briante

In this seminar we will delve into the relationship between the lyric tradition and the use of autobiographical material engaging in a variety of historic moments and important debates. We will start by considering William Wordsworth’s claim that poetry represents “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” in light of the work of the Romantics. Then we will look at T.S. Elliot’s counter that “poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion.” We’ll study the role subjectivity plays in movements as diverse as Surrealism, “Personism” and Confessional poetry, among others. We’ll test the relationship between the subjective lyric and political engagement, between individual experience and larger dynamics. We will read about the science, psychology, and philosophy of the self. Most importantly, we will analyze contemporary poetry and poetics statements by writers such as Lyn Hejinian, Bernadette Mayer, Alice Notley, and Carmen Giménez Smith (to name just a few) in order to understand how they make use of the autobiographical. Naturally, we will discuss how issues of gender, race, and class influence these works as well as their reception. While the questions we raise and issues we discuss will be rooted in poetry, our findings will be relevant to those writing in and beyond a variety of genres. Over the course of the semester students will produce several creative and critical responses to our readings as well as a culminating book review, panel presentation, and/or interview that engages with the debates and discussions taken up in this class.

Reading list:

Excerpts from
“Getting Personal: The Lyric ‘I’” from Lyric by Scott Brewster (30-42)
“Prelude from the Lyric Ballads” William Wordworth
“Tradition and the Individual Talent” TS Elliot

Foundational Autobiographies:
Joe Brainard I Remember
Lyn Hejinian My Life
Alice Notley Mysteries of Small Houses
Bernadette Mayer *Midwinter Day*

**Documentary Autobiography:**
Bernadette Mayer *Midwinter Day*
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha *Dictee*
Noah Eli Gordon’s *In-box*

**Collective Autobiography or Histories:**
Juliana Spahr *The Transformation*
Eleni Sikelianos *You Animal Machine*
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha *Dictee*
*The Grand Piano*

**Family Stories/Trauma Stories:**
Kate Greenstreet *Young Tambling*
Eleni Sikelianos *You Animal Machine*
Heidi Lynn Staples *Take Care Fake Bear Torque Cake*
Dodie Bellamy *The TV Sutras*
Sasha Steensen *House of Deer*
Rachel Zucker, *MOTHER(s)*

**Collaborative Autobiographies:**
Noah Eli Gordon’s *In-box*
DA Powell and David Trinidad *By My Self*
*The Grand Piano*

**Em(bodied) Autobiographies**
Carmen Gimenez Smith *Milk and Filth*
Dodie Bellamy, *The TV Sutras*
Kazim Ali, *Fasting for Ramadan*
Megan Volpert, *Only Ride*
Literature of Social Justice
Instructor: Fenton Johnson

This is a course in the study of a highly selective sampling of the literature of social justice. We will discuss the historical circumstances surrounding each of the readings – students will be asked to research and give oral presentations on that history. We will also discuss the rhetorical devices that the speaker / writer / director uses. We will pay particular attention to the ongoing, ever-present discussion over the relationship between literature, art, and politics. Is the creation and study of beauty an inherently radical and subversive act? To express the question in terms of brick and mortar, does a museum exist to cultivate the seeds of revolution, or does it exist as a means of defusing the power of art and turning it into mere decoration? Is there such a thing as “mere” decoration? What is the relationship between craft and politics / personal philosophy?

Students will be asked to design or participate as a volunteer in a social justice project outside the Creative Writing Program curriculum. I recognize the burden graduate school places on students. But conceiving and/or participating in, even in a limited way, the challenges and rewards of activism is an important aspect of the course – a bit of “practicum” integrated with and, I hope, informed by theory. I will work with students in designing projects that dovetail with and reinforce existing interests, and that are most likely to provide research background and experience contributing to their thesis and creative projects. We may also meet less frequently (e.g., every other week) by way of allowing time to identify and pursue these interests. Projects or volunteer work could be with organizations as varied as the Center for Creative Photography, the Sky Island Alliance, the Audubon Society, Primavera, the Community Food Bank, Casa Mariposa, the Poetry Center... Students will generate approximately six short (1-3 pp.) critical papers, and one longer writing project (poetry, prose, or fiction) inspired by and rooted in their activism and/or personal philosophies.

