I’m not entirely willing to limit art’s inquiries to three, but Lanchester’s questions offer a pretty good outline of how we’ll approach this term’s work. We’ll look at questions of authorial position and authorial involvement, and as we do so we’ll refrain from losing ourselves in fiction’s vivid continuous dream. We’ll investigate writers’ strategies to figure out what—in tactical, practical, procedural terms—is going on.

I. WRITING

This is not a conventional workshop course, heavy on independent work and group critique. Rather, it’s more of a craft course, a literary exploration tailored to the concerns of the working writer. The emphasis will be on exercises, and as with all exercises, the point is to play and experiment, to stretch new muscles rather than flex those that are already strong. Only you can know if you are truly taking chances or playing to your own abilities, but you should know that our class discussions will privilege invention and ingenuity, even to the point of some raggedness. If your work over the course of the term hits the same notes over and over again, you may be missing the point.

Each week a simple exercise will be assigned. Many of these will be short, and I doubt any will run beyond two pages. But because the exercises are apparently undemanding, I’d like you to take them seriously. Write a draft, then examine your methods. You may want to look at the assignment again. Revise; clarify. Make the language stronger, the images more cogent, the emotional life more daring. In other words, if you dash this work off, you’re doing it wrong.

A further clarification: a fair number of these assignments will involve poetry. You will begin with simple syllable counting and move through accentual syllabic verse to composing a fully rhymed and metered sonnet in our thirteenth week.

I believe all prose writers benefit from some practice of poetry; I’ll go over my reasons for this at our first class. That said, I know that some students find poetry forbidding, so every effort will be made to pace ourselves and to keep the poetic discourse fun. I