

ENG 247.01: Intermediate Creative Writing: Poetry

Unpredictable Aestheticians, Destroyers of Sense

Instructor: Francesco Levato

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Classroom: Stevenson 410

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Class time: TR 2:00 - 3:15 PM

Office Hours: T 1:00pm–2:00pm, R 1:00pm–2:00pm & by appointment

Email: falevat@ilstu.edu (Best way to contact)

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*, Caroline Bergvall
- *Synopticon*, Louis Armand & John Kinsella
- USB Drive
- Something to write with (can be a traditional paper notebook or an electronic device like a laptop or tablet)
- Proficiency and skills with ReggieNet
- Printing may be required for this class—you will need regular access to a printer or money on your Redbird Card to print in class

“Think what it would be to have a work conceived from outside the self, a work that would let us escape the limited perspective of the individual ego, not only to enter into selves like our own but to give speech to that which has no language...”

—Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

What is poetic voice? How are our notions of it constructed? What informs that construction and what are the attendant socio-political implications? How are we defined, constrained, or contained by such constructs? How do we resist them, and to what end? This course is designed to decenter notions of poetic voice and authorial authenticity, and to introduce us to oppositional tactics that can be employed in resisting such prescribed constructions of our poetic identities. We will be reading, writing, and experimenting heavily; working towards opening our poetic practices and our concepts

of poetic voice to the possibilities of the unpredictable. We will focus on oppositional/experimental poetic strategies, like chance operations, conceptual writing, constraints, procedures, surrealist games, and appropriative works. These strategies will be combined with explorations of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that inform such poetics, and with an examination of how the poets on our reading list critically engage with their own work, with that of others, and with the larger literary community; this, towards fostering the same in our own work.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Students are expected, at minimum, to do the following:

- Write every day (M-F) for 45 minutes in your writing journal (which can be a traditional paper notebook or an electronic device like a laptop or tablet). By the end of each week you should have 3-5 pages of raw material and one polished page of poetry for your portfolios. This means that by the end of the semester your journal should contain 48-80 pages of raw material.
- Bring writing tools (notebooks, laptop, tablet, etc.) to class each day, as we will write individually and/or collaboratively on a daily basis, appropriate source text (each other's as well), and occasionally share our work out loud.
- Bring your books to class. Do not come to class without them. I reserve the right to turn you away and mark you as absent if you do not have your book with you. If there is a cost or availability issue, please come talk to me ahead of time, and we'll try to work something out, if necessary.
- Read closely and think about the assigned readings for each week.
- Collaborate with your classmates, with various texts, with people outside class.
- Complete writing assignments on time and make copies for classmates.
- Take home peer work in order to read and critique the material prior to workshop.
- Actively participate in discussion and workshop.
- Keep cell phones tucked away. If you're expecting an important call, let me know.
- Be on time, always.

Coursework Overview:

Please note: all written work, except the writing journal, must be turned in electronically in Microsoft Word format.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

We will spend time writing in each class. Early in the semester assignments will focus on invention or the generation of new work. We will experiment with a number of strategies and techniques designed to move us away from conventional modes of writing. These will include chance operations, procedural writing, appropriation, collage, erasure, and others. As the semester progresses, our writing assignments will shift to focus on adding to, subtracting from, refining, “translating,” rearranging, and sequencing our existing work.

Writing Responses

These micro-papers are designed to make it easier to respond to readings, discussions, workshops, activities, etc. They should be about 300 words and include the following:

- Write three things you learned or points you feel were most important or useful in the text, discussion, workshop, or activity (please note that three points does not equate to three sentences);
- Two things or points you think need to be further clarified;
- One good question for class discussion to finish your response. This is a place to connect your response to the greater world: other classes you’re in, current events, separate ideas you are thinking about, etc. Questions can also help you be ready for upcoming discussions and help you, the students, control the direction of class discussion and learning.

