

## Workshops Offered by Jessica Jacobs & Nickole Brown

*Poets Jessica Jacobs and Nickole Brown, who have been married since 2013, regularly travel together to give readings and often teach (and co-teach) a number of generative, craft, and publishing intensives to a wide range of students at all levels.*

*They have taught together in a range of venues, from Poets House in New York and The Poetry Center at Smith College to Eastern Carolina University and the Writing Workshops in Greece.*

*There is no required reading for any of these workshops; handouts, accompanied by related generative prompts, will be provided. The workshops can be as short as two hours but can be extended to continue over the course of several days. An ideal group size will not exceed 12 participants, but there is some flexibility depending on the chosen course.*

*Below is a list of their offerings. For more information, feel free to reach out to them:*

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### **Four Workshops Co-Led by Nickole & Jessica:**

#### **Re-cognition and Re-vision: Pushing the Boundaries of Your Poems**

Writers often place a hard line between the acts of writing and revising. While the first is seen as an act of joyful inspiration, the second is generally viewed as drudging perspiration. This workshop focuses on specific elements of poetry such as tone, metaphor, imagery, form, and sound to walk students through a step-by-step process by which they can revise their poems, with the goal of infusing revision with the creative energy that accompanies writing early drafts. This straightforward, pragmatic workshop will be most helpful to writers currently working on drafts of existing poems.

#### **Coming Back to Your Senses: Writing with Awareness**

With so much of our lives spent in the disembodied world online, this poetry intensive will focus on reconnecting you to your senses, encouraging greater awareness of yourself and your environment, and strengthening your poems by helping them sing with the texture of the well-observed world. Through a combination of close-readings of writers both old and new, generative exercises, and traditional workshops, this course will help writers refresh their senses and descriptive powers through a deep practice of awareness and an unflinching dedication to scrubbing away one's preconceived notions of a thing in order to see it anew.

#### **Writing Beyond Yourself: The Art & Craft of Persona Poems**

"Write what you know:" This most common of writing advice can also be the most confining. So why limit yourself? After first exploring how writers like Natasha Trethewey, Patricia Smith, and Sharon Olds take on the voices of others in order to speak about the issues most dear to them (looking out to look within), a series of generative prompts will invite you to take on others' lives and voices, to write from perspectives, time periods, and even genders not your own. Led by Jessica

Jacobs, whose collection *Pelvis with Distance* pushes past the legend of the artist Georgia O’Keeffe to find the woman beneath, and Nickole Brown, whose collection *Fanny Says* explores the voice and history of her grandmother, this workshop will guide you through the process of imagination and research required to write a life outside your own, giving you a set of solid craft techniques to find the voices of everyone from celebrities to family members.

### **Promoting Your First Book of Poems**

A practical talk about what it takes to get a book out into the world and the steps debut authors might need to take should their first publisher be an independent with limited marketing resources. For ten years Nickole Brown served as publicist for Sarabande, worked as publicist for Arktoi Books, is now Editor of the Marie Alexander Poetry Series. Jessica Jacobs worked as a Senior Acquisitions Editor at Wiley and now serves as the Associate Editor of *Beloit Poetry Journal*, directing publicity for the journal’s new chapbook series. To support Nickole’s second collection and Jessica’s first, the two toured together for nearly six months, giving over 50 readings and garnering reviews in outlets including *Publishers Weekly* and *O Magazine’s* “Oprah’s Circle of Friends.” Drawing on these experiences, they will walk aspiring authors through the steps they can take to see that their first book makes it into the hands of readers.

### **Five Workshops and Craft Talks Led by Nickole:**

#### **Me Too: Writing Your Way Through (and Out of) Childhood Sexual Abuse**

How to write the fragmented, charged, often shameful memory of childhood sexual abuse in a way that isn’t mired in self-pity, rage, or the standard-issue language of confession? And how to excavate a history half- or mis- remembered, as early trauma often is? What are the pitfalls when writing becomes therapy and publishing becomes public? How can you get yourself to a place of clarity in order to fortify yourself with strategies of craft and narrative distance to make the mess of memory into art? In the heat of the “Me Too” movement, open discussions about sexual harassment of any type is essential, but abuse that happens in childhood comes with very specific and complicated issues, and poet Nickole Brown will draw upon her experience as a survivor writing *Sister*, a collection of poems published over ten years ago that she doesn’t hesitate to say once saved her life. This workshop is intended as a guide—or even just a first step—to help participants in all stages of healing and with all levels of writing experience to find their own words, and ultimately, the courage to heal.

#### **Writing in the Age of Loneliness: Eco-Literature & the Writer’s Task**

We are now in the throes of a sixth mass extinction of plants and animals. Some call it the Anthropocene, but biologist E.O. Wilson said it may be called by scientists and poets alike the Eremozoic, meaning “The Age of Loneliness.” If we take the worries of climate change and habitat destruction seriously—and in this lonely age potentially bereft of our fellow creatures—how can we help but feel an incapacitating sense of hopelessness that threatens to render things like literature and poems utterly useless? In this intensive, we’ll strive together to find ways past this potentially debilitating hurdle. We’ll ask questions that instead of silencing ourselves will urge us on: What is

our responsibility as writers to this epoch? Can the average working person with limited access to nature make any difference? How might we depict the suffering of non-human but sentient beings? How can one write about plants and animals without producing work that is sentimental, overly personified, flat-lined with facts, or, worse, rendered incapable of communicating from its own rage? What impact can we make with our words? Depending on the time we have together, we'll study poems, lyric essays, and stories that have their own solutions to these pitfalls and will try our hands at writing through this darkness with awareness, control, and yes, even hope.

