REQUIRED TEXTS

A number of first books or chapbooks by authors, as selected by the students in the course. I will provide a list of recently published possibilities in an updated syllabus over the summer.

SEMINAR DESCRIPTION

This graduate-level, generative writing seminar will focus on different strategies for organizing, developing, and presenting the extended poetic form we commonly think of, for better or worse, as “the book,” the product that some describe as the primary poetic form of our time.

One third of the course will be devoted to studies of published poetry collections—full-length and, possibly, couple chapbooks—as well as secondary materials that challenge us to enlarge our concepts of what the book is and does, including essays by Roland Barthes, Wayne Booth, Michel Foucault, and others.

The other two thirds of the course will be devoted to examining and commenting on each other’s manuscripts as these progress throughout the semester. As writers, we will craft brief statements of poetic intent (elevator speeches) about our work in progress as well as extended statements about our work. As readers, we will compose written letters in response each other’s manuscripts; lead discussion about each other’s work; and write brief synopsis/descriptions (blurbs) of each other’s work. All participants will enter with roughly 12–24 pages of an original poetry manuscript in draft. Manuscripts need not be completed by the course’s end; however, continued progress towards that completion is expected.

SEMINAR GOALS

By the end of this course the successful participant will:

1) **Develop an extended poetic work.** All participants must enter with at least 12–24 pages of an original poetry manuscript in draft. We will spend the majority of our time in this course examining and commenting on each other’s collections as they progress throughout the semester. Collections need not be completed by the course’s end; however, continued progress towards that completion is expected.

2) **Communicate about one’s poetic project in clear terms,** composing at least two separate brief poetic statements of one to two sentences, as well as a longer poetic statement (125-300 words). The longer statement will explain one’s project in specific terms and (/or) contextualize it within the broader landscape of contemporary poetry. All
three of these will be due at the end of the semester; however, I may ask that you turn in preliminary attempts at some point in the semester.

3) **Address in written and oral form the personal and artistic values at stake in the work of one’s colleagues**, regardless of whether that work is similar to or unlike one’s own.

4) **Broaden one’s sense of the possibilities available for work in extended poetic forms.** For our purposes we will define “the book” broadly, as a vehicle that collects and presents work within the context we call “poetry.” We will consider the effects of the book—the author, readership, the book contest, the blurb—and will examine various models for developing and framing extended poetic work—the book bound as a loose collection of individual lyrics, the book bound by procedure, the book bound by theme, the book bound as a combination of these and other things. The chapbook, the electronic book, audio recording, video recording, live performance, as well as poetry that integrates other art forms may also well enter our conversations.

**TENTATIVE SCHEDULE**

Poet A: Janice  
Poet B: Alayna  
Poet C: Rhodes  
Poet D: Kristen  
Poet E: Tim  
Poet F: Susan  
Poet G: Jesse

WK1 Introduction to course

First Round of MS review: Submit 12-20 pages and 2 elevator speeches

**Brief Statements of Poetic Intent / Elevator Speeches (Authors)**
Each manuscript sample in the first round will be accompanied by two brief statements of poetic intent, or elevator speeches. These should be each one to two sentences in length. Examples will be provided.

**Response Letters (Readers)**
Each participant, including myself, will compose a letter in response to each manuscript up for critique. The letter should be ready to hand to the poet at the end of the critique. Your letter may address various elements / strategies of a particular manuscript such as: organization; sequencing; coherence; argument(s);
the sources of unity within the manuscript and its sources of tension; formal and procedural tendencies; habits of voice, image, syntax, address; the need for and uses of end notes, proem, a prefatory essay, and other contextualization; the positioning of key poems; general risks taken by the manuscript and potential payoffs in taking those risks. You may also provide context for reading the work: the position/implications of the work in the greater discourse of poetry and poetic thought, as well as art and culture outside of poetry; precedents and antecedents; contemporary works with which this work appears to be in conversation. In addition to your letter, you may also bring examples of works in poetry (and/or other kinds of works) that you relate to the work we are critiquing so that you can share these with the author and perhaps even to discuss during critique. We can also view examples from online if you provide me the links ahead of time. Think of these as gifts to the poet.

WK 2  First review of work by students A (name) and B (name).
Letters of response due
Class discussion of Booth on the implied author

WK 3  First review of work by students C (name), F (name), and E (name).
Letters of response due
Class discussion of Barthes on the death of the author

WK 4  First review of work by students D (name) and G (name).
Letters of response due
Class discussion of Foucault on what is an author

Second Round of MS review: Submit 18-35 pages

The Cover Letter (Authors)
This preface to your manuscript should:
• Include the tentative title of your MS.
• Summarize your understanding (from our letters and discussion) of how people are reading the work so far.
• Describe the changes/additions/revisions/subtractions/re-sequencing that this iteration of the MS presents.
• Discuss (to whatever degree you wish—this may be minimal) what your intentions are in making these changes/additions/etc.
• Lay out any questions/considerations/concerns to which you'd like for us to attend as we read through and prepare our comments during round 2.

