

ENGL 7471: Forms of Fiction – Process Aesthetics

Spring 2023

Wednesdays 5:30-8:30pm

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Conversations about creative writing typically assume the literary *object*—the story, poem, novel, etc.—is where the art lives. But this semester, I want to consider creative writing as a *process art*, an activity done for the aesthetic qualities of the activity itself.

To that end, we'll undertake a wide range of experiments in process, which will take us across campus and across Memphis. For example:

- To rethink POV and writing in character, we will meet with an actor and professor in the Theatre Department to study actor's methods for getting into character.
- To rethink imagery and visual description, we will visit labs at the Southern College of Optometry for a visceral explanation of how the eye and brain create imagery.
- To rethink our relationship to the sounds of written language, we will visit the Hearing Lab's anechoic chamber—a room so quiet you can hear only the blood flowing through your ears—and see if and how we can use the alphabet to describe utter silence.
- We'll consider "creative reading" as an artistic process and pay some overdue attention to the role of imagination in the reading process.
- We'll consider different theories of where dreams and imagination come from, and meet with a meditation instructor who will teach us techniques for stimulating the visual imagination and direct a walking meditation through Overton Park.
- We'll study story structure as codified by Hollywood script gurus and test the experience of writing beat by beat. We'll attempt alternative story shapes—the meander, the spiral, the wave. Then we'll write without such schemes, comparing the aesthetics of plotting, planning, and "pantsing."
- We'll consider fiction writing as a form of question-asking, as a dialogical process, and we'll practice "dead-ending," i.e. writing to a place where we have no answer.
- We'll consider inspiration and its opposite—"un-spiration"—and develop techniques for writing through boredom, anxiety, and fear.
- We'll read philosopher Thomas Nagel's "What Is It like to Be a Bat?" and try writing from animal and alien points of view. We'll read philosopher C. Thi Nguyen and consider creative writing as a game. We'll read craft essays by Edwidge Danticat (on Death), Peter Turchi (on Puzzles), and Carl Phillips (on Daring).

Overall, the course will be a sequence of generative experiments open to game creative writers of any genre.