Brevity, Economy, and Lush Life
Instructor: Aurelie Sheehan

In this craft seminar, we’ll focus on very short prose forms (prose poetry, micro-fiction, short essays), reading examples of these forms and considering their attributes. Students will be asked to write short prose pieces and assemble work into a collection. We will consider two
primary questions: the relationship between economy and “lush life” and between an individual piece and a larger idea.

Reading list:

*Genesis* / Eduardo Galeano (selections)
*The Pillow Book* / Sei Shonagon (selections)
*Revenge of the Lawn* / Richard Brautigan
*In Our Time* / Ernest Hemingway (selections)
*Can’t and Won’t* / Lydia Davis
*The Most of It* / Mary Ruefle
*Short: An International Anthology of Five Centuries of Short-Short Stories, Prose Poems, Brief Essays, and Other Short Prose Forms* / Alan Ziegler, Editor
*Invisible Cities* / Italo Calvino
*One Hundred Apocalypses* / Lucy Corin
*Bluets* / Maggie Nelson
*Reader’s Block* / David Markson
*Last Car Over the Sagamore Bridge* / Peter Orner
*I Remember* / Joe Brainard
*We the Animals* / Justin Torres
*And Yet They Were Happy* / Helen Phillips
*How a Mother Weaned Her Girl from Fairy Tales* / Kate Bernheimer (selections)
*The Frogs Are Incredibly Loud Here* / Sean Lovelace
*Letter to a Future Lover* / Ander Monson (selections)

Writing In the Contact Zone

Instructor: Farid Matuk

Some say translation is the closest reading we can do and also the most violent treatment a text can suffer. This multi-genre craft course will explore literary translation as a concept and as a creative practice. Students are encouraged to enroll regardless of second language competency. We will read broadly from contemporary and canonical short fiction and poetry in translation, we will compare and evaluate various English translations of the same text, and we will sample some key texts in translation theory and practice. We will consider the values of analogous writing techniques across languages and, where no match is possible, we will
imagine new compensating effects. We will consider, too, what might be the unique role of translation within a creative writing program, how translators who are themselves authors first can imagine translation broadly and boldly. Framing these technical concerns will be our ongoing and open-ended exploration of the ethics of writing in the “contact zone,” the place where communities, languages, and texts reveal their interdependencies. Students will be free to design their own writing experiences, ranging from taking on a significant single project in literary translation to using translation techniques to discover new possibilities in their own English language texts.

Reading list:

Selections from The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation (free online through UA Library’s Summon)
Benjamin, Walter – “The Task of the Translator”
Pound, Ezra – “Guido’s Relations”
Donoghue, Denis – “Translation in Theory and in a Certain Practice”
Appiah, Kwame Anthony – “Thick Translation”
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty – “Translating into English”
Tedlock, Dennis – “The Translator; or, Why the Crocodile Was Not Disillusioned”
Selections from Gass, William – Reading Rilke
Miranda, Gary – “On Translating Rilke’s Duino Elegies”
Deleuze, Gilles, Felix Guattari – “What Is a Minor Literature?”
Joudah, Fady – “Arab-American Poetry As Minor”
Brown, Kelly – “Translating Vallejo: Three Poems”
Burton, Williams – “Inverting the Text: A Proposed Queer Translation Practice”
Hass, Robert – “A Note On Translation” Essential Haiku
Weinberger, Elliot – “19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei”
Chilcott, Tim – Basho’s Narrow Road To the Deep North
8 openings of Basho’s Narrow Road To the Deep North
Katz, Daniel – “Jack Spicer’s After Lorca: translation as decomposition”
Selection from Place, Vanessa – Statement of Facts
Selections of comparative translations of Rilke, Vallejo, Celan, Lorca, Purchase or Borrow
Hong, Cathy Park, Dance Dance Revolution (Norton, 2008).
Spicer, Jack. My Vocabulary Did This To Me. Eds. Peter Gizzi and Kevin Killian.
Yasusada, Araki. Also, With My Throat, I Shall Swallow Ten Thousand Swords: Araki Yasusada’s Letters In English. Trans. Tosa