

“But the artist *does not know*. She doesn’t know what she knows about the world until she creates the object. For the artist, the writing of a work of art is as much an act of exploration as it is expression, an exploration of images, of moment-to-moment sensual experience.”

~Robert Olen Butler
From Where You Dream

CRW-4311 – Advanced Poetic Technique – Writing Your Now

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

For aspiring poets and critics, this course studies the elements of poetry with significant practice in writing poetry. We’ll keep an eye always toward the contemporary poetry scene and what it means to be a contemporary poet/writer, while also realizing that any understanding of the contemporary is incomplete without historical awareness. You’ll need to stay open-minded and adventurous and be prepared to expand your notions of what poetry can be and do—it could get weird. You’ll also need to bring your textbook (or other text under discussion) to every class, as we’ll slow down the reading process and pay very, very close attention to linguistic nuance and textual architecture. *Presence*, both mental and physical, is required at all times, as we’ll travel, invite guests to visit, and peer-determine much of our content and assessment. Along the way, you’ll use your writing to establish a professional web presence.

COURSE MATERIALS:

- ~Michelle Boisseau, *Writing Poems*
- ~Craig Blais, *About Crows*
- ~Three contemporary (post-1990) Discovery Poet collections of your choice
- ~Website: www.PoTech.wordpress.com
- ~Bring pen and paper to every class

COURSE OUTCOMES:

By the end of the semester you’ll:

- 1) expand your notions about contemporary poetry, allowing you to place your own work in the context of poetry’s history up to and including your present moment
- 2) close read a poem using a specialized vocabulary (to “close read” means to articulate relations between form and content in literature)
- 3) articulate your close reading both spoken and written
- 4) speak and write intelligently about poetry from a historical perspective
- 5) compose and edit your own nuanced poems to publishable quality, having developed a sense of poetic process

DISCOVERY POET:

Your Discovery Poet is a contemporary, living poet whose three books you’ll address for a significant number of assignments, and whose work will inspire you throughout the semester. You are responsible for finding a poet who speaks to you and whose work you enjoy, and you may have

more than one Discovery Poet. To discover your poet(s), I encourage you to browse the poetry collections of local bookstores like Paperback Rack and Warehouse Books. Other resources include Strozier, Coleman, Leon libraries, UBorrow, ILL, list of contemporary poetry journals on www.salutsky.com, Internet, fellow students, teachers, local poets/writers, non-local poets/writers.

RECITATION:

Recitation poems will be determined by your informed consensus. After a round of assigned poems, you'll read for the class a Discovery Poem of your choice *from a book*. While we all get nervous performing for an audience, also think of Recitation as generative: after listening to poetry for an hour, hearing the music, you'll be surprised how easy it is to sit somewhere after class and let language and image come from your pen. The trick is that you have to *let it*—get out of the way and let poetry come.

Recitations are peer graded—you may handwrite your peer grades on the reverse side of your scansion:

- 10 = solid memorization, nuanced interpretation, and nearly flawless presentation
- 9 = as above, with minimal stalls, missed words, or missed title/author
- 8 = as above, with more than a couple pregnant pauses, missed words, or phrases
- 7 = exceedingly hesitant, or with unclear passages
- 6 = complete but barely intelligible
- 1-5 = incomplete to varying extents (2-minute time limit)
- 0 = not attempted

Tips:

- 1) Please remember to preface your recitation with title and author.
- 2) Look up unfamiliar words and allusions beforehand.
- 3) Assert your presence, announce, and slow...down.
- 4) There's a difference between knowing it and *knowing it*—thorough preparation trumps nerves.