The Annotated Research List (Authors)
We will spend part of critique during the second round thinking about the conversations voiced directly and indirectly between each of your manuscripts and the work of other writers, thinkers, and makers of things—thinking in particular about how those conversations might be expanded further to the work's
advantage. To that end, accompany your manuscript and cover letter this round with:

- An annotated list of books you've read that you feel inform your MS (w/ simple one–three-word notes indicating how each of these books so informs your work).
- An annotated list of books you'd like to read (w/ simple one–three-word notes, question marks, exclamation points, etc when appropriate).
- You may also include a separate non-poetry section in your annotated reading/research list. The non-poetry section may include anything that significantly informs (or that you want to pursue so that it might inform) your work in terms of structure, form, theme, subject, philosophy, character, setting, etc. It may be visual art, science writing, a practice of some sort, a form of music, a religious text, a theory, a work of fiction, a fictional place, a period of history in a certain region, etc.

Discussion Points For Critique / Discussion Leaders (Readers)
In lieu of letters during the second round, you will produce discussion points for each of the manuscripts under consideration. These discussion points will help focus conversation and, when shared with the author, will help him/her understand how you as a reader respond on multiple levels to various aspects of the work. When devising your discussion points, refer to the suggestions and guidelines for letter writing.

During these next two rounds, two participants of the seminar are responsible each week for leading discussion of two manuscripts, except the final week, when we'll discuss only one MS. Discussion leaders will turn a copy of their discussion points in to me each week.

WK 5  Students G (name) and C (name) lead discussion of work by students A (name) and B (name)
First pass of class discussion of books 1 and 2, selected by participants.

WK 6  Students B (name) and E (name) lead discussion of work by C (name) and F (name)
First pass of class discussion of books 3 and 4, selected by participants.

WK 7  INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY RECESS

WK 8  Students A (name) and F (name) lead discussion of work by E (name) and D (name)
First pass of class discussion of books 5 and 6, selected by participants.

WK 9  Student D (name) leads discussion of work by G (name)
First pass of class discussion of book 7, selected by participants.
Final Round: Submit 25-48 pages, two elevator speeches and extended statement

Statement Of Poetic Intent (Authors)
During our third pass over your work, each poet should preface his/her manuscript with a cover letter that includes an extended statement/synopsis/description of the collection and with a new draft of two “elevator speeches” about the work. The extended statements should be around 125 words in length, although they can be longer if you like; I provide some examples below. The elevator speeches should each be a sentence or two long. Please also include in your cover letter any particular questions you want us to attend to as we read this new version of this manuscript.

Letters To The Author And Blurbs (Readers)
We will also return to the practice of letter writing this turn. Every participant will submit a letter to the poet whose work is up for critique during a given week; readers should also give to me a copy each of these weekly letters. Each letter will begin with your own 100 word synopsis/description of what this work is doing and how it does it; again, see examples below. Think of these descriptions as blurbs, if that helps.

10.31 Students D (name) and E (name) lead discussion of work by A (name)
Letters of response due

11.07 Students A (name) and F (name) lead discussion of work by B (name)
Letters of response due

11.14 Students F (name) and G (name) lead discussion of work by C (name)
Letters of response due
Second pass at discussion of book 3.

11.21 Students G (name) and E (name) lead discussion of work by D (name)
Letters of response due

11.28 Students C (name) and D (name) lead discussion of work by F (name)
Letters of response due
Second pass at discussion of book 5.

12.05 Students B (name) and C (name) lead discussion of work by E (name)
Letters of response due
Students A (name) and B (name) lead discussion of work by G (name)
Letters of response due
EXAMPLES OF POETIC STATEMENTS

Aaron Kunin is in the habit of publishing a description of his books as a kind of preface. These prefaces are perfect examples of what we’re looking for. I include two here and one I’ve copied from his book of poems, *Folding Ruler Star*.

SYNOPSIS TO KUNIN'S NOVEL, _THE MADARIN_ (a three-page version of the Synopsis opens the novel itself; what follows is a much abbreviated version):

_The Mandarin_ does at least pretend to be an ordinary novel. It is set in places that no longer exist in Minneapolis—houses and apartments where one of the characters used to live, businesses and restaurants that have closed or moved elsewhere. Its narrator, Willy, writes boring novels that put everyone to sleep. The plot develops recursively rather than progressively, as a kind of theme-and-variations; usually one of the characters is in a house or a room, and the others are outside trying to get in. _The Mandarin_ is written almost entirely in dialogue; as a result, actions and events tend to occur within a nimbus of uncertainty. Consciousness tends to be communal rather than personal. _The Mandarin_ preserves the conventions of the novel: the speakers are individualized characters speaking in an identifiable situation. This means that, at any moment, the characters might stop talking and start doing something. Of course, they won't, but this option is always available to them.