LEADING DISCUSSION

At least once during the semester you will lead our discussion of a selected reading. As the discussion leader, you will make a brief presentation that engages with and examines the poems and the poet’s process. This should last around 10 minutes, no more. For this you will need to draw from the poet’s statement of poetics (in the case of *I’ll Drown My Book*, this is included in each poet’s section), from critical articles published on the poet’s work, or from interviews where the poet discusses their poetics. This is intended to offer us an informed point of entry for our discussion. You will also prepare three open-ended questions for further discussion/consideration. After offering your presentation as a frame, you will use your questions to facilitate our discussion (approximately 30 minutes). Please provide copies of your presentation, or presentation notes, and your questions to the class so we can use them for the discussion.

PORTFOLIOS

Mid-term Portfolio

The mid-term portfolio will be a showcase of 10 pages of work that will be read and analyzed as drafts. You will include 5 specific neutral questions you'd like readers to consider regarding how your presented pieces are working to accomplish their goals. Bring two typed copies of your mid-term portfolio to class on the due date. You will trade the portfolio with two of your classmates, who will read, mark up, and respond in writing to it, and you, in turn, will do the same for their portfolios. Staple your signed responses to the back of your partners' portfolios and deliver it them the following week in class.

Please note: when responding to your partners' portfolios, you should avoid general comments like "I love/hate this piece," or "This is perfect, you shouldn't change a thing," as comments like these are not helpful to the revision process. If you liked a piece, look for ways your partner might complicate it, ask questions to help them consider the piece from differing cultural, economic, or gender perspectives. If you didn't like a piece, try to explain why; a thoughtful explanation of why a piece isn't working for you could offer a productive lens through which your partner could consider revisions. Please be thoughtful, thorough, and constructive in your comments, keeping in mind the questions your partners asked you to consider. Due dates are detailed in the weekly schedule.

Final Portfolio

The final portfolio is meant to showcase the poetry you have composed during the semester, and to demonstrate the development of your own sense of poetics. The portfolio will include selections from the writing that is turned in for assignments, as well as from the daily writing you have done over the course of the semester. It will also include your writing journal and all written feedback you gave during peer workshops. It will consist of 15-20 typed pages of texts that you feel are ready for publication. You should pay attention also to arrangement of the texts in order to make them "talk" to one another (think here of how books are organized). The portfolio should be accompanied by a cover letter of 600-800 words discussing your emerging poetics: the choices you made in producing the texts, and what informed those choices, or the work as a whole (i.e. which poetries, theories, aesthetic practices, etc.). I will respond to your text in letter form, attempting to describe what the text is doing and situating it among other contemporary writing. Please also include the journal you did your longhand composing in (it should be about full). All this can be included in a dossier-type file folder with your name marked clearly on it.

CONFERENCES

You will be required to schedule at least 2 conferences with me over the length of the semester. Conferences are meant to provide students with more in-depth individual feedback as well as offer an opportunity for students to reflect on how well they are meeting the goals of the course.

WORKSHOPS

Everyone in class will have their work discussed by the class at least two times or more, time permitting. I will make the workshop schedule in the first week of class. The week before you are to workshop, you will be required to bring a copy of your work for each person in the class. Please print your work ahead of time and be organized with enough copies for everyone. Limit work for workshops to one page and include, on a separate sheet, 3 specific neutral questions you'd like readers to consider regarding how your presented pieces are working to accomplish their goals.

You will be required to respond in writing to other writers' work. Please type about ½ page single-spaced describing what you think the work is doing and your general response and comments on the work. Staple your typed response to the original work. Also mark up the text itself with specific notes, explanations, etc., and be ready to give your signed text to the author when the workshop finishes. If you take handwritten notes on workshop pieces, be sure to scan a copy for inclusion in your final portfolio. When responding to your classmates' work, you should avoid general comments like "I love/hate this piece," or "This is perfect, you shouldn't change a thing," as comments like these are not helpful to the revision process. If you liked a piece, look for ways your partner might complicate it, ask questions to help them consider it from differing cultural, economic, or gender perspectives. If you didn't like a piece, try to explain why; a thoughtful explanation of why a piece isn't working for you could offer a productive lens through which your classmate might consider revisions. Please be thoughtful, thorough, and constructive in your comments, keeping in mind the questions your classmate asked you to consider.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECT/PERFORMANCE

