

Mark Irwin / Taper 415

Fall 2023

University of Southern California

Office: T: 12:00-2:00 pm

TH:4-4:30 pm

**Class: Tuesday 2-4:20 pm**

**Taper Hall 107**

## ENGLISH 304: “Rag and Boneshop of the Heart”

### INTRO TO POETRY WRITING

TEXT: Diane Seuss. *franksonnets*. Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2021.

MEAD COMPOSITION BOOK: for copying poems

**FRANCE 2 & FRANCE3 Pdfs =F2 F3**

- WEEK 1**      **DICTION/SYNTAX:** The precise choice of their words & their music. Sweeney: “Little Wet Monster” **Syllabus**  
Graham: “San Sepolcro” “I Watched a Snake” Collins:  
“Intro to Poetry” **Hillman F3** “Till it Finishes What it Does” **What to write About? Getting Started.**  
**Inspiration** Free writing/notebooks  
**Photo/Ekphrastic/Memory**  
Intro to line & image in poetry. Creeley: Copy poem  
**Versification Exercise** Frost: Figure a poem makes  
Graham: V: “Over & Over Stitch,” “Opulence”
- WEEK 2**      **IMAGE/LINE** WW: C1, 12 Readings: Creeley: “I Know a Man” Graham: Selected & “The Salmon”  
Merwin Poems F2 **Birdlong: “un(dead)” syllabus**  
Yeats: “Sailing to Byzantium” Kasischke: 2 Poems  
**WORKSHOP** Estes: “Note” **syllabus**  
**5 word exercise Due. What to Put in Your Poem?**
- WEEK 3**      **FREE & FORMAL VERSE/ PROSE POETRY**  
Rhythm & Meter                      **WORKSHOP**  
Stafford: “Traveling Through the Dark” Poetry  
Foundation Website & Lowell: “For Union Dead”  
Wallace: Measuring the Line **F2**  
Pull & Drag W.C. Williams    **Begin: franksonnets**  
Sze: “Ox Head Dot” F3
- WEEK 4**      **SOUND & SENSE:** WW 7 Graham: “Opulence”  
Selected Readings: Ammons, Levine: “They Feed, They Lion” Poetry Foundation Web. Komunyakaa: “Facing It”  
Dylan Thomas **WORKSHOP** Gary Snyder Kay Ryan  
Angie Estes & continue Seuss: **franksonnets**

- WEEK 5      **SYNESTHESIA/ TEXTURE/ ILLUMINATION:**  
 Lighting the poem from the inside. Dickinson: **Selected**  
 Graham Kleinzahler, Mary Oliver WW p.33 Graham  
**One Sentence Exercise Due WORKSHOP Dickman**  
**Poems F2 / CD Wright Syllabus**  
**franksonnets p. 24**
- WEEK 6      **METAPHOR/ CONTENT: That Essential Something**  
 WW: C 2 Readings: Merwin: "Tree" Larkin, Ruefle  
 Amichai: "Lament" Bishop: **Thomas Sayers Ellis: "Or"**  
 Dickinson, Ashbery: **F2** Stafford, **Notley: FRANCE3**  
 Hass: "Meditation at Lagunitas" Milosz: "Encounter"  
 Carson poems Tate: "Distance from Loved Ones"  
**WORKSHOP Graham: FRANCE3**  
 Lowell: "For the Union Dead"  
**Pantoum/Sonnet exercise due**  
**"Post-Colonial Lovesong" Syllabus**
- WEEK 7      **METAPHOR/ CONTENT / SYMBOL & MYTH**  
 WW: C3 Yeats, Eliot, Merwin, Levine, St. John:  
**"Elegy" F2** "Iris," Tate: "Distance Loved Ones" F2  
 Ruefle: "Bunny" **F2 5 IDEA EXERCISE Due WORKSHOP**  
 Valentine: "Door in the Mountain" Kasischke poems  
 RANGE IN POETRY Milosz poems "Esse" **F3**  
 Yeats: "Sailing to Byzantium"
- WEEK 8      **TONE & GESTURE IN POETRY/ Perception**  
**Dramatic Monologue** Berryman & Plath Poems  
 Readings: St. John, Gluck, Frank O'Hara,  
 Schuyler: "Korean Mums" Tate: "Land of Little Sticks"  
 "Good Time Jesus" Dickman: "King" **F2** Ruefle poems  
 Carl Phillips poems Henri Cole poems: "Broom"  
**WORKSHOP "Romp Through Ruefleland Essay"**
- WEEK 9      **PERSPECTIVE/ POINT OF VIEW** **WORKSHOP**  
 Readings: Graham: "History" Wilner: "Girl with Bees in  
 her Hair **F3** Tate: Selected Laura Kasischke poems  
**Counterpoint Exercise: relating 3 stories Estes: "Note"**  
 Syllabus Rick Barot Poems (Handout)
- WEEK 10      **NARATIVE/ WHAT TO LEAVE OUT** **WORKSHOP**  
 DISCURSIVENESS IN POETRY: Hass: "Meditation  
 At Lagunitas" Poetry Foundation Website  
 Larry Levis: "Winter Stars" Syllabus Milosz: "Esse" **F3**  
**franksonnets**