### **Genre-Bending: Limning the Borders Between Poetry, Fiction, and Prose**

“Where the boundary between prose & poetry lies, I shall never be able to understand. . . Poetry is verse: prose is not verse. Or else poetry is everything with the exception of business documents and school text books.” Leo Tolstoy wrote this over a hundred years ago, and not only did he not find an answer to this conundrum, writers are still today debating this predicament of genre. So, what happens when the barriers of form are broken down, when poetry is knocked from its pedestal, so to speak, and the pragmatics of prose are finessed to carry the lyricism of poetry? What happens when the democratic, accessible form of prose is dressed up in the garb of poetry? What word experiments and subversions and surrealistic meanderings can ensue? Or when the expectations of genres are mixed? In this workshop, we'll explore these questions. This liminal, uncharted space between forms and genres is the focus of this workshop that will study experiments in literature—prose poetry, novels-in-verse/essay, and hybrid work—for a deeper understanding of what's possible. Poet Nickole Brown will draw on her experience writing two hybrid books—*Sister*, a novel-in-poems, and *Fanny Says*, a biography-in-poems—as well as her many years working as Editor of the Marie Alexander Series in Poetry to lead a discussion and generative writing exercise.

### **Teaching by Design: Using Imitation in the Classroom**

Dancers follow choreographers, visual artists try to copy great works of art or to replicate a subject placed in the middle of a studio, vocalists and players of musical instruments all learn pieces composed by others. So why should writers be any different? Why this immense pressure to write unlike anything else that's ever been inked? Why wouldn't poets need to be taught as apprentices, modeling their work after others until they master the craft? As Nicholas Delbanco mentions in his introduction to *The Sincerest Form*, sincere imitation—imitation that truly emulates a poet's original work and uses it as a starting place—can help a writer to "earn" her own originality. This talk, designed for teachers of writing, Poet Nickole Brown will draw on her ten years of experience using this pedagogical tool and will then guide participants through their own imitative exercise.

### **Independent Publishing 101**

*Independent. Nonprofit. Literary.* What do each of these words mean in the world of publishing? Why would a press decide to become a nonprofit enterprise? And what are the key differences between such a press and a larger, corporate house? What effect do these two forces have on the literary world at large? Drawing on her ten years of experience working at Sarabande Books, her three years with Arktoi Books, and her current work with the Marie Alexander Series at White Pine, Nickole Brown will answer some of these questions and share some of the successes (and challenges) of publishing poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction from an independent press. This talk would be

informative for those wanting to start their own press or simply wanting to understand how independent publishing works.

### **Five Workshops and Craft Talks Led by Jessica:**

#### **The Poet Confronts History: The Art of Research for Creative Writing**

In a time when we're screaming at each other across massive ideological divides, the creative, compassionate act of writing from research feels more vital than ever. When done well, such writing demands we explore voices and viewpoints not our own, demands we act with *empathy*, looking at others—even those with whom we disagree—with not judgement but a desire to understand and even find possible points of agreement. Based in the experience of researching and writing *Pelvis with Distance*, a biography-in-poems of the artist Georgia O'Keeffe, Jessica Jacobs will discuss the practices that were most useful in finding her way in to O'Keeffe's world, finding the permission needed to inhabit her voice, and how to break free from the straight-jacket of facts to allow poems to live and breathe on the page.

#### **Blah, Blah, Love; Blah, Blah, Joy: Why Joyful Poems Are So Damn Hard to Write & Some Strategies for Doing It Anyway**

For most readers, it's far easier to write a successful elegy than an ode. The ponderous nature of sorrow slows us to the point we can write its details with texture and precision; the contemplative quality of grief and contrition forces us to ruminate on our regrets until we know them cold. But joy is such a rush that when we try to get it down on paper, we all too often resort to cliché to try and capture the elusive blur already fading from memory. In this talk, Jessica Jacobs, whose second collection is a record of the joys and challenges of early marriage, will provide strategies for allowing happiness to live and breathe on the page, strategies based in close readings of poems by Ross Gay, Matthew Olzmann, Dorianne Laux, and Laure-Anne Bosselaar.

*\*\*This topic can also be led as a workshop:*

#### **Blah, Blah, Love: Pushing Past Clichés in Love Poems**

So much of our self-definition rests on who we love and desire, as well as all those loves lost. But when trying to translate those honest sentences—"I love you," "I want you"—into a poem, so much of the meaning is lost in the sad static of cliché and unearned sentimentality. Drawing on the poems of writers like Dorianne Laux, Matthew Olzmann, and Sharon Olds, this workshop will help you ground your love poems in the rough, vibrant texture of the world (and maybe even help you get a date . . .).

#### **How to Sing the Body Electric: The Art & Joy of Embodied Writing**

When so many poems begin with a sedentary poet gazing out a window, it's no wonder poems can often feel so intellectual and abstract that they seem to have no real connection to our experience of the real, lived world. In this talk, poet Jessica Jacobs will discuss how her own experiences as a long-distance runner and multi-sport athlete feed her creative life and inform and enrich her poems. Through close readings of poems by writers like Jean Nordhaus, Aracelis Girmay, Stephen Dunn,

and Ross Gay, she'll highlight ways in which physical observation and image can be used to animate and ground even the most complex questions and ideas.

### **Writing Through Conflict**

In this workshop, after a discussion of ways to approach those moments or events that sometimes feel too difficult to fully think about let alone put on the page, a multi-part writing prompt will help you build a foundation of facts before feelings, from which you will then be guided to consider multiple perspectives—enabling you to write through conflict with both nuance and power, as well as empathy and compassion for yourself and others.