

HZ9201: Poetry Writing

Division of English

Semester 1, AY 2019/2020

Seminar Number:

Seminar leader: Broc Rossell

Time: Monday 14:30-17:20

Location: HSS Library

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Office: HSS 03-71

Pre-requisite: HZ9101

This course is for students who have taken our introductory course and elected to further revise and refine their writing of poetry. Therefore we have two goals. The first is to write poems and read poems in ways that both solidify the art you've been practicing, and open up that practice to a new trajectory for your work in the years to come. The second is to articulate your own poetics and to the greatest possible extent in order to situate yourself on that trajectory and begin to identify priorities for growth and revision.

Our classes are divided into two parts. At the outset we will discuss published poetry, assigned readings. We won't be reading a huge amount, but as it is poetry, repeated readings and rigorous attention are needed. Our efforts in reading will be to gain the deepest appreciation of what each poet is trying to accomplish, an effort meant to influence our own efforts, our own sensitivities in reading each other's poems, and to articulate our own positions with regard to the issues each poem raises.

In the latter portion of class we will "workshop" each other's poems, treating each other as serious artists producing work that warrants our greatest attention and care. The workshop is a classroom format where students and professor meet together (envision a round table) to discuss poems and poetry, in order to deepen and strengthen our relationships to the craft and the art. It depends on students who are engaged, thoughtful, and respectful. We will assume everyone in the class is a serious artist, and treat each other and our work with the respect and effort it requires, and deserves.

To "workshop" a poem means to read it carefully and thoughtfully: to stay away from qualitative statements ("it's good," "it's bad" – "I like this part," "I don't like this part") and instead describe not only what the poem makes you think about but how the poem works to make you think and feel such things. Some basic questions to ask about each poem are:

- How is this poem most being itself? How is it being alive?
- Where, if any, are there moments it fails to be itself?
- What poetic techniques does the poet use to create an effect?
- Are they effective? Why/why not?

Course Outline / Reading Schedule

Week 1: Introductions, in-class reading of de Maria & Merwin

Week 2: Lorde, Guillevec, Borges

Week 3: from Lorca, Vallejo

Week 4: from Mackey

Week 5: from Reines

Week 6: from Salamun

Week 7: from Villa

Week 8: from Longsoldier, Jeffers

Week 9: from Inger Christensen, *alphabet*

Week 10: from Inger Christensen, *alphabet*

Week 11: Holiday / no class

Week 12: from Inger Christensen, *alphabet*

Week 13: Presentations, roulette

All readings are subject to revision and replacement if that's a good idea

REQUIRED READING: The reader is to be purchased from Print Services, HSS Level B1. Inger Christensen's book *alphabet* is to be purchased (no PDF) from the bookstore.

Assignments / Assessment:

Event report	10%	600 words.	Due Week 8
Participation	20%	Cumulative	Cumulative
Workshop Leads (2x)	20%	600 words ea.	Dates in Week 1
Final Portfolio	20%	8 pages.	Due Week 13
Statement of Poetics	30%	1500 words.	Due Week 13

Descriptions of Assignments:

Event report

This assignment requires you to either

1. Review a poetry event that you attend: a book launch, a slam, a reading, or workshop. You must evaluate it according its value and use: what it makes you think about in terms of the art and craft of poetry, of our workshop, and/or of your own writing; **OR**
2. Write a short essay in response to a poem written by a Singaporean poet that you find powerful, moving, or brilliant, using quotes and specific references to make a strong argument for the source of its power.

Participation

Participation means active engagement with the material, both published and unpublished. It is essential for your success and ours. It means being present and prepared. The minimum required is: coming to class on time with printouts of the reading – the course reader and your peers' workshop materials – and your

responses annotated by hand. Typed responses are also acceptable. Producing feedback after class is over is not acceptable.

We have a variety of activities by which to be engaged. I know everyone learns differently and expresses their interests differently. Those who have difficulty being vocal in class will compensate by the depth of their comments on their peers poems.

Critically, participation means sharing your own workshop materials with your classmates by the deadline so that they have time to really think about your work and respond to it meaningfully. The deadline is five days before your workshop, i.e., by midnight on the Wednesday before class. One failure to upload on time will result in the loss of half of your participation mark. Two means a zero.

Workshop Leads

Your workshop lead is a typed, double-spaced, two-page reading response to the work of a classmate up for workshop. Your comments will begin our class discussion. The reading response consists of three parts: (1) your characterization or interpretation of the text, (2) quotes that support that characterization, and (3) a clear, logical explanation of how the text you cite supports your characterization. It is a concise, incisive work of literary analysis. Two copies – one for the poet, and one for the teacher – are due in class. You submit two leads over the course of the term.

