What is the relationship between writing and diaspora? This transgenre workshop moves through a series of key diasporic texts, from ancient times to the present, asking students to respond to these works in their own language—with an emphasis on reading and writing across genre—through poem, essay, story and translation. Together, as a writing community, we will constellate a number of difficult, pressing questions around our collective work, including: what is our relationship as writers to urgent issues of diasporic statelessness in the contemporary moment? What are the implications of diaspora in art? The stakes of diaspora in art? Who gets to speak and who gets spoken for? How and where does language serve as a boundary/border defying medium? How and where are boundaries/borders reinforced and reified in language? Class sessions will incorporate a mixture of open communal discussion and paired learning, and will engage with the intersubjectivities of the texts we read, write and translate by interpreting and workshopping them alongside one another. No prior literary writing experience required.

This course is cross-listed with Comparative Literature.

**Syllabus is a live text & is subject to change. Please refer to digital copy of syllabus in googlegroup for most updated readings/assignments each week**

**Required Texts:**

**Recommended Texts:**

**Journals:** Students will keep journals (handwritten, typed, blogs, video blogs, dedicated twitter accounts are acceptable as are hand-drawn cartoons on loose sheets of paper bound up in twine) about:

1. **their readings of the assigned texts**
2. **their reactions to class discussion**

I will collect, read and evaluate the journals at the end of the semester. As long as you are keeping a daily account of your reading, writing and thinking, you will get full credit for your journal. You may do this in whatever way makes sense for you.

**Weekly Writing & Critiques:** In general there will be a writing assignment for each session, although no more than one page of writing is required per session. You will need to make one copy of each text for every student, as well as for me – everyone will be handing back comments. Although only two students per session will workshop their writing in class, you will be expected to exchange writings & provide written comments (in whatever style you choose) for each of your classmates each week. At the end of the course you will be grading everyone’s feedback on your work and this will become part of their final grade (as well as yours).

A portion of each class will consist of classroom discussion of works written by two class members.

Please also send your writing to the diasporics googlegroup on Mon/Wed morning no later than 12PM.

***Many of the writing assignments give you full range of choice in terms of what/how to write. This is a transgenre workshop, which means we are writing across forms in order to respond to the diasporic (moving) texts before/ahead of us. This being said, I expect each of you to experiment with forms you are not necessarily accustomed to (ie. write OUTside your comfort zone), as much as possible in order to explore new terrain in your writing.

**Leading Discussion:** Each session two discussion leaders will split the assigned readings & each will present on half, giving their reflections & insights, as well as whatever sociohistorical/biographical context seems pertinent. The more you can present the better! The discussion leaders are the rudder of the class discussion. Please post/send notes for your presentation to the diasporics group no later than 12PM on the day you are leading. You can present together, if you want to collaborate, or separately, if you do not. You shd decide between yourselves who’s presenting on what.

**Absences:** You may have one absence for the semester with no questions asked. After that, any absence will lower your final grade, unless you’ve checked-in with me beforehand & I’ve approved it. Each of you make up a critical part of our writing community, & we need you here!
**Technology:** Discussion leaders shd feel free to use laptops at/for their presentations. Everyone else shd leave computers & all other tech in their bags or at home. Please speak to me privately if you have any questions or concerns about this policy.

**Grading:** Your grade will consist of:
1. Weekly reading assignments = 10%
   (as evidenced by class discussion and your journals)
2. Weekly writing assignments = 15%
   (as evidenced by breadth, depth, willingness to “stretch,” and overall quality)
3. Leading class discussions = 15%
4. Your journal. Remember that jour- comes from the French for daily = 15%
5. Written feedback on the writing of other students = 15%
6. Class participation = 20%
7. A final portfolio of class work and participation in a final class reading = 10%

Grading is weighted toward internal response of the student to the reading, assigned exercises, class discussion, and feedback on work; so that the student is evaluated in terms of her or his own progress within the course, adjusting for the experience, skill, and talent on entering the class.

