

Wesleyan University  
Graduate Liberal Studies  
Summer 2018

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**HUMS619 *Crossing Genres/Hybrid Poetry***

**Instructor:** Martine Bellen

**Class hours:** August 4, 5, 13, 14, and 15 from 9 a.m. -5 p.m.

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**Room:** DWNY 100

Course Description

In the book-length poem *One Big Self*, C.D. Wright documents—by incorporating interviews and conversations, tattoos slogans, tests, overheard talk, signage, and other “stuff”—her visits to the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, the East Carroll Parish Prison Farm, and the Louisiana State Penitentiary. In *Nox*, a book-in-a-box collage journal, Anne Carson creates an elegy object for her brother while translating a Catullus poem. Border works, such as these, iconoclastic multicultural books that cross thresholds by crossing genres—that appropriate elements from a variety of sources such as memoir, theory, and history—have formed a genre of their own, sometimes referred to as hybrid poetry. How are these protean constructions conceived and built? This workshop is a laboratory intended to answer just these questions. Through reading works and through practice, we will write hybrid poems that will culminate in a chapbook that incorporate a diverse range of genres.

**Required Texts**

*Nox* by Anne Carson (New Directions)

*That This* by Susan Howe (New Directions)

*Jane: A Murder* by Maggie Nelson (Soft Skull Press)

*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* by Michael Ondaatje (Vintage)

*Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankin (Graywolf)

*One Big Self* by C.D. Wright (Copper Canyon Press)

*If the Tabloids Are True What Are You* by Matthea Harvey (Graywolf Press)

*Corporations Are People, Too !* by Jerome Sala (NYQ Books)

*On Ghosts* by Elizabeth Robinson (Solid Objects)

*We Take Me Apart* by Molly Gaudry (Ampersand Books)

**Course Objectives**

At the end of this course, participants will have deeply engaged in a diverse body of hybrid poetry texts and will be reading with an eye (and ear) toward identifying appropriated and integrated genres to further poems’ reverberations and will have an expanded conception of poetry and how they can incorporate varied materials and modes into their writing and thinking. Participants’ writing, at the completion of the course, will

have become freer as participants incorporate into their work a broader capacity of cultural materials.

### **Course Requirements**

Reading ten texts and writing reflections

Preliminary chapbook proposal

Oral presentation (described below)

Critiquing of peers' work and participation in class discussion

Twenty page cross-genre poem chapbook

### **Assignment Breakdown: Grades**

Project Proposal	10%
Participation (Discussions, critiquing of peer work)	10%
Oral Presentation	20%
Reading Reflection	10%
In-Class Writing	10%
Chapbook (Drafts Included)	40%
Total	100%

### **Oral Presentation**

Class participants will read each of the ten course texts. Each participant will present one text to the class and be an expert of that work. Participants will bring texts to class for close-reading discussion. Professor will assign texts to students a month in advance of class. Contact professor with questions or problems that arise. The following is an outline for oral presentation. Participants are encouraged to use technology (ppt, slides, video, audio, etc.) for presentations. (1) Author's background and biography. (2) Author's philosophy/influences/intentions. Read and or listen to no fewer than two interviews by author. Identify author's creative process. What methods does author use to write? What writers and artists does author associate him/herself with? What questions does author explore? What genres are the author interested in? (3) Listen to author read or perform work. PennSound <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/> is one site that will have readings. YouTube and other sites should also be explored. What do you notice about the author's work when performed? What is the author's performance style? If author collaborates with others in genres off the page, such as music or dance, introduce that. (4) Present an overview of the text. How is the text structured? What is its arc? What are the issues the author investigates? What genres and techniques does the author incorporate? (5) Choose from 1 to 5 pages of the text for a close reading. Email close-reading pages to classmates (let professor know which pages you have chosen before emailing class with pages). Prepare three questions for class discussion (questions should be written for class on ppt or handouts). (6) After class discussion, close with notes that you want to add. Presentation of text (ppt presentation up until full-class discussion should be 15 to 20 minutes).