Final Portfolio and Statement of Poetics

Your statement of poetics is, with your portfolio, the capstone to the course: an articulation as cogent, clear, and forceful as you can make of what you value in poetics: *not* poetry, but poetics – the conversations that happen around poetry, what poetry makes you think about. It must make a convincing argument your poetry as a reflection of those values. This assignment can, and often does, incorporate elements of a research paper, argument paper, literary analysis paper, or any combination thereof; your “sources” may and should include your own poems, your event report, your peer critiques, our assigned readings, and any secondary or external texts you find or have found useful. It should present to the reader a clear and forceful introduction to your work, as presently constituted in your poetry portfolio. Please slavishly adhere to MLA format.

The poetry portfolio is also due on the last day; your statement of poetics serves as its introduction. It is comprised of eight pages of finished work written over the course of this semester; old poems may not be submitted. New poems must begin at the top of a new page. Include at least one previous draft of each poem you submit (previous drafts do not count toward your page total of finished work). The poems should reflect your engagement with the assigned readings and the work of your classmates, and should illuminate your statement of poetics as much as your statement of poetics illuminates your poems.

Assessment notes / general guidelines / rules of the game:

An unexcused absence will not affect your participation mark. A second unexcused absence will lower it a full letter grade and a third will result in a zero for the assignment.

Missed class periods do not excuse the requirement of providing feedback for workshop. Notes for all workshop materials are to be provided by PDF as an email attachment to your prof within forty-eight hours of the end of class you missed.

Arriving more than 20 minutes will be counted as an absence.

Failure to upload your own workshop materials to BlackBoard by Wednesday midnight will result in your participation mark being lowered by one letter grade.

All graded work is to be typed according to MLA format. Please review MLA format at OWL MLA now if you're not intimately familiar or coming from another major or discipline.

Late work will be penalized by half a letter grade per day and no work will be accepted more than five calendar days after the due date unless an extension is arranged prior to the due date.

Emails to me will be answered within 48 hours. Emails about assignments that are due within 48 hours will not receive a response.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. It's very easy to spot, especially in a poetry class. Don't do it. If you're tempted to do it, this class is not right for you and you should definitely take another one instead. If you do decide to steal someone else's ideas, words, or work (which includes unacknowledged collaboration), the university process will be activated and a hex shall be upon your head.

Course Aims and Outcomes

In this course, you will learn the art of paying attention and of discovering poetry in the everyday. You will study exemplary poems with a view to recognizing and utilizing poetic techniques, and write poems via exercises and assignments designed to enable you to view the world as the potentiality of poetry. Along with acquiring a practitioner's understanding of the creative process, you will learn to evaluate your own writing and its impact on readers and audiences.

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Examine various forms of poetry from a writerly and critical point of view.
2. Efficiently deploy techniques to shape a poem.
3. Apply knowledge of poetic ideas derived from particular kinds of poetry.
4. Communicate effectively through textual analysis and creative practice.
5. Develop your own voice by using knowledge of an array of poetic voices, from local to the global.

APPENDIX 1: Workshop Learning Agreement and Feedback Guide

Workshops are an integral part of any creative writing class. At least twice during the semester you will present written work to your colleagues for discussion and critique. Use this workshop time to help you prepare for assessment. A schedule of allocated dates for these workshops will be drawn up within the first few classes. If you forget to bring in work to class, you will be responsible for distributing this work by email. Ensure you have your class's email addresses at the start of the semester.

Learning Agreement

The purpose of creative writing workshops is not only to provide your work with an audience, though this is important. It is always useful to test the success of your writing on a community of readers in order to gain an idea of what works (what communicates or "carries") and what doesn't. You can then think about *why* some things succeed and others don't. This process of workshop-generated reflection is key to good revision and to informing the critical self-commentaries that form part of all assessed assignments.

But there is more to it than that. In submitting your work for discussion you are providing us – the group – with an opportunity to think about some of the key issues in creating stories, poems, novels, and scripts. These issues may be technical, ethical, perceptual, philosophical... And it isn't just you – the author – who benefits. In analysing your work, we are all pressed in to thinking about the issues your work raises.

The workshop provides us all with an opportunity to learn, regardless of whose writing is under discussion. For this reason it is crucial that you participate in every session. Your participation will benefit you as much as the person whose work is being discussed.

