

Politics and Poems: Writing Verse in DC

This course is a space for writing and discussing poems in the nation's capitol. The course title takes as inspiration the name of the renowned independent bookstore (Politics and Prose) in Washington, D.C. Accordingly, most of the assigned texts will be by DC area poets who will visit the class as special guests. This course is *as much* about reading poems *as* writing (and revising) them. Students will attend at least one live literary event to experience poetry as live performance, as well as visit a museum or gallery to use the visual or plastic arts as a springboard for some of their poems. Finally, students will practice and hone vocabulary in order to offer constructive feedback on one another's work.

Instructor:

Francisco Aragón

<http://www.franciscoaragon.net/>

Course meets on Thursday evenings from 6:30 – 9:30 PM at the UC Washington Center

Required Texts

Beastgirl and Other Origin Myths (YesYes Books) by Elizabeth Acevedo

Unaccompanied (Copper Canyon Press) by Javier Zamora

Killing Summer (Sibling Rivalry Press) by Sarah Browning

Speaking Wiri Wiri (Red Hen Press) by Dan Vera

There will also be readings from, *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry* (W.W. Norton & Company) edited by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux

poets

Elizabeth Acevedo is the author of *Beastgirl & Other Origin Myths* (YesYes Books). Her poems have appeared in *Puerto Del Sol*, *Callaloo*, *Poet Lore*, *The Notre Dame Review*, and other literary journals. She holds a BA in Performing Arts from The George Washington University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Maryland. She has performed nationally and internationally including venues such as Madison Square Garden, the Kennedy Center of the Performing Arts, and South Africa's State Theatre. Some of her poetry videos have gone viral and been picked up by PBS, Latina Magazine, and Cosmopolitan. Acevedo is a National Slam Champion and the 2016 Women of the World Poetry Slam representative for Washington, D.C, where she lives and works.

Javier Zamora is the author of *Unaccompanied* (Copper Canyon Press, 2017). Born in El Salvador, Zamora migrated through Guatemala and Mexico to eventually make it to the United States in 1999. Zamora is a 2016-2018 Wallace Stegner Fellow at Stanford University and is a 2016 Ruth Lilly/Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellow. He holds fellowships from CantoMundo, Colgate University, MacDowell, Macondo, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Yaddo. In 2016, Barnes and Noble granted him the Writers for Writers Award for his work in the Undocupoets Campaign. He recently won the 2017 Narrative Award. Zamora lives in San Rafael, CA.

Sarah Browning is the author of *Killing Summer* (Sibling Rivalry, 2017) and *Whiskey in the Garden of Eden* (The Word Works, 2007). She is co-founder and Executive Director of Split This Rock and an Associate Fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies. She is the recipient of fellowships from the DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the Adirondack Center for Writing. She has been guest editor or co-edited *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *The Delaware Poetry Review*, and *POETRY* magazine. Browning co-hosts the Sunday Kind of Love poetry series at Busboys and Poets in Washington, D.C.

Dan Vera is a writer, editor, and literary historian in Washington, DC. The author of *Speaking Wiri Wiri* (inaugural winner of the Letras Latinas/Red Hen Poetry Prize) and *The Space Between Our Danger and Delight*, his work appears in various journals, including *Beltway Poetry*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Foreign Policy in Focus*, and *Delaware Poetry Review*, and anthologies like *Queer South*, *Divining Divas*, and *Full Moon On K Street*. Named a 2014 Top Ten “New” Latino Author to Watch (and Read), he co-curates the literary history site, DC Writers’ Homes, and chairs the board of Split This Rock Poetry. For more visit <http://www.danvera.com>

Course Requirements

- 1) Write and submit 9 poems*, as indicated on the class schedule.
- 2) Revise each of these 9 poems and submit them, as indicated on the class schedule.
- 3) Submit a final portfolio of between 7-9 poems that has been deliberately ordered, including final revisions. (One of the poems must be an ekphrastic poem.)
- 4) Contribute regularly to the class blog
- 5) Attend one live poetry event in Washington, D.C. and write a 1 – 2 page reflection paper on the experience, to be included in your final portfolio.
- 6) Visit a museum or gallery in Washington, D.C. to write your ekphrastic poem and write a 1 – 2 page reflection paper on the experience, to be included in your final portfolio.
- 7) Select one poem from the four single-author volumes we will be reading this semester and present it to the class (I’ll say more about this).
- 8) Take part in the class reading and later attend a featured reading at the Split This Rock Poetry Festival