### Oral Presentation Rubric

	<b>Exceeds Standards (3)</b>	<b>Meets Standards (2)</b>	<b>Below Standards (1)</b>
<b>Presents background information on author and text</b>	Presenter includes background, interview, and performance information in an engaging way. Presenter includes collaborations and other expressions of author's work that give insight into the creative process and into text.	Presenter includes background, interview, and performance information in an engaging way.	Presenter includes background information but doesn't investigate author's multifaceted use of genre, lacks interview and/or performance insight.
<b>Presents overview and close reading of text</b>	Presenter insightfully gives an overview of the text and has considered the micro and macro concerns. The presenter knows the text well and has an understanding of it.	Presenter gives an overview of the text and has considered the micro and macro concerns. The presenter knows the text well. The presenter might not understand everything in the text but has engaged with it.	Presenter partially introduces text. Presenter introduces either the micro or macro concerns of the text.
<b>Presents class discussion question</b>	Presenter is prepared with 3 thoughtful questions to lead a discussion and has his/her own insights to add.	Presenter is prepared with 3 thoughtful questions to lead a discussion.	Presenter isn't prepared with 3 questions to lead a discussion or all questions have been created on the spot, haven't been written down.

### Text Reflection

Write your initial response to the text after you read it. Write two questions you have for the text and/or author. Write what you learned, connections you made after presentation and class discussion. Reflections are from 500 to 700 words, double spaced, and should be handed in to teacher the day after the presentation.

## **Preliminary Proposal**

Participants will bring project proposals to first day of class. Since class meets for 5 days only, you must consider what content and genres you are interested in investigating from the start. Nevertheless, as fresh ideas are proposed to you and inspired by class discussions and classmates' work, you might find that your project develops in an unexpected direction. Proposal should include (1) a working title for your project. (2) The content you are interested in exploring. Content ideas might grow out of a question that you have been pondering, a situation you have found yourself in, or it might grow out of the content from one of the class texts. Examples of content are "perspectives of what it means to be an American in 2018," "welcoming a first child into the world and experiencing his/her transformation," or "a study of J.M.W. Turner's paintings." Or content might be "who is Bob Dylan?". In other words, content might be personal, political, artistic. You might use high or low culture or both. (3) What genres are you especially interested in exploring. Again, you may consider which genres you want to explore when reading texts and also consider which genres interest you. More than one genre should be considered. For instance, you might want to incorporate motifs from science fiction. You might want visuals, maps, music or video. You might want to include history, maybe primary and secondary sources. Be as specific as possible. How do you want to use these genres? What outside texts do you plan to use as resources? (4) If there are specific writing techniques or forms you are interested in exploring, please include these. For instance, you might want to use sestinas, collage, found objects.

**Attendance policy:** Since class lasts for only five days, no absences are permitted.

**Final Project** will be a full-length chapbook, which will consist of 20 pages of writing. If final project takes a non-paper form (for instance, a video), written text and drafts should accompany final project.

## **Course Outline**

### **Day 1**

*Nox and That This.*

How might narrative be relayed in hybrid poetry? How might the personal be transformed/translated into art?

We will discuss how story can be told through various genres in an extended book-length poem. We will discuss the use of fragmentation to create a narrative. We will address the nature of the autobiographical narrative and how weaving nonbiographical material into it can add dimension. We will look at how meditations and digressions can enrich narrative.

### **Day 2**

*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid and Jane.*

We will discuss how history/myth and true crime can be incorporated into poetry, how prose and verse can be in conversation. We will investigate techniques that draw out interior and exterior characterization. We will look at interview, epistolary, and song in texts and how textures and perspectives can be elucidated through incorporating various genres. We will consider questions of creating identity through language.

### **Day 3**

*One Big Self* and *Citizen: An American Lyric*.

We will look at the documentary poem and essay poem.

What live research might a writer involve himself/herself in and how can that research be brought into the poem? We will discuss how race, class, and politics might be addressed in poetry.

We will discuss methods of first-hand research. We will investigate how the interview, personal experience, letters, memories, and all kinds of documentation can be used in poems.

We will look at how the poem can borrow techniques from the essay form to investigate concepts and abstractions. The essay substantiates propositions while poetry most often does not. How can these two very different forms meet?

### **Day 4**

*If the Tabloids Are True What Are You* and *Corporations Are People, Too!*

We will look at how art can be incorporated in a literary work (both with photographic reproduction and incorporating writings about art—ekphrastic poetry) and how various materials and forms used in a project are synthesized. We will discuss appropriation (including language appropriation) and the convention of “a book of poems,” what our expectations are.

### **Day 5**

*On Ghosts* and *We Take Me Apart*.

We will discuss how fairytale/folk tale and ghost stories can be incorporated into a hybrid form. We will look at tone and mood in poetry. We will investigate the psychological realm of language.

### **In-Class Agenda**

Each morning you will be given the agenda of the day. Our time together will be filled with discussing texts, working on writing prompts, incorporating techniques discussed in texts into our writing, and critiquing one another’s written work for revision feedback and to develop as readers. I look forward to an inspiring and enriching experience in which everyone explores new territories and discovers unmined resources.