POETRY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: SYLLABUS for the Craft of Poetry, Writers in Florence, Summer 2018

27 May 2018 - 23 June 2018: Wednesdays and Fridays (3:00-5:30)
Professor: Catherine Barnett; cb56@nyu.edu
Office hours: To be arranged

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 European poets, 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. Our weeks together will take us into the work of Guillaume Apollinaire, Zbigniew Herbert, Wislawa Szymborska; Eugenio Montale; Cesare Pavese, and Rainer Maria Rilke, and Marina Tsvetaeva, among others. We'll examine these poets as makers, seeking to understand the fruitful frictions, contradictions, and deep human urgencies that animate their poems. As we study these poets, we'll discuss syntax, metaphor, point of view, temporal shifts, tonal shifts, contradiction, and rhetorical strategies. Using Elizabeth Bishop's notion that "poetry is thinking with feeling," and the examples provided by these European 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 (and use it as a sourcebook) that brings contemporary American poets into conversation with poets from around the world.

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

Students will be asked to hand in at least one analytic and one creative response each class. 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:**
Guillaume Apollinaire, *Zone* (handouts provided)
Guillaume Apollinaire, letters (handouts provided)
Zbigniew Herbert, selected poems (handouts provided)
Eugenio Montale, selected poems (handouts provided)
Eugenio Montale, *Poetic Diaries* (excerpts provided)
Cesare Pavese, *Hard Labor* (handouts provided)
*The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke* (edited and translated by Stephen Mitchell; Vintage Int'l)
Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (available online)
Wislawa Szymborska, *View with a Grain of Sand* (handouts provided)
Marina Tsvetaeva, selected poems (handouts provided)
Marina Tsvetaeva, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Boris Pasternak, *Letters 1926* (excerpts provided)
*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)
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 (30 May and 1 June):
Introductions; poems as self-portraits and as ars poetica
Discuss Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*
Read Rilke and Tsvetaeva

Week Two (6 June and 8 June):
Lyric vs Narrative poetry: Cesare Pavese and Eugenio Montale
(Class visit to Caffe Giubbe Rosse, where Montale and other literary types often met)
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; and Apollinaire. Practice "phonetic" translation; "translate" a poem from English into English. Translate a poem from Italian into English.

Week Three (13 June and 15 June):
Order vs. Adventure: Apollinaire
Questions of Time: Apollinaire

Week Four (20 June and 22 June):
Thinking vs Feeling: Zbigniew Herbert and Wislawa Szymborska
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.