CRW 5367
ADVANCED POETRY WRITING
(CRN # 12075), Fall 2017

Professor Sasha Pimentel
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Fall 2017 Office Hours
Wednesdays 12:00-2:00pm & by appointment

Course Information
• Meeting Times: Mondays, 6:00-8:50pm
• Classroom: UGLC, Room 334
• Credit Hours: 3.0, Lecture

Intensive study and practice in the various forms and approaches within the writing of poetry, including workshop discussion of individual student poems. (Prerequisite: Department approval.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Richard Wilbur says that to begin writing a poem, “there has to be a sudden, confident sense that there is an exploitable and interesting relationship between something perceived out there and something in the way of incipient meaning within you,” and in this graduate workshop, we will work through your poems to mine that territory between the external and the internal. This graduate writing seminar will ask you to learn advanced skills in poetry by working poems written by you and your classmates. We will focus on: how to find a poem’s form; creating complex meanings through line, language and whitespace; and on developing rhythm and tension through syntax, punctuation, perspective and repetition.

BOOKS AND SUPPLIES
The main text of this course will be your own poems. Please be prepared to bring 14 printed copies of each of your poems to the class for workshop, and consider the printing expenses to do so. In addition, please buy the following collections of poems by September 19, 2015. They can be bought online, more affordably through an online seller like Amazon.com, or they will also be available at the Barnes & Noble (Sunland Park) Bookstore in about three weeks (I’ll let you know when it’s there.)

• Patricia Smith, Incendiary Art
• Jericho Brown, *Please* (English Edition)
• Jericho Brown, *Please* (Edición español, traductor Andrea Cote*  

(*This version of the book may be able to be bought directly through the editor for a deep discount, more details later)

I will supply supplemental reading (poems, interviews and essays on craft) via handouts.

**Grading and Requirements**

Your final grade will be dependent on your successful completion of the following course requirements based on the following grading scale.

Practically, in this course, you will:

1) write and workshop new poems (yours and your classmates’) free of any style and subject;
2) organize two poetry performances as a class, one featuring yourselves reading your own poems, and the other helping with the organization of a reading for either visiting writer Jericho Brown or our faculty member Dr. Alcalá;
4) keep a record of poems you admire, and want to learn from, on Twitter; and
5) finally, turn in a revised portfolio of your poems with a formal and substantive statement of your aesthetics.

Please see specific descriptions for the assignments below, and the Course Schedule for deadlines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poems &amp; Poetry Workshops (4 new poems of any style)</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organize Poetry Performances (one for yourselves, and the other to help with Jericho Brown’s or Dr. Alcalá’s readings)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter database (keep a “social” record of poems you admire)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Portfolio (revisions of your workshopped poems) &amp; a formal Statement of Aesthetics</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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POEMS & POETRY WORKSHOP

This is a poetry workshop class, intended to get you to generate as much creative work as possible. You will be asked to turn in new poems for workshop—poems which you have not worked on in other classes before, in any style, form, and on any subject—which we will workshop. We will divide the class into groups and alternate weeks of workshop, so you’ll write as many poems as you can over the course of the semester, given this schedule. I’m not giving you a set number, as that may change with the class’s needs over the course of the semester.

Please see the Course Schedule for deadlines to turn in poems, as (except for the first workshop) you will turn in poems to the class the class session before we workshop those poems. This is so everyone may have a chance to carefully read and assess your work. Please note: if you miss a workshop, either because you did not turn in the poem to the class on time or because you were absent on the day we were scheduled to workshop your poem, you will receive a 0 for that poem and we will not workshop it later as a class.

Also, traditionally, poems will be workshopped physically, during our scheduled course times, and you can write poems free of any style, length or theme considerations. However, there will be some weeks when I’ll ask you to turn in longer poems which we’ll divide into multiple Skype workshops throughout the week, in smaller groups. (I’ll announce these in the Course Schedule).

POETRY PERFORMANCES

Because you’re a writer in a community of writers, I’m asking you to, as a whole class, organize two performances in poetry for the UTEP and El Paso community.