NOTE ON METHOD, which prefaces the UbuEditions online publication of Kunin's chapbook "The Mauberley Series":

NOTE ON METHOD

The series beginning "You won't remember this" is a translation of Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" into a severely limited vocabulary of about 170 words. For Pound, "Mauberley" had provided an occasion for disavowing his earlier "aesthetic" work, and also for meditating on the uses of beauty for poetry. It was a way of asking the question: how could Pound write shallow poetry if he were not essentially a shallow person?

My translation is conceived as an inversion of Pound's psychological experiment. Instead of using "Mauberley" to go outside myself, to gain access to unfamiliar uses of language—which, for Pound, is the value of the poetic persona—I wanted to inhabit my personal 170-word vocabulary as fully as possible. Because I really believe that the part of yourself that you're most ashamed of is interesting and can be used as material for art.

The vocabulary derives from a peculiar nervous habit: for several years, I've been compulsively transcribing everything I say, hear, read, or think—in short, all the ambient language that I can pick up—into a kind of sign-language (technically a "binary hand-alphabet") that looks more or less like fidgeting or piano playing. The inception of this
practice can be dated quite precisely at February 14, 1993--my twentieth birthday. I soon discovered that the compulsion was not directed exclusively toward ambient language, because my hand continued to form words in the hand-alphabet even when there wasn't, apparently, anything for it to transcribe--no one was saying anything, and I wasn't reading or even thinking anything that I was aware of. At these times, my hand tended to fixate on some phrase of indeterminate origin, which it would then repeat until I made a conscious effort to stop it. The tone of the phrases was predominantly melancholy--e.g., "it won't be easy and can't be a pleasure, it won't be easy and can't be a pleasure." I started keeping a record of the phrases, and when the record included about 170 different words, I decided to try writing with them.

In a sense, I was already writing with them--wasn't the hand-alphabet a form of writing? So you could say that my project in these poems was to combine a rigorous formal constraint (writing within the limited vocabulary, and as much as possible--which is to say, not much--within the paraphraseable content of "Mauberley") with a kind of automatic writing (since the hand-alphabet represented, at least to me, a direct connection between my hand and my unconscious).
Streckfus, *The Cuckoo*

3 Brief Statements (Elevator Speeches):

It's filled with faulted heroes who embark on faulty journeys that they never complete; Ronald Reagan appears twice.

It's an attempt to redeem the patriarch, in a manner of speaking --- sympathy for the devil --- a kind of purgatorio written from the position of a feminist (and empathetic) son.

It's also a very personal examination of power and authority; When I say power and authority, I'm thinking of historical authority, spiritual authority, and other forms of hegemony that affect the songs we sing and the stories we tell --- I don't expect readers to come away with that impression necessarily, but that's what it is for me as a thinker and writer.

Full Statement 1:

Among its many references, *The Cuckoo* points to literary, natural, and personal history, and to the importance of theft, desire, and dislocation in all of these. I am thinking, for instance, of the bird hidden in William Carlos Williams's reference to the Middle English lyric on spring "Sumer Is Icumen In" that closes his poem "The Sea-Elephant" ("Ludhe sing cuccu" the old song continues), as well as the Chinese and Japanese traditions from which Modernists like Williams borrowed ("Turn the head of your horse sideways," writes Basho, "so that I may hear the song of the cuckoo"). I am thinking also of the biological bird's knack for singing from the densest of trees, close to the trunk, almost always out of view, and of its penchant for clandestinely leaving its eggs in the care of other birds. I am thinking of the repeated question that has no answer, of the hidden, and of appropriation.

Full Statement 2:

My work in *The Cuckoo* points to literary and natural history, and to the importance of theft, desire, and dislocation in both. Using "the journey" as their primary narrative trope, these poems cross a range of poetic forms and traditions, and appropriate various histories and lyric voices, traditional, Modernist, transcultural, and experimental in position. The poems include a fourteen-syllable sonnet, a traditional rondel, works imitating Chinese prose-verse forms, and collage poems such as the book's final sequence, "The Organum." This poem counterpoises language from Francis Parkman's chronicle *The Oregon Trail* with lines from the sixteenth-century Chinese work of comic mytho-historical fiction *The Journey to the West*, referencing the pleasures of realist and fabulist modes of narrative representation while at the same time dissembling their insinuated wisdom and authority.
A few first books that I’ve noticed:

TBA

Some chapbook series to consider:

TBA