

Crossing Genres / Hybrid Poetry: An Immersive Writing Workshop

Instructor: Martine Bellen

Room:

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Dates: 3/28-3/29, 4/11-4/12, 4/18

Time: 9am-5pm

Course Description

In the book-length poem *One Big Self*, C.D. Wright documents—by incorporating interviews and conversations, tattoos slogans, tests, overheard talk, signage, and other “stuff”—her visits to the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women, the East Carroll Parish Prison Farm, and the Louisiana State Penitentiary. In *Nox*, a book-in-a-box collage journal, Anne Carson creates an elegy object for her brother while translating a Catullus poem. Border works, such as these, iconoclastic books that cross thresholds by crossing genres—that appropriate elements from a variety of sources such as of memoir, theory, and history—have formed a genre of their own, sometimes referred to as hybrid poetry. How are these protean constructions conceived and built? This workshop is a laboratory intended to answer just these questions. Through reading works and through practice, we will write hybrid poems that will culminate in a chapbook that incorporate a diverse range of genres.

Texts:

Nox by Anne Carson (New Directions)

That This by Susan Howe (New Directions)

One Big Self by C.D. Wright (Copper Canyon Press)

On Ghosts by Elizabeth Robinson (Solid Objects)

The Collected Works of Billy the Kid by Michael Ondaatje (Vintage)

If the Tabloids Are True What Are You by Matthea Harvey (Graywolf Press)

The Year of Yellow Butterflies by Joanna Fuhrman (Hanging Loose Press)

We Take Me Apart by Molly Gaudry (Ampersand Books)

Tongue a Queer Anomaly by j/j hastain and t thilleman (Spuyten Duyvil Books)

Course Requirements:

An oral presentation (described below)

Reading nine books of poetry

Critiquing of students' work and participation in class discussion

Students are required to write a project proposal before the course begins and new work for each class and write a 20-page cross-genre poem chapbook to be handed in at the end of the course.

Oral presentations: prepare a 15-minute oral presentation on one aspect of one of the books that you're assigned. Oral presentations will include information on the author's background and information about the tradition (author's influences/intentions) of the work, and you'll be asked to read some interviews to better understand the author's

practice. Author's writing techniques will be analyzed and the poem(s) will be unpacked. You will be expected to do a close reading of the text in oral presentations. We will discuss how the author addresses form and content. Prepare two discussion questions for the class. Books will be brought to class for discussion.

Attendance policy: Since class lasts for only five days, no absences are permitted.

Final Project will be a full-length chapbook, which will consist of 20 pages of writing.

Grades will be based on attendance and participation, final project and oral presentation.

Before the course begins, decide on and write a description of a full-length poetry project that you want to work on that is due the first day of class. You will work on your 20-page poem throughout the class and portions of it will be critiqued in class.

Course Outline

Day 1—March 28

Oral presentations of *Nox* and *That This* and discussion of the poems.

How is story relayed?

We will discuss how story can be told through various genres in an extended book-length poem. We will discuss the use of fragmentation and collage to create a full narrative. We will address the nature of autobiographical narrative and how weaving nonbiographical material into it can add dimension. We will look at how meditations and digressions can enrich narrative.

In-class writing

We will go over writing proposals.

Day 2—March 29

Oral presentations of *One Big Self* and *On Ghosts* and discussion of poems.

We will look at the documentary poem and the essay poem

What live research might a writer involve himself/herself in and how can that research be brought into the poem?

We will discuss methods of first-hand research. We will investigate how the interview, personal experience, letters, memories, and all kinds of documentation can be used in poems.

We will look at how the poem can borrow techniques from the essay to investigate concepts and abstractions. The essay substantiates propositions while poetry most often does the opposite—raises more questions, encourages doubt. How can these two very different forms meet?

In-class writing.

Your poetry will be critiqued.

Day 3—April 11

Oral presentations of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *If the Tabloids Are True What Are You* and discussion of the poems.

We will look at how art can be incorporated in a literary work (both with photographic reproduction and incorporating writings about art—ekphrastic poetry) and how various materials and forms used in a project are synthesized. We will look at how history writing can be incorporated into poetry. We will discuss appropriation and the convention of “a book,” what our expectations are. Your poetry will be critiqued.

Day 4—April 12

Oral presentations of *The Year of Yellow Butterflies* (title poem) and *We Take Me Apart* and discussions of the works.

We will discuss fiction in prose poetry—both short form and extended narrative. We will look how fairytale/folk tale can be incorporated in a hybrid form.

We will look at the use of repetition and memory prompts.

In-class writing.

Your poetry will be critiqued.

Day 5—April 18

Oral presentation of *Tongue a Queer Anomaly* and discussion of the book.

We will discuss and explore writer collaborations. We will consider how the glossary/dictionary form can be used in poetry.

In-class writing.

Presentation of chapbooks.