The first is your own performance, as a group. Since it’s yours, you all will decide how, when, and where you want these performances to be, and be like, though please schedule them when I can attend them. Please exercise your creativity!

The second is a reading that you’ll help, choosing to either help with the reading Dr. Cote and I are organizing for Jericho Brown (October 27), or for Dr. Alcalá (in September, details TBA). While the decisions are yours to make as a class, I will advise you on issues such as: how to book rooms on campus or off-campus, how to organize receptions, how to bring visiting writers or include other artists, etc. I do ask you, though, to meet the following requirements:

I ask you to organize the above performances in order to stress that poetry is occurring not just on the page, but right now, in communities and in very human and physical ways—and always
“in conversation.” Your own performances, in particular, stress too the concept that this program intends to train you to become professional writers. In the academic classroom, that training focuses on your technical and aesthetic learning. But emerging writers must learn not only how to create publishable work, but also how the writing industry works, including how to place your work in journals, how to later seek presses for your manuscripts, and how to publicize your own work. The first performance is intended as an opportunity for you to practice how to perform your work in public, as such performances are central to how we publicize our work as contemporary writers.

I also ask you to organize the above performances in order to, more practically, get you university-sanctioned organizational experience onto your curriculum vitae and resumes for when you apply for jobs after this MFA program.

**Twitter Databases**

Professional writers learn the discipline to work every day. That’s not necessarily always in the act of writing, but also in reading. We should read every day. Often that reading is done in solitude, but it’s nicer too when such reading, such poetry we find, can be shared. In that philosophy, for this class, I will ask you to either create a Twitter account, or use a current one. (You do not need to share this account with anyone outside of the class, and outside of the journals I’ll ask you to follow, if you don’t want to).

For every week of the semester (except for Thanksgiving break), you must choose five poems on (five separate days) to post. Find poems that you just love, or admire. You simply need to:

1) post each poem you find as a picture, as a link to a video or podcast or website, or if it’s short enough, as the text.
2) If the poem is longer than 140 characters, quote a part you love from it in your post.
3) Please use the designation “#UTEPAdvPoWr” so that we can, as a class, build a database of other poems. (You can even re-post something one of your classmates has for your poem that day, so long as you find something in that poem to admire, technically or artistically.)

You will not be required to respond to your classmates’ posts, but you will be required to “follow” your classmates’ accounts so you can see the poems they choose to post. Similarly, I also want you to “follow” the following journals:

- Poetry Foundation
- poets.org (Academy of American Poets)
- Circulo de Poesía
- And to subscribe to at least four more poetry journals or magazines of your choice.

Choose poems that you admire so much, there is something there you want to emulate in your own work. You may have to search for a while to find that poem each day, but that’s my hope—
to make force you through this class to search for, and find, and read, and study, the poetry that is going on in the world around you.

**Final Portfolio**
Revision is the real act of writing. Thus, you will be responsible for revising, and turning in at the end of the semester, revisions of all the poems you workshoped in class. Your revisions should clearly demonstrate your learning of course concepts and the feedback that you received from your classmates and from me. You should turn in your best and final revisions. You need only turn in clean final copies, and each revision should reflect your practical understanding of important concepts such as image, line, language, sound, etc. In addition to these revisions, I will ask you to turn a formal Statement of Aesthetics, please see below.

**Statement of Aesthetics**
This statement is intended to give you a chance to construct a first draft of your aesthetics for your eventual MFA thesis proposal and thesis preface. More importantly, however, it is an opportunity for you to begin to define your developing aesthetics in creative writing, as artistry should be a deliberate, careful and conscious venture. I am also asking you to consider how, as artists, you “take place” in larger and ongoing literary and artistic conversations. This should be a carefully constructed text of 10-15 pages, in a standard 11-12 pt. font, double-spaced. Please use MLA Style for in-text citations and a Works Cited page.