**Office Hours:** By Appointment.

**Classroom Policies:** Please refer to the following links for information on the University of Pennsylvania’s classroom policies regarding (1) Plagiarism, (2) Academic Integrity, and (3) Disability Services:
1) [http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/plagiarism_policy.html](http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/plagiarism_policy.html)
2) [http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html](http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html)
3) [http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/](http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/)

**CLASS SESSIONS:**

1. **(May 21) Introduction: What is Writing Toward Diaspora?** (Introducing ourselves; exploring key terms; first chevruta); Begin reading Pierre Jorism *A Nomad Poetics*

   **Further Reading/Listening:**
   --Pierre Joris, Ariel Resnikoff & Anna Strong discuss Paul Celan’s Corona:
   http://jacket2.org/podcasts/it-time-poemtalk-107
   --Habib Tengour, *Exile is My Trade* (translated & edited by Pierre Joris)
   **Writing:**
   Choose an essay in *A Nomad Poetic* & respond to it in any form that makes sense to you (be it as poem, short essay, short story, translation, adaptation, dramatic vignette etc. etc) -- be prepared to discuss why you chose the form you choose. (this will always be the case for any writing we produce for class.) 1 page minimum.

3. **(May 28) MEMORIAL DAY: NO CLASS**

4. **(May 30) Read Genesis 12 & Exodus 12-15; Read Judges (Song of Deborah): 4-5; Read Morris S. Seale, “Deborah’s Ode and the Ancient Arabian Qasida” (posted in google group); Read three examples**
of the classical qasida. Read Homer, *Odyssey* (Books 1-4); Read Cristian Violatti, “The Vedas” & *The Rig Veda, Book 1*; listen to *chanting of the Rig Veda* (you can listen to this closely or put it on as ambient music as you do something else; no need to listen to the whole thing)

**Further Reading/Listening:**
--- *The Complete Vedas* (video) (highly recommended; the chanting starts at 5:49)
--- Samaritan Torah (Old Testament) reading
--- Homer’s *Odyssey* as read in the reconstructed ancient Greek

**Writing:**

**Option 1:** Write a myth of nomadics akin to the texts we’re reading for class this week (but of your own nomadic imagination); choose any form that makes sense to you.

**Option 2:** Translate a piece of ancient or medieval nomadic writing, either using one of the texts we read for class this week or another text of your choosing. You may translate from the *origin(al)* language, or from another language of your choosing (ie. translate from a translation) -- but in any case, please do land in English (even if their are other language variations which you create) for the purposes of all students being able to read.

**See Charles Bernstein’s **EXPERIMENTS** for techniques related to experimental translation/adaptation. I encourage you to use Charles’s **EXPERIMENTS** as a reference point for your writings/translations/adaptations thru-out the semester.

---

**5. (June 4) Begin reading Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions***

**Further Reading/Listening:**
--- Jonathan Boyarin, *The Storm from Paradise*
--- Daniel Boyarin, *Talmud’s Way* (Talk)
--- *Babylonian Talmud* v.1-10
--- Elsa Houcaye reads from *The Book of Questions* (French)

**Writing Assignment:**

**Option 1:** Take a look at a piece of the Babylonian Talmud in Jewish Aramaic. Consider the use of center & periphery in the form of the textual layout. Play in the talmudic forms of text and subtext (center & periphery in the visual field). Use the form to respond to what we have read so far. Feel free to put multiple texts in conversation, even as you create your own line of talmudish commentary.

**Option 2:** Translate a piece of Babylonian Talmud, either from the *origin(al)* Jewish Aramaic or from any other language (translation).

---

**6. (June 6) Finish reading Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions***

**Further Reading/Listening:**
--- Eliezer Sigel, *The Concept of Diaspora in Talmudic Thought*
--- Maurice Blanchot, “Edmond Jabès’ *Book of Questions*” (on google group)
--- Pierre Joris, *Reading/Writing #13: Via Edmond Jabès*
--- Rosmarie Waldrop, *Lavish Absence*
--- Rosmarie Waldrop/Leonard Schwartz, *On Cross-Cultural Poetics* (much of this is on Jabès)

**Writing:**

**Option 1:** Respond to Jabès’s *Book of Questions* by creating your own (re)imagined intertextual uni-verse (ie. as Jabès does with his invented sages). What is it that *The Book of Questions* questions?