Benefits of Recitation:

- 1) pays homage to poetry's oral roots
- 2) allows you to embody poems by inscribing into your neural pathways certain lyrical habits that reveal themselves when you write
- 3) by allowing you to slow down and spend time with a poem, counteracts the erosive effects of a consumer culture obsessed with speed
- 4) enhances your communication skills by giving you an audience and prepared content
- 5) offers our class a handful of poems to which we can refer for comparison's sake at any given time
- 6) good writers memorize good writing

Recitation Poems, in Order:

Recitation sonnets as determined by consensus:

- 1 – [*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?*] by William Shakespeare — p. 173
- 2 - *Sonnet to Sleep* by John Keats — p. 266
- 3 - *In an Artist's Studio* by Christina Rossetti — p. 267
- 4 - *Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem* by Helene Johnson — p. 439
- 5 - *Sweep Me Through Your Many-Chambered Heart* by Diane Ackerman — p. 264

GRADING:

40% = Website of Original Poems

A record of process that shows a willingness to explore and accept suggestions, most of all from the poem itself. In addition to the ideas you'll be offered in and out of workshop, a "Comprehensive Revision Checklist" is available on our course website. Your own websites shall contain 8-10 poems with *minimum* 3 drafts of each, accompanied by 8-10 500-word ERNs. ERNs shall explore your revision strategies and their effects, and exhibit some awareness of your own writing process and what it means to be a contemporary poet. We won't have a final exam, so I'll look to these ERNs for a comprehensive view of what you've learned this semester. Be thoughtful.

25% = Blog Posts

Includes book-assigned and impromptu exercises, class notes, and noticings. You're required to address my comments on your posts, and you're required to rate all your peers' posts. All posts must be thoughtful. Late work will not be accepted.

15% = Recitation

Prefaced on thorough memorization, your recitation should exhibit a nuanced interpretation of the poem's themes. Due each recitation day is a handwritten or hand-typed scansion of the week's poem.

10% = Literary Citizenship

In order to be a good member of your writing community, you must nurture not only your own projects but also those of others. You are required to engage in five acts of literary citizenship (such as attending a public reading or reviewing a book or literary journal) throughout the semester and post a 300-word digital report. Your report should include a summary of the act and an evaluation of its outcome (usefulness/success/participant's reactions). Though you will submit five reports over the course of the semester, I will not accept more than one report in a given week. (Translation: Do not wait until the end of the semester.)

10% = Participation (5% Verbal, 5% Written)

Verbal and written participation involve engagement, civility, punctuality, and openness in class discussion and in responding to others' work. Your overall demeanor—pleasant, disruptive, thoughtful, verbose, bitter, sarcastic, etc.—factors into your Verbal Participation grade. For Written Participation, you're required to write a 300-500 word response to each workshop poem.

A=90-100, B=80-90, etc.

Workshop:

We'll regard *workshop* in a generative, perhaps conventional sense: a place where we use the materials at hand to build new things. In this way, an individual student's poem becomes not a broken thing that needs to be fixed, but rather a springboard for new work for us all, an opportunity for invention and exploration. Be prepared to write during every workshop, and expect to be given a poetic assignment (that is, invention exercise) each workshop that will count as an impromptu POST, due the following class.

You'll commit to one workshop. One week before your workshop day, you'll bring hard copies of your poem for your classmates, instructor, and guest—late penalties apply. Your workshop poem must have been written anew specifically for workshop—do not use previous work. Anything over two pages (you may print front/back) MUST be stapled, or points will be deducted. Arbitrary double-/triple-spacing also will be penalized—take control of your formal choices rather than allow word processing software to be your brains (unless you're experimenting with machine/human interaction, of course).

Last, we'll try a descriptive approach, where we use our class learning and vocabulary to describe how a poem works. Here's a chance to practice articulating close readings of your peers' poems.

In addition to scheduled workshops, I'm available during office hours or between classes to meet with you individually regarding your original poems—in fact, I encourage and enjoy this.

About the Instructor:

Ron Paul Salutsky is the author of *Romeo Bones* (Steel Toe Books, 2013). Previous and forthcoming poems and prose appear with McGraw-Hill, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, *The John Clare Society Journal*, *Colorado Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, the Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP), *Louisville Review*, *Verse Daily*, the Poetry Foundation, *Interim*, *Ninth Letter*, *Sugar House Review*, *St. Petersburg Review*, *The Café Review*, and elsewhere.