During the semester you and a partner will be working on a collaborative, long form poem using writing techniques and strategies explored in class. How the collaboration unfolds is up to you, but can include writing prompts from your partner, overwriting of each other's texts, defacements, collages, erasures, etc. Towards the end of the semester you will then perform the poem for the class. The poem should be at least 5

pages in length and before the performance you should supply the class with a critical statement/reflection on the poem and the process, including any information you think relevant to contextualizing your work in the collaboration. Prior to the day of your performance, you will turn in the collaborative poem and critical statement to me.

PARTICIPATION

Be ready and open to offering your voice in all phases of this class: as a writer, critic, peer, friend, etc., because in a very real sense the substance of our discussions determines the content of the class.

DIGITAL RESERVE READINGS

Several readings for the course can be found online through my folder in the English Department's Digital Reserve Readings. Students will be expected to read these selections thoroughly, so make sure that you have access to the readings ahead of time. Students are also expected to either print these readings or bring in a laptop for when we will be discussing them in class. To access, use the following link:

<https://cas.illinoisstate.edu/Instructors/people/falevat>

ASSESSMENT AND FINAL GRADE

Assigning individual letter grades to creative work tends to focus student attention on the grades themselves and away from experimenting with language, form, and innovative strategies. As such it limits your ability to follow your instincts and curiosity as a writer by forcing you to produce work you think is expected.

In order to free you to take the risks necessary to your development as a writer this course defers assessment until the final portfolio. Therefore, your final grade will be determined by:

Portfolios (50% of final grade): The final portfolio will consist of 15-20 pages of texts that represent the best of the creative work you have composed during the semester. It will also include your writing journal, writing assignments, and all written feedback you gave during peer workshops. The portfolio should be accompanied by a cover letter of 600-800 words discussing the choices you made in producing the texts and anything else you think I might want to consider as a reader.

Collaborative Project/Performance (25% of final grade): includes the actual written poem (5-page minimum), the critical statement/reflection, and the performance itself.

Participation (25% of final grade): includes attendance, participation, meeting deadlines with creative and critical writing including workshop responses, and meeting with me twice. Due to the collaborative nature of a creative writing course, consistent engagement and attendance is extremely important.

Evaluative Comments and Feedback

Descriptive comments and feedback from me will be offered in response to work in portfolios and during meetings. I will participate in full-group workshops only to facilitate and offer comments (think of me as a moderator).

ATTENDANCE

Students are allowed up to 2 absences during the semester with no questions asked. Additional absences will have a negative impact on a student's grade, and **4 absences or more will result in a student automatically failing the course**. If you know you are going to miss class, please notify me in advance.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

Some of the strategies used in this course are dependent upon original works of appropriation. That being said, the issue of plagiarism, while a serious consideration, is somewhat gray here. We will operate under the following guiding principal: Always name your source text(s) in your critical statement. This is both to acknowledge the source as well as to allow you the opportunity to discuss why you found this *particular* source to be useful in constructing your piece.

EMAIL, PHONE, AND OFFICE POLICY

I will only check and respond to email between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., as my schedule allows, and will try to respond to you within 24 hours (48 hours if it's a weekend). Please prefix your email subject lines with "ENG 227" followed by your name, then your subject. While I prefer to be contacted via email, I will check voicemail during my regular office hours and will try to respond to you within 24 hours (48 hours if it's a weekend). Though I have an open door policy during office hours, please email me to schedule a time and date for office visits to ensure I'm not meeting with another student at that time.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability should contact Disability Concerns at 350 Fell Hall, 438-5853 (voice), 438-8620 (TTY).

STATEMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

College life can get very complicated. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression, or struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. As complicated as things may be, many of these issues can be effectively addressed with a little help. Student Counseling Services (SCS) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. Student Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors who are attuned to the needs of college students. Services are FREE and completely confidential.

Find out more at Counseling.IllinoisState.edu, 309-438-3655.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SCHEDULE

Week 1 Process: Constraint, Mimicry, Mediation, Translative, Versioning

T 8/19 Course introduction
 In-class: Syllabus review
 Reading: “‘when i was a young soldier for the revolution’:
 coming to voice,” bell hooks
 “Blood and Scholarship: One Mixed Blood’s Story,”
 Malea Powell, *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*

R 8/21 In-class: Discuss readings, Writing assignment 1: Exquisite Corpse
 Reading: *I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*,
 Caroline Bergvall (pg. 14-68)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 2

T 8/26 In-class: Writing assignment 2: Oulipo N+7 Method
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 8/28 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *Synopticon*, Louis Armand & John Kinsella (pg. 6-19)
 Excerpt *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 3

T 9/2 In-class: Discuss readings (prior 2 weeks)
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 9/4 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*,
 Caroline Bergvall (pg. 69-123)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 4

T 9/9 In-class: Writing assignment 3: Homophonic & Homolinguistic Trans.
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 9/11 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *Synopticon*, Louis Armand & John Kinsella (pg. 20-32)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 5 Structure: Appropriation, Erasure, Constraint, Formula, Pattern, Palimpsest

T 9/16 In-class: Discuss readings (prior 2 weeks)
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 9/18 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*,
 Caroline Bergvall (pg. 125-172)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 6

T 9/23 In-class: Writing assignment 4: Cento
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 9/25 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *Synopticon*, Louis Armand & John Kinsella (pg. 33-46)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 7

T 9/30 In-class: Discuss readings (prior 2 weeks)
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 10/2 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*,
 Caroline Bergvall (pg. 173-219)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 8

T 10/7 In-class: Writing assignment 5: Erasure
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 10/9 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *Synopticon*, Louis Armand & John Kinsella (pg. 47-59)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 9 Matter: Baroque, Hybrid, Generative, Corporeal, Dissensual

T 10/14 In-class: Discuss readings (prior 2 weeks)
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 10/16 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*,
 Caroline Bergvall (pg. 221-273)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 10

T 10/21 In-class: Writing assignment 6: Acrostic Chance
Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 10/23 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
Reading: *Synopticon*, Louis Armand & John Kinsella (pg. 60-71)
Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 11

T 10/28 In-class: Discuss readings (prior 2 weeks)
Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 10/30 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
Reading: *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*,
Caroline Bergvall (pg. 274-325)
Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 12

T 11/4 In-class: Writing assignment 7: Latour Litany
Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 11/6 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
Reading: *Synopticon*, Louis Armand & John Kinsella (pg. 72-81)
Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 13 Event: Documenta, Investigative, Intertextual, Historicism, Speculative

T 11/11 In-class: Discuss readings (prior 2 weeks)
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 11/13 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*,
 Caroline Bergvall (pg. 326-383)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 14

T 11/18 In-class: Writing assignment 8: Documentary Poetics
 Assignment: Written comments for workshop pieces due Thurs.

R 11/20 Workshop: Group discussion of workshop pieces
 Reading: *Synopticon*, Louis Armand & John Kinsella (pg. 82-94)
 Assignment: Print outs for workshop pieces due Tues.

Week 15: Thanksgiving Break (note: readings assigned)

11/22-30 Reading: *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*,
 Caroline Bergvall (pg. 384-440)
Synopticon, Louis Armand & John Kinsella (pg. 95-106)
 Homework: Writing assignment 9: Radical Revision (optional)

Week 16

T 12/2 In-class: Collaborative Project Performances, writing assignment

R 12/4 Last day of class
 In-class: Collaborative Project Performances, writing assignment