**Option 2:** Translate a piece of modern Jewish diasporic writing, either from Jabès, or another Jewish writer of your choice (feel free to ask me for suggestions of writers to translate) from the *origin(al)* language or from another language (ie. a translation of a translation).
7. (June 11) Read Harold Schimmel, *Qasida*

**Further Reading/Listening:**
--Rodney Koenke, “*Qasida*”
--Gabriel Levin, *The Dunes Twisted Edge* (googlebook)

**Writing:**
**Option 1:** Respond to *Qasida* in whatever form makes sense to you.
**Option 2:** Make a map thru collage (use writing & at least 1 other medium, tho more than 1 is also fine) of your thinking about nomadics (ie. in relation to the group of texts we have been exploring, their relationship to one another & to you)

8. (June 13) Begin reading Kamau Brathwaite, *Middle Passages.*

**Further Reading/Listening:**
--George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*
--William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
--C.L.R. James, *The C.L.R. James Reader*
--Kamau Brathwaite on Pennsound

**Writing:**
**Option 1:** Respond to Kamau Brathwaite’s *Middle Passages* in whatever form makes sense to you.
**Option 2:** Invent a creole out of two (or more) languages that interest you & write a poem from/thru this fusion. Make a translation &/or gloss of the work in standard English.

9. (June 18) Finish Reading Kamau Brathwaite, *Middle Passages.* Begin reading Aimé Cesaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land;* read *An Introduction to Negritude*

**Further Reading/Listening:**
--Zohreh T. Sullivan, “Narratives of exile and diaspora from Aimé Cesaire to Bharati Mukherjee” (on googlebooks)
--Erica Hunt, “Césaire and Poetic Knowledge”
-- *Five Poems* by Aimé Cesaire in BOMB magazine.

**Writing:**
**Option 1:** Respond to Aimé Cesaire’s *Notebook* in whatever form makes sense to you.
**Option 2:** Translate a piece from Aimé Cesaire (either from his *Notebook* or from another work) or from another Caribbean diaspora writer. As always, feel free to translate from translations.
**Option 3:** Explore a surrealist mode in your writing; try out any/all of these surrealist techniques; see if you can translate a “non-surrealist” text into a surrealist mode; transcribe your dreams upon waking & treat them as “found text” in your writing.

10. (June 20) Begin reading M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!*

**Further Reading/Listening:**
--Fred Wah, “Reading M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!*”
--M. NourbeSe Philip on PennSound

**Writing:**
**Option 1:** Respond to *Zong!* in whatever form makes sense to you.
**Option 2:** Create a work based wholly on found language (from other texts, *literary* &/or otherwise.) Write a short author’s note, which explains/elucidates your process?
11. (June 25) Finish M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong*; begin reading Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *DICTEE*

**Further Reading/Listening:**
-- *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory* eds. Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller (essay collection)
-- Bob Perelman reads from *DICTEE* (highly recommended)

**Writing:**
Begin a longer (2 week) memoiristic or autobiographical work in whatever form makes sense to you. Multimedia, multilingual, translational, etc. techniques are encouraged, tho not required. **3 page minimum.**

**Discussion Leaders:**
POST-PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DISCUSSION
In-class readings: Charles Bernstein, “On Election Day” (2008); George Oppen “Of Being Numerous” (1968); Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, from *DICTEE* (1982).

12. (June 27) Finish reading Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *DICTEE*

**Further Reading/Listening:**
-- Anne Anlin Chang, “Memory and Anti-Documentary Desire in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée.*”
-- from *DICTEE* (korean adaptation)

**Writing:**
Continue/conclude your longer (2 week) memoiristic or autobiographical work. Multimedia, multilingual, translational, etc. techniques are encouraged, tho not required. **3 page minimum.**