Although undertaking studies in creative writing demonstrates willingness to engage in the workshop process, not everyone enjoys having their work discussed, let alone dissected; not everyone feels comfortable in the spotlight. It *can* be a trying experience. It can also seem quite at odds with the day-to-day reality of writing, which usually involves silence and solitude. Even those of us who do feel at ease may struggle to cope with certain kinds – and levels – of criticism. It is therefore important that your criticism be constructive.

In order for your criticism to be constructive, you should endeavor to identify and praise what does succeed before you go on to talk about what might not. And in discussing what works less well, you should try always to think about solutions, remedies, the ways in which a difficulty might be resolved. What is the problem exactly? How do you think it might be fixed? Bear in mind that the improvement of technique and structure – insofar as these can be separated from theme and from one's personal philosophy – is our primary focus.

Needless to say, whatever your feelings about the writer, it is the work you should be focused upon. The workshop is not a place to air personal grievances and the work itself should never become a pretext for other kinds of criticism. This guideline for conduct should, naturally, apply to correspondence outside the classroom as well. Moreover, the confidentiality of someone else's written work must be respected; that which is meant for discussion in the workshop should not be shared elsewhere.

Feedback guide

The writing workshop is an opportunity for you to share your creative writing in progress with the group, but also an opportunity for you to aid in the development of others' work. There are a few guidelines for giving and receiving feedback which will make the sessions as productive and useful as possible, so please bear them in mind. Refer to this list if you get stuck when giving feedback.

Giving Feedback:

- Give an overall response at the end that is positive and supportive and balances criticism with praise. Think 'critical sandwich' – a positive comment, followed by a more critical, questioning comment, followed by another positive comment.
- Everyone is expected to contribute in class, bear in mind the above when making comments in class.
- Avoid psycho-analysing the writer, assuming their work is biographical, or giving comments that are personal in any way.
- It is useful to write comments or mark/underline your copy, then give this copy to the person presenting

Things to consider when giving feedback:

Initial impressions:

- What's your 'gut feeling' about the piece, what first impressions do you have?
- When you have read it, what remains, are there certain images or ideas that linger in your consciousness?
- What are the most significant aspects of the piece?
- What were the strongest images or ideas?
- Did it feel fresh, original or distinctive?
- Was it hard to put down?
- What are its strong points? Its weaker areas?
- Does it feel complete?
- Are you left with a sense of satisfying mystery, or confusion?
- What do you think the piece is about?

- Did the piece provoke thought?
- Does the piece feel complete, rounded, or like a fragment?

After the initial impressions, you need to focus on more technical areas:

Please make sure you read all the work that is due to be workshopped that week and make notes on the work to help you participate in discussion

Receiving Feedback

- Remember you are in the privileged position of having a cross-section of your potential readership spending lots of time looking at your work in detail.
- During feedback in class it's useful to stay silent for the initial feedback. This avoids leading the reader towards a particular interpretation of your work, and means you will get an outside view of your writing.
- Be open to feedback and see it as a positive way to improve and develop your work.
- Don't take more critical comments personally, instead think constructively about how you can use that information to improve your work.

APPENDIX 2: HSS English Division: Definition and Penalties for Plagiarism

Definition

Plagiarism (from the Latin word for 'kidnapper') is the deliberate or accidental presentation of someone else's ideas or words as your own. This includes:

- The unacknowledged use of words, images, diagrams, graphs, or ideas derived from any source such as books, journals, magazines, the visual media, and the internet. Note: cutting and pasting words from the internet into your own essay, even if you reword them, is still plagiarism.
- Copying the work of a fellow student, having another student write one's assignments, or allowing another student to borrow one's work.
- Buying and/or copying essays, assignments, projects etc from the internet or any other source and handing them in as your own.

Please bear in mind that your lecturers know the subject and have read widely. They therefore can spot unreferenced quotations, and can tell the difference between university level writing and that of published scholars.

Penalties

- If a first year student is caught plagiarizing, and it is the student's first offense, the student will have the opportunity to rewrite the paper with one grade reduction.
- After the first year of studies, it is expected that a student thoroughly understands the implications of plagiarism. Thus, after the first year, or if a student is caught plagiarizing a second time, the student will receive an F for the assignment.

Why plagiarism is academically dishonest

- The unacknowledged borrowing of another's work is theft.
- Independent and creative thinking, as well as intellectual responsibility, are fundamental to a humanities education, and cannot be developed if one simply borrows the work of another.