Your statement of aesthetics should include, but need not be limited to:

- a thoughtful proposal and discussion of what is important to you to in writing and why
- a thoughtful proposal and discussion of what is important to you to in poetry, specifically, and why
- an analysis of how your own writing and your aesthetics are grounded in the philosophies and practices-of-craft of published writers (you must include poets), philosophers and other artists
- a thoughtful proposal and discussion on the relationship between form and language
- an analysis of the kind of writing you have been producing, or trying to produce with regards to your larger aesthetic goals (please include as examples work you’ve specifically produced in this class)
- an assessment of what it is you still need to learn as a writer, and why

**Workshop, Participation, and Formatting**
This is a writing course for professional writers and as such, we’ll be conducting regular workshops of your creative work. The poem that you turn in to workshop should not be your “first” draft of that poem. You should turn in the best possible poem you can write (having
worked on that poem considerably) when a poem is due from you because you’ll get more advanced feedback. As in any form of artistry, the harder you work at each stage of the writing process, the faster and better you will learn your craft.

You are responsible for bringing in enough copies (14) of your work for the entire class. Please see the Course Schedule for deadlines specific to your workshop group. Also please see the Attendance & Late Work policy for rules in turning in your work to workshop.

Your poems should be typed, printed, single-spaced, in a single-column (unless you’re purposefully writing a multiple-column poem) and justified to the left-hand margin (unless you’re specifically experimenting with whitespace in a modern way), and in a single standard font like Times New Roman, in 11-12 pt. size. I ask you to use these guidelines because we cannot control the stylistic aspects of a poem when we turn work in for publication to editors, and also so we can study as writers how to create emotional effects using language itself, not the ways by which language can be stylized. Turn in only one poem per scheduled workshop or techniques activity, no more. Please use a full printed page for each of your poems, as the whitespace of a poem is just as important as the written text. Please use the following formatting for each poem:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshop Group Name, Poem #</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
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<td>Title</td>
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<td>Poem Text</td>
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During workshop, I ask you to take your role as a poetry critic with seriousness and sensitivity. You have a responsibility to your classmates to not only read their work carefully, but to make constructive and useful comments to help them express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions into a compelling aesthetic. In the beginning I may lead discussion more, but as the course progresses, I’ll expect you to take more of a lead in shaping the conversation. In respect of your peers, I expect that you will have read your colleagues’ poems beforehand, that you will have made careful notes on the poems, and that you will be vocal during workshop.

This is a graduate course in the arts, wherein much of the learning occurs through your articulation of the subject. Participating in these workshops will help you to read and revise your own work with more fluency and expertise. There is always something to critique. It’s your job as a writer to find it. It is unacceptable to tell a fellow writer that you love or like everything about his/her poem, as this is quite unhelpful to your peers and is non-intuitive to the writing process, which demands revision.
ATTENDANCE POLICY
Come to class! Because of the intensive nature of this graduate class, I will adhere to a strict attendance policy:

- You are allowed 1 absence, for any reason, whether by necessity or whimsy.
- Leaving early or coming late, or leaving class when in session by more than 15 minutes will be counted as a ½ absence.
- Any absences above the allotted will lower your final grade by a letter for each absence.
- If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out the work that you’ve missed, including any activities, homework assignments or copies of your classmates’ poems for workshop. (I strongly suggest that you get contact information from your fellow classmates in case you might be absent).

I cannot make any exceptions. If you feel that circumstances arise so that you cannot be successful in this course at this time, please withdraw from this course officially by the university’s course drop deadline so that you can receive a “W” for a grade.

LATE WORK POLICY
I will not accept late work. Please take careful note of due dates of assignments on the Course Schedule.

COOKIE POLICY
If your phone rings while class is in session, or if I catch you texting during workshop or lecture, I’ll ask you to bring cookies for the entire class for the following week.
Please sign up to join a group for the following categories: workshop groups, Stretch! groups and journal/conference presentation groups.

1. **Workshop Groups** *(for whole-class workshops of your poems)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Joseph Brodskys</th>
<th>The Federico García Lorcas</th>
<th>The Wislawa Szymborskas</th>
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**Course Schedule**
I will distribute these to the class next week, on Monday, September 4, 2017.