



## **Bilingual Imaginaries**

Thinking, Writing, and Living across Languages



Rothko, N<sup>o</sup>. 7 or N<sup>o</sup>. 11 (1949)

### **Course Description**

This course examines what it means to exist in more than one language. For some, another language might be natively known, or laboriously acquired to the point of fluency in adult years; others may live with a second language that has been partially lost, suppressed, or broken (and perhaps later revived and reclaimed). We will read poems, plays, short stories, and novels in which various proficiencies in another language are met with restlessness, exuberance, anxiety, humor, and ingenuity. Thinking about how language and identity are bound together in vital and surprisingly elastic ways, we will consider how knowledge of a second language can impress itself on the imagination, on literature—even on one's very sense of self.

No prerequisites. (Knowledge of a second language is also not required!)

## Objectives

This course helps students acquire critical reading and writing skills, with a particular focus on close reading, textual analysis, formulating academic arguments, and essay-writing.

## Course Materials

All readings are available online.

## Schedule of Readings

### Week 1 | July 2 and July 4

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Tuesday

Course overview

**Gloria Anzaldúa** | *Borderlands* | *La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987)

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Thursday

**Billy-Ray Belcourt** | *This Wound is a World* (2017)

**Lisa Betasamosake Simpson** | from *This Accident of Being Lost* (2017) and selections from *Islands of Decolonial Love*

**Due Friday, July 5: Personal reflection**

### Week 2 | July 9 and July 11

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Tuesday

**Melanie Yergeau**, *Authoring Autism* (two chapters: Introduction and Epilogue)

**Tito Mukhopadhyay**, selected poems and prose

Thursday

**Paul Celan** | “Death Fugue” and “Psalm”

**Jewish Study Bible** | Song of Songs and Psalm 51

**Akutagawa Ryunosuke** | “Faint Smiles of the Gods” (1922)

**Due: Midterm essay**

### Week 3 | July 16 and July 18

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Tuesday

**Salman Rushdie** | from *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

**Somadeva** | from *The Ocean of the Streams of Story*

Thursday

**Langston Hughes** | “Spanish Blood” and selected poems  
**Zaffar Kunial** | selected poems and prose  
**dg nanouk okpik** | selected poems

#### Week 4 | July 23 and July 24

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Tuesday

**Abdelfattah Kilito** | from *Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language*  
**Yiyun Li** | “To Speak Is to Blunder: Choosing to Renounce a Mother Tongue”  
**Lisa Linn Kanae** | from *Sista Tongue*

Thursday

**Ocean Vuong** | selections from *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*  
**Ocean Vuong** | selections from *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*  
**Viet Thanh Nguyen** | “Becoming Bilingual, or Notes on Numbness and Feeling”

**Due Sunday, July 27: Final essay DRAFT**

#### Week 5 | July 30 and Aug 1

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Tuesday

**Tanya Saracho**, “Fade” (2017)  
In-class screening of episode from Saracho’s *Vida*

Thursday

**Ross Showalter** | “Toward a Literature of Sign Language”  
**Ilya Kaminsky** | from *Deaf Republic*  
Presentations

**Due Friday, Aug 2: Final essay**

## Evaluation and Assignments

### Participation: 15%

Active participation in our class discussions is essential. You are not expected to come to class with perfectly formed ideas, but please prepare in advance—come with questions and comments, and we will work through the readings together.

### Short Responses: 15%

Identify a specific passage, sentence, phrase, or even a single word in the assigned reading, and in a short response of 150-200 words (1) discuss why you find it significant or complicated or moving, and (2) reflect on its importance for the reading as a whole. These short responses will be written in class.

### Midterm Essay: 25%

In an essay of 3-5 double-spaced pages (20%), you will present an argument supported by evidence drawn from our readings. You may choose any topic or reading(s) as your focus and craft an argument in consultation with me (5%).

**Discussion Questions: 15%**

Everyone will prepare discussion questions for any two class sessions (selected at the beginning of the term). On each of these days, you will share three questions about the reading(s) with the class to spur and direct our discussion.

**Personal Reflection: 5%**

In a brief reflection (one page, double-spaced), you will discuss an experience you have had with any language you consider to be a second language (this could be a language you studied in high school, or speak natively, or grew up hearing but can't speak—this could even be a language you *wish* you could learn, given the chance).

**Final Essay: 25%**

Your final paper (8-10 pages), due at the end of the term, will present an argument supported by evidence drawn from our readings and other scholarly sources. You may choose any topic or reading(s) as your main focus. After turning in a first rough draft (5%), you will submit revised final draft (20%) at the end of the term.

**Attendance:**

Per Yale's summer session policy, there are no allowed unexcused absences allowed. Each unexcused absence will result in 4% loss of your overall course grade. Please note that our class also meets on holidays, including July 4. If you have a reason for not being in class, please be in touch with me by email.

**Academic honesty and plagiarism:**

Academic integrity is a core university value that ensures respect for the academic reputation of the University, its students, faculty and staff, and the degrees it confers. The University expects that students will conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner and respect the intellectual work of others. Please ask about my expectations regarding permissible or encouraged forms of student collaboration if they are unclear.

Any work that you submit at any stage of the writing process—thesis, outline, draft, bibliography, final submission, presentations, blog posts, and more—must be your own; in addition, any words, ideas, or data that you borrow from other people, and include in your work must be properly documented. Failure to do either of these things is plagiarism. **You are not allowed to use ideas, words, and/or data that are in any way derived from ChatGPT or similar AI programs.**

Please familiarize yourself with the University policies here:

<https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/writing/using-sources/understanding-and-avoiding-plagiarism>; and here: <http://ctl.yale.edu/writing/wr-instructor-resources/addressing-academic-integrity-and-plagiarism>. Ignorance of these policies will not be considered a valid excuse.