How to avoid academic dishonesty

Plagiarism

- If you use an author's exact words, you must put them in quotation marks. If you paraphrase another's ideas, you again must indicate the source to your reader.
- Facts and statistics that are not "common knowledge" must be referenced.
- Be sure to use the method of citation recommended by your professor.
- If in doubt, it is always best to reference your material.
- Remember that your lecturer wants to see your ideas and interpretations. Avoid excessively quoting secondary sources and show your reader your thinking.

Collusion and complicity

- Ask your lecturer if you are allowed to work on assignments in groups.
- Get the approval of your professor if you want to hand in material that you have already submitted for another course.
- Do not allow students to copy your work (including work from previous semesters).
- Follow the examination rules set out by the university.

If you still have questions, please ask your professors, or consult the website: <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

Sources for this document:

The Little, Brown Essential Handbook. Ed. Jane E. Aaron. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006.

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR CREATIVE WRITERS:

The conventions for acknowledgement in creative writing are somewhat different to those for acknowledgement in academic writing, but NO form of intellectual dishonesty is acceptable. It is acceptable to appropriate material from source texts, AS LONG AS your use of these texts is acknowledged, is within reason, and demonstrates substantial independent and creative thinking of your own.

There are a number of ways to acknowledge the use of source texts in creative writing, and these vary according to your stylistic imperatives, the level of dependence on the source text and the level of familiarity your audience is likely to have with the source text. For the purposes of this course, you need not always use quotation marks for quoted material if this interferes with your stylistic imperatives (they may be intrusive in a poem, for example). You MUST, however, acknowledge any source texts you use through reference integrated into the work itself, through footnotes or through endnotes. Do not “borrow” work from friends, books, the internet, song lyrics or any other source without acknowledgement, as this counts as plagiarism.

APPENDIX 3: Critical Self-Commentary Guide

All creative work relies to some extent on instinct. As a writer you need a feel for the rhythms and textures of the language, for the shape of a phrase, the weight of a word. You need to be responsive to the promptings of your imagination. You need to be sensitive to the subtleties of human behaviour.

Instinct, however, will only take you so far. You also require a sound understanding of the conventions of writing. You need a solid grasp of the techniques for creating poems and stories. You need to be capable of careful redrafting and editing, and you need to be attuned to other writing and how you might learn from it: every good writer is first of all a good reader.

In other words, the process of writing is both instinctual and highly self-aware. For this reason all our creative writing courses carry some element of critical self-commentary.

The purpose of the self-commentary is to provide you with an opportunity to consider your own creative processes. Here you might account for the ways in which your reading has influenced or guided your writing, in terms of both theme and technique. You might comment on the technical difficulties you have

encountered and the strategies you have employed to overcome them. You might attempt to place your creative work in the context of your wider critical studies.

Among the questions you might seek to answer in your self-commentary are these: How are you a writer of a particular cultural/historical context? What problems did you run into, and what steps did you take to overcome them? What techniques have you learned from other writers? What were your thoughts at each stage of composition, and what gains did you make in the process of redrafting? What insights did you gain *as a writer* from your reading? And what do you think you have learnt in producing this work, both as a writer and as a reader of other writings?

To help guide your reflections it might be useful to keep a writer's journal over the course of the semester. Here you can chart the journey you make from conception to completion. You can divide the process of composition into stages and make notes on each stage. You can analyse the issues that arise, and set down your anxieties, and explore some potential solutions. You can register your responses to class exercises and workshops. You can keep a detailed log of your reading.

Such a journal would not be submitted for assessment. However, you could draw upon it when writing your self-commentary. You could quote from it directly.

When you submit work for assessment I do not expect you to demonstrate your progress by including earlier drafts of your poems or stories. You may however quote from these earlier drafts in your self-commentary, giving a considered account of how your writing has developed.

What I am looking for is self-awareness, an ability to comment in a writerly way on your writerly processes and perhaps make a literary-theoretical critique of the end product.

You should be reflecting intelligently on your experience of writing and showing a genuine understanding of the issues raised in class. I will be looking for you to demonstrate an ability to examine your own work in the light of these issues and to refer to any set reading as appropriate. You may also draw on your knowledge of critical theories and theories of creative writing, using the appropriate critical vocabulary. I will also be looking for evidence of an ability to place your own work within larger critical and cultural contexts. You should be able to demonstrate a critical awareness of some key issues of literary production - such as, for instance, questions of authorial control and intentionality - and be able to employ theoretical perspectives when analysing your own processes. You should, in other words, have a sophisticated take on what it is you're up to.