WEEK 11	<b>EMOTIONAL AMPLITUDE / LOVING WORDS</b> <b>WW: C5</b> Auden, Komunyakaa, Dylan Thomas: "Do Not Go Gently" Plath: "Daddy" Poetry Foundation Web <b>WORKSHOP</b> Graham <b>Ekphrastic Exercise</b> <b>franksonnets</b>
WEEK 12	<b>MYSTERY IN POETRY</b> Selected Readings: Graham (Selected) Milosz Gluck: "The Garden" Ashbery: Selected Merwin: Selected Ruefle poems Carson/Creeley poems <b>"The Emergency of Poetry" Mark Irwin (essay)</b>
WEEK 13	<b>WORKSHOP</b> <b>Revision Exercise</b> Revisions of other poets Final Revisions Due Merwin: "Epitaph" Revision Xerox
WEEK 14	<b>REVISION: LEAPS &amp; CARPENTRY</b> Drafts: Yeats, Merwin, Graham: Leaping in Poetry Kasischke: "O Elegant Giant"
WEEK 15	<b>WORKSHOP</b> <b>REVIEW</b> <b>PORTFOLIO DUE</b>

**RULES:**

1. Everyone will be expected to produce at least 5 finished poems with attendant revisions.
2. Everyone will be expected to complete at least 4 of the 6 assigned exercises. Two of these may count toward your final 5 finished poems.
3. **Anyone missing more than 2 classes, unexcused, will no longer be enrolled. 2 lates = 1 absence.**
4. Everyone will be expected to make written comments on the poems work-shopped & to be well prepared for the discussions.

## Grading Breakdown

You will be graded on the technical and overall artistic quality of your poems, and also on your success at revising them. **50%**

You will also be graded on the quality of your writing exercises, which may compose part of your final 5 finished poems, all of which will be present in **your final portfolio**, which will be graded for its completeness. **35%**

Class participation will also be considered and you will be graded on the critical comments made on other poems. This is a creative class so the grading criteria are different from regular classes. Each participant will be asked to present one contemporary poem of choice, and then to argue for its passion, originality, and evocative use of language.

**15%**

## Introduction to Poetry

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,  
or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.  
But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.

Billy Collins

# Everything Good between Men and Women

BY C. D. WRIGHT

has been written in mud and butter  
and barbecue sauce. The walls and  
the floors used to be gorgeous.  
The socks off-white and a near match.  
The quince with fire blight  
but we get two pints of jelly  
in the end. Long walks strengthen  
the back. You with a fever blister  
and myself with a sty. Eyes  
have we and we are forever prey  
to each other's teeth. The torrents  
go over us. Thunder has not harmed  
anyone we know. The river coursing  
through us is dirty and deep. The left  
hand protects the rhythm. Watch  
your head. No fires should be  
unattended. Especially when wind. Each  
receives a free swiss army knife.  
The first few tongues are clearly  
preparatory. The impression  
made by yours I carry to my grave. It is  
just so sad so creepy so beautiful.  
Bless it. We have so little time  
to learn, so much... The river  
courses dirty and deep. Cover the lettuce.  
Call it a night. O soul. Flow on. Instead.

C. D. Wright, "Everything Good between Men and Women" from *Steal Away: New and Selected Poems*. Copyright © 2002 by C. D. Wright.

## (un)dead

Does anyone else, while they're watching  
the video of the cop shooting the black  
man/boy/person on the internet

pause the video right before it ends?  
I do—It doesn't matter if it's the one  
with Tamir or Oscar.

