

2021 WRITE FOR YOUR LIFE
Sessions on Craft

SESSION I: Thursday, 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.

ENABLING CONSTRAINTS

- Kerrin McCadden

Throughout the ages, poets have bent their imaginations using form. During the mid-20th century, the Oulipo writers used procedures to generate poems. Come experiment with their strange techniques!

INTO THE FORBIDDEN

- Jaed Coffin

In my experience, the best stories we have to tell are about the places we shouldn't go: emotionally, geographically, and spiritually. In our time together, we'll develop material about the forbidden places in our lives--the old quarries, abandoned houses, decommissioned military bases and taboo people of our communities--to shine light on the unspeakable elements of our past and future lives. By writing about such places and things, my hope is that we'll get a deeper understanding of how the things we don't talk about can give our readers, well, something to talk about. Students should be ready to probe the depths of their own lives, but this is obviously open to fiction and poetry!

CAN I REALLY PUT THAT IN THE POEM?

- Breone Janae

As new poets we often feel pressured to leave out the idiosyncratic details of our experiences that would give our poems life, texture and depth, in service of writing something that sounds pretty. However, Toi Dericotte wrote that “the job of the artist is not to resolve or beautify, but to hold complexities, to see and

make clear.” In this craft talk we will explore the expansive and political nature of the lyric “I,” and how poets transform and transcend biography by locating their story’s particular place within the context of a larger socio-historical narrative framework. We will use poems by Toi Dericotte, Layli Long Soldier, Malcolm Tariq, and Jericho Brown as guides to how we might use our own personal experiences to create poetry that speaks the truth in all of its fullness, nuance, and complexity.

SESSION II: Friday 2:30 – 3:30 p.m.

EVERYDAY HORRORS

- Sheila Liming

Creative writers are often given the advice to “write what they know.” However, it is often the unknown—the strange, the unexplainable, or the mysterious—that excites and inspires a writer’s imagination. In this craft discussion, we’ll talk about various approaches to writing about what scares us. We’ll experiment with ways to get at the idea of the unknown, to represent and explore our fears through fiction, and to build upon our understandings of the known and real world in order to make those fears come alive for not just us, but for our readers as well.

THE MOMENT THAT MADE YOU YOU

- Philip Baruth

If you were going to write a memoir of your life, and you started with your own birth, you’d be confronting a real problem: babies (while cute) are boring. You couldn’t talk or walk or do anything much of interest at birth or as a toddler. So one technique that autobiographers use is to begin with a dynamic, defining moment anywhere in their life – a key event or set of events that 1) serves as a solid hook for the reader, 2) stands on its own, more or less, as a self-contained incident, and 3) also provides a thematic gloss on your ultimate identity, why you are who you are now. Then, with that moment in place, they flash back to their childhoods. In this craft talk, we’ll take a look at a few of these sorts of openings

to memoir, and you'll write one of your own. Pro Tip: this memory doesn't have to concern something dramatic or meaningful for others (a car crash, a terminal disease, a wedding or a birth), just something that struck you yourself as powerful and unforgettable, something that helped you become or realize who you are. Sure, if you're Barack Obama, you start with yourself walking down the Colonnade just outside the West Wing, marveling at the fact that it's you who occupy the Oval Office, before flashing back to your childhood on Honolulu. But for you and me, it might be less grand but equally illuminating: a walk on the beach when you realized something undeniable about yourself, a visit to a foreign country that broadened your perspective, a game your team won, a horrible rejection, a first time falling in love. The key is to set the hook at the beginning of your story, and then reel the reader in at your leisure.

POEMS AS GREEN WAVES OF MADNESS

- Bianca Stone

Wallace Stevens said that “in poetry, you must love the words, the ideas and images and rhythms with all your capacity to love anything at all”. It is significant that he put “words” before “ideas”. We forget that poetry is fundamentally about language, not just ideas. *Feeling* the words, in both sound and association, how they look on the page, what words to place besides one another—all these things are not actually concerned with *logical narrative*. So, in this short-and-sweet craft talk we will be looking at the *madness* of language; how to use fresh, unexpected words in similes and take risks. Surprisingly, we find that being ridiculous, contradictory, playful, imaginative and strange can often be the best way to capture complex emotions and experiences that are actually quite serious. We will look at two example poems, discuss, and then do a poetry-MAD-LIB-in-class-writing-experiment, to see how the same poem functions with different key-words. This will be fun and inspiring and get at the most primordial pleasures of poetry.

SESSION III: Saturday 1:30 – 2:30 p.m.

THE TIME WARP

- GennaRose Nethercott

Ever wonder why the passage of time felt so bizarre during quarantine? Whole months seemed to vanish in a flash, while others stretched on into centuries, or seemed to run on loop. We've always been taught that time is the one force that can't be altered or tampered with, crumbling civilizations and killing the mightiest kings--and yet, we've watched time bloat and shrink right in front of us. What if we could snatch up the clock-twisting experiences of the past year, and use them to alter time deliberately? By examining both our own memories and the theories of leading time philosophers, we'll turn our writing into time machines, manipulating that so-called immovable force to create more dynamic and uncanny stories--and ultimately transcending the limitations of time itself.

CAN YOU PICTURE THAT?

- Jenny Land

What stories can we learn from the past and other places? Ready to kick writer's block? Is a picture truly worth a thousand words? Please bring 3 photographs (hard copy or digital) to the workshop. Trawl the shoeboxes in your family closets and the internet and find photos that pique your curiosity. You may bring either photos of places and people that you know or find ones of unknown origin and subject matter. Get ready to start digging into the stories! Both poets and fiction writers are welcome.

FOLLOW YOUR DOCTOR'S ORDERS: LEAP

- J. C. Ellefson

When he raised his fin and flashed his razor sharp white teeth, mean Dr. Moss told all of us undergraduates that the worst kind of death is to be bored to death. In short, he demanded strangeness, ultimate surprise, complete and utter revelation. However, as writers, how can we deliver the goods? Well, easy. One

way is to perform the leap. In this craft talk, I will metaphorically take you to the top of a 97 story building, tie a bungee cord around your writerly ankles, and then throw you the hell out the windows. Come prepared to write. Boredom be gone.