*for this workshop, each poem must not exceed one page in length, and be a *minimum* of 12 lines

Course Policies

- 1) Hand held devices, such as mobile phones must be off or silent during class.
- 2) All writing assignments must be word processed
- 3) All writing assignments are to be uploaded to the web as a WORD document the day they are due, unless you’ve made prior arrangements with me. I’ll say more about this in class.
- 4) Any assignment turned in late will automatically have points taken away, unless you’ve spoken to me beforehand about a particular circumstance.
- 5) Behavior and speech that disrupts the collegial learning environment goes against the atmosphere we want to create in the workshop, and will be noted and considered when calculating your participation grade.

Class Participation

Factors that will be taken into consideration when evaluating class participation (in addition to punctual attendance) are: frequency and quality of your contributions when we are discussing the class readings (the four single-author volumes of poetry) both in class discussion and on the class blog; the frequency and thoughtfulness of the verbal feedback you offer your classmates when we are “workshopping” poems; presenting the poem you have chosen to share with the class.

Attendance & Punctuality

Our aim is to create a space for engaged learning. Key to this goal is mutual respect for one another and our time—valuable time we spend preparing for class. Not coming to class, or arriving to class late...works *against* this goal. So, unless you have a valid excuse, more than one unexcused absence and/or more than one instance of arriving to class late will be noted and impact your final grade.

Academic Code of Honor

The poems you submit to the workshop must be written by you and you alone.

Course evaluation break down

Final Portfolio	40%
9 poems	20%
9 revisions	20%
Class Participation	20%

Class Schedule

January 11, 2017

introductions
sample poems by four visiting poets
in-class writing

January 18, 2017

Beastgirl and Other Origin Myths (1) by Elizabeth Acevedo (p. 1-14)

January 25, 2017

Beastgirl and Other Origin Myths (2) by Elizabeth Acevedo (p. 15 – 32)
PINTURA:PALABRA: poetry inspired by art (1)
“Salt” by Elizabeth Acevedo vs. “Gaslight Hair” by Carmen Calatayud
poem #1 due

February 1, 2017

Unaccompanied (1) by Javier Zamora (p. 3- 37)
instructor returns poem # 1
poem # 2 due

February 8, 2017

Unaccompanied (2) by Javier Zamora (p. 41-75)

instructor returns poem #2

revision of poem #1 due

poem # 3 due

Special Guest: Elizabeth Acevedo

February 15, 2017

Unaccompanied (3) by Javier Zamora (p. 79 – 91)

instructor returns poem #3

instructor returns revision of poem #1

revision of poem # 2 due

poem # 4 due

February 22, 2017

PINTURA:PALABRA: poetry inspired by art (2)

Poetry Magazine (March 2016) + other ekphrastic poems (handout)

instructor returns poem #4

instructor returns revision of poem #2

revision of poem #3 due

poem # 5 due

March 1, 2017

Killing Summer (1) by Sarah Browning (p. 15 – 51)

instructor returns poem #5

instructor returns revision of poem #3

revision of poem #4 due

poem # 6 due

Special Guest: Javier Zamora

March 8, 2017

Killing Summer (2) by Sarah Browning (p. 55 – 71)

instructor returns poem #6

instructor returns revision of poem #4

revision of poem #5 due

poem # 7 due

March 15, 2017

Killing Summer (3) by Sarah Browning (p. 75 – 93)

instructor returns poem #7

instructor returns revision of poem #5

revision of poem # 6 due

poem # 8 due

March 22, 2017

Speaking Wiri Wiri (1) by Dan Vera (p. 17 – 34)

instructor returns poem #8

instructor returns revision of #6

revision of poem #7 due

poem # 9 due

April 5, 2017

Speaking Wiri Wiri (2) by Dan Vera (p. 37 – 62)

instructor returns poem #9

instructor returns revision of poem #7

revision of poem #8 due

Special guests: Dan Vera & Sarah Browning

April 12, 2017

Speaking Wiri Wiri (3) by Dan Vera (p. 65 – 78)

instructor returns revision of poem #8

revision of poem #9 due

April 19, 2016

Final Portfolio Due

class reading + presentations

Split This Rock Poetry Festival