Sometimes, right before it gets to the end  
I'll stop it, then hit rewind—It's always bizarre  
witnessing the body rise and the cop

retreat, climb back into their car  
before fleeing in reverse. Likewise, it is  
strangely beautiful to see the snow

(un)red as the bullet exits the (un)dead  
body and return into the barrel's black,  
the boy/man/person now standing,

walking. Does anyone else laugh  
or manage a mischievous smile  
imagining the look on death's face?

Bryan Byrdlong

## Terra Incognita

I plugged my poem into a manhole cover  
That flamed into the first guitar,  
Jarred the asphalt and tar to ash,  
And made from where there once was  
Ground a sound instead to stand on.

--Rowan Ricardo Phillips

## Extract from Postcolonial Love Poem

I've been taught bloodstones can cure a snakebite,  
Can stop the bleeding – most people forgot this  
when the war ended. The war ended  
depending on which war you mean: those we started,  
before those, millennia ago and onward,  
those which started me, which I lost and won –  
these ever-blooming wounds.

I was built by wage. So I wage love and worse –  
always another campaign to march across  
a desert night for the cannon flash of your pale skin  
settling in a silver lagoon of smoke at your breast.

I dismount my dark horse, bend to you there, deliver you  
The hard pull of all my thirsts –

I learned *Drink* in a country of drought.  
We pleasure to hurt, leave marks

The size of stones – each a cabochon polished  
by our mouths. I, your lapidary, your lapidary wheel  
turning – green mottled red –  
the jaspers of our desires.

There are wildflowers in my desert  
which take up to twenty years to bloom.

The seeds sleep like geodes beneath hot feldspar sand



until a flash flood bolts the arroyo, lifting them  
in its copper current, opens them with memory –  
they remember what their god whispered  
into their ribs: *Wake up and ache for your life.*  
*America faces an end*

Natalie Diaz

## The Bunny Gives Us a Lesson in Eternity

We are a sad people, without hats.  
The history of our nation is tragically benign.  
We like to watch the rabbits screwing in the graveyard.  
We are fond of the little bunny with the bent ear  
who stands alone in the moonlight  
reading what little text there is on the graves.  
He looks quite desirable like that.  
He looks like the center of the universe.  
Look how his mouth moves mouthing the words  
while the others are busy making more of him.  
Soon the more will ask of him to write their love  
letters and he will oblige, using the language  
of our ancestors, those poor clouds in the ground,  
beloved by us who have been standing here for hours,  
a proud people after all.

--(Mary Ruefle 69)

Chad Sweeney

**Little Wet Monster**

*for our unborn son*

The cornfield winds its halo darkly  
Come home my little wet monster

Time in the copper mine, time in the copper  
Come darkling soon come woe my monster

Distance shines in the ice like a flower  
Come early little bornling

Before the furlight's gone from going  
Come rowing soon, come wet my monster

Before the bloodtrees bramble over  
Come low my rainweed monster

Come antler through the gates my thingling  
Your grapes contain the houses

Unmask the stones my darkling grief  
Come whole my homeward early

You alone devour the night  
Gather in your teeth, my zero

You devour the night's holy sound  
Come home my little wet monster

## LARRY LEVIS

## Winter Stars

My father once broke a man's hand  
 Over the exhaust pipe of a John Deere tractor. The man,  
 Ruben Vasquez, wanted to kill his own father  
 With a sharpened fruit knife, and he held  
 The curved tip of it, lightly, between his first  
 Two fingers, so it could slash  
 Horizontally, & with surprising grace,  
 Across a throat. It was like a glinting beak in a hand,  
 And, for a moment, the light held still  
 On those vines. When it was over,  
 My father simply went in & ate lunch, & then, as always,  
 Lay alone in the dark, listening to music.  
 He never mentioned it.

I never understood how anyone could risk his life,  
 Then listen to Vivaldi.

Sometimes, I go out into this yard at night,  
 And stare through the wet branches of an oak  
 In winter, & realize I am looking at the stars  
 Again. A thin haze of them, shining  
 And persisting.

