

Advanced Poetry Workshop

Dr. Janelle Adsit

Course Information
Contact Information

Office Hours: XX:XX – XX:XX
Office Location: XXX

Course Description

In this course, you'll work to compose and design a chapbook manuscript that employs a range of methodologies, exemplified by our course texts. To encourage your own writing, we'll engage with a range of booklength works of poetry that draw from a diverse array of source materials. We'll discuss the methodologies we find in our readings and how they can inform a poetic practice. Discussions of methodology will take us to questions of form, constraint, and the relationship between expository and literary writing. We'll ask what it means to embark on a poetic project, and we'll consider the art of the manuscript. Our discussions of these topics will continue as we workshop class members' manuscripts. In our workshop sessions and discussions of the readings, we'll consider the value of poetry as an investigative practice.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able...

- To experience writing as a meaning-making activity; to make new meanings from unusual juxtapositions.
- To continue the habit of writing, relying on a variety of methods, processes, craft techniques, and heuristics for generating and revising texts.
- To read literature as a practitioner; to read closely and employ vocabulary that creative writers use to talk about craft.
- To include in your writing an array of source materials drawn from interviews, archives, fieldwork, and observation.
- To experience poetic writing as a lived, multidimensional research practice.
- To recognize form as inextricable from content; to put the "message in the means."
- To identify rhetorical and craft choices in your writing and to consider their effects.
- To write with audience awareness.
- To question definitions of informative/expository and imaginative/creative writing.
- To recognize the ways that poetry can participate in activism and community formation.
- To gain a sense that writers are interdisciplinary – able to draw upon many sources.
- To develop and design a manuscript that is suitable for publication.
- To consider changing publication practices, both in print and online.

Required Textbooks

1. Brenda Coultas, *A Handmade Museum*
2. Lydia Davis, *The Cows*
3. Édouard Levé, *Autoportrait*
4. Rusty Morrison, *Whethering*
5. Cecily Nicholson, *From the Poplars*
6. Harryette Mullen, *Urban Tumbleweed*
7. Cole Swensen, *Gravesend*
8. Jean Valentine, *Lucy*

Course Policies and Expectations (Attendance, Plagiarism, Community Expectations, etc.)

See separate sheet.

Grading

Your grade will be determined by the cumulative points earned on the following assignments.

| Major Assignment / Project | % of Total Grade |
|--|------------------|
| Self-Study | 10% |
| Manuscript Project Proposal | 10% |
| Mixed Methods / Mixed Forms Poetry Manuscript With Critical Introduction | 50% |
| Participation (Attendance, Discussion & Workshop Contributions) | 30% |

Major Assignments

- **Self-Study (10% of the final grade):** In imitation of the readings we'll discuss in the first weeks of class, write an autobiography in 30-40 discrete sentences. Your objective is to create a portrait of a life in fragments. It is up to you how you present the sentences – for example, you may do one line per sentence (as in a list), or put all sentences in one paragraph. Your sentences should be a mix of intimate and detached, general and specific, plain and elaborate, long and short, matter-of-fact and emotive, mundane and grandiose, and so on. When taken in combination, the sentences should reveal quirks, habits, hopes, disappointments – the more diverse, the better. Capture the complexity of one's character. (Assignment is adapted from Conchitina Cruz. Your self-study can be included in your final project/manuscript if you wish, or it can be submitted separately.)
- **Manuscript Project Proposal (10% of the final grade):** Write a brief (2-3 page) proposal for a poetic project that you will undertake this semester. Your project should involve a range of methodologies, some of which may be exemplified in our course readings, and a set of your own questions and interests. You are encouraged to pursue two disparate topics and to see where those subjects take you. For instance, you might choose to research both coastlines and handwriting. While these two topics – coastlines and handwriting – would seem to have little to do with each other, the poet can find unexpected connections through research and the accumulation of source materials. Take this opportunity to try out this practice of arriving at surprising juxtapositions through research.
- **Mixed Methods / Mixed Forms Poetry Manuscript With Critical Introduction (50% of the final grade):** Compose a 20-40 page manuscript of carefully drafted poems that make use of at least two methodologies discussed in class. In this work, seek to not only "write what you know," but to "write in order to know" – to learn from your process of writing. Your manuscript should demonstrate engagement with a range of formal choices, which we discuss in class, and it should show thoughtful

consideration of the feedback you receive on your proposal and in our workshop conversation. Be sure, too, that your manuscript is carefully designed, with attention paid to the reader’s multisensory encounter with the text and the book as an object.

The manuscript should be prefaced by a critical introduction that makes substantive comparisons between your own work and the work that you have encountered from other poets (those in the class and those listed on our reading list). Your critical introduction should reveal your intentions for the manuscript and your process in completing it. Also discuss your influences and your perspectives on the question of whether poetry can give “news” and information, and what poetry offers as a mode of investigation.

- **Participation (30% of the final grade):** This portion of the grade includes daily attendance, contributions to discussion, and workshop participation. A creative writing class builds a community of writers who learn their craft collaboratively. The workshop is therefore a significant part of the coursework. At some point in the semester, you’ll submit your manuscript-in-progress for workshop discussion. You’ll also offer substantive responses to your fellow poets’ work. While our workshop sessions will take place in class, you’ll be asked to prepare for these conversations by composing an elaborated response to each text. You’ll bring two copies of this written response to each session – one copy to be submitted to me and one to be submitted to the poet whose work you review. Your workshop feedback should provide evidence that you are rigorously engaging with the course objectives, our readings, and the concepts that we discuss in class. Apply the ideas and questions that are raised in class to your readings of fellow poets’ work.

Course Overview

The following provides an overview of the organization of the course. A day-by-day schedule with assignment due dates will be provided at the beginning of each unit. All assignments will include a detailed checklist of criteria that will be used in evaluating your work. Throughout the semester, in all of the following units, we will discuss the art of the manuscript, issues of process and invention, and the form and technique of the poets we read. The full collections we read will be supplemented by, and paired with, poems by other authors that we will read and analyze together in class.

SELF-STUDY

Text: Édouard Levé, *Autoportrait*

Text: Rebecca Solnit, "Who Am I Where?" (handout).

Text: Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "¿Quién soy Dónde?" (handout).

Text: Conchitina Cruz, "Here," "Exhibition Notes" (handout).

Text: Kenneth Goldsmith, *Soliloquy* (available online).

OBSERVATION

Text: Lydia Davis, *The Cows*

Text: Harryette Mullen, *Urban Tumbleweed*

FIELD-WORK

Text: Rusty Morrison, *Whethering*

INTERVIEW

Text: Cole Swensen, *Gravesend*

ETHNOGRAPHY

Text: Brenda Coultas, *A Handmade Museum*

ARCHAEOLOGY

Text: Jean Valentine, *Lucy*

ARCHIVES

Text: Cecily Nicholson, *From the Poplars*

FINAL UNIT:

- **Workshops of manuscripts**
- **Discussion of professional issues in writing: publishing full-length manuscripts and chapbooks, formulating new projects, and presenting work**
- **Reading event / Celebration of work**