It used to make me feel lighter, looking up at them.  
 In California, that light was closer.  
 In a California no one will ever see again,  
 My father is beginning to die. Something  
 Inside him is slowly taking back  
 Every word it ever gave him.  
 Now, if we try to talk, I watch my father  
 Search for a lost syllable as if it might  
 Solve everything, & though he can't remember, now,  
 The word for it, he is ashamed...  
 If you can think of the mind as a place continually  
 Visited, a whole city placed behind

The eyes, & shining, I can imagine, now, its end—  
 As when the lights go off, one by one,  
 In a hotel at night, until at last  
 All of the travelers will be asleep, or until  
 Even the thin glow from the lobby is a kind  
 Of sleep; & while the woman behind the desk  
 Is applying more lacquer to her nails,  
 You can almost believe that elevator,  
 As it ascends, must open upon starlight.

I stand out on the street, & do not go in.  
 That was our agreement, at my birth.

And for years I believed  
 That what went unsaid between us became empty,  
 And pure, like starlight, & that it persisted.

I got it all wrong.  
 I wound up believing in words the way a scientist  
 Believes in carbon, after death.

Tonight, I'm talking to you, father, although  
 It is quiet here in the Midwest, where a small wind,  
 The size of a wrist, wakes the cold again—  
 Which may be all that's left of you & me.

When I left home at seventeen, I left for good.

That pale haze of stars goes on & on,  
 Like laughter that has found a final, silent shape  
 On a black sky. It means everything  
 It cannot say. Look, it's empty out there, & cold.  
 Cold enough to reconcile  
 Even a father, even a son. ■

## POETRY CRITIQUE GUIDELINES

In addition to class discussions and assignments, written critiques of student poems should be completed prior to workshops. Criticisms should ask:

1. Did the form of the poem reinforce the poem's content?
2. Was the poem beautiful, or purposefully not beautiful? Specifically how?
3. Did the poem use language in an original, fresh sense that heightened content?
4. Was the poem memorable? Why? How?
5. Was the point of view (or the perspective) of the subject matter compelling?
6. Were you moved by the poem?
7. Did the poem seem true, sincere? What does that mean?
8. How would you improve the poem?
9. Did the poem achieve a form of "separation" in voice, madness, or music?
10. Did the poem create tension or instill a great sense of peace through the relationship of the words to one another?
11. What is art?

**Town of Finding Out About the Love of God**

I had made a mistake.  
Before this day.  
Now my suitcase is ready.  
Two hardboiled eggs.  
For the journey are stored.  
In places where.  
My eyes were.  
Like a current.  
Carrying a twig.  
The sobbing made me.  
Audible to you.

(Anne Carson 102)

**Passage**

In autumn in this same life  
I was leaving a capital  
where an old animal  
captured in its youth  
one that in the wild  
would never have reached such an age  
was watching the sun set  
over nameless  
unapproachable trees  
and it is spring

--W.S. Merwin

## Note

They wrote to say they'd found my mother *wondering*  
*in the garage*—like entering the ethereal sphere,  
 I thought: *drawing near to its desire, so deeply*  
*is our intellect immersed that memory*  
*cannot follow after it*, as if desire were a fugitive  
 dye made from the blue stars of the forget-me-  
 not and hell could be defined as that which cannot be  
 forgotten, the damned condemned to go on  
 like Paolo and Francesca in desire but unable to  
 recognize what could move them so

\* \* \*

When I was a child, my mittens were attached  
 to each other, their cord running under  
 my coat from hand to hand like the blue (no stanza break)  
 veins in the clear plastic Invisible  
 Man I assembled in the basement, and after  
 he left assisted living, my friend's father  
 kept asking, What if my mother dies  
 again? What, I thought, if she slips off  
 like a glove

\* \* \*

In paradise,  
 Dante says, we will have only a memory  
 of having a memory, now lost  
 like the photograph of my mother's great



grandfather printed from a negative made  
from a photograph of a negative, which we  
Xeroed for keeps: it's the same old  
story of the Perseids, their gray hair  
streaking the sky the way ethereal  
is streaked by real

\* \* \*

Like denizens  
of the cadenza, cicadas scratching  
their cicatrices, a star shines until day  
begins to lighten the sky, the shining  
gone through the star remains, not  
shining but not yet gone, still  
moving across the heavens right up  
to the moment the sky turns  
sky blue. <sup>2</sup>

Angie Estes

## ***Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems***

### **Academic Integrity:**

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](https://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Support Systems:**

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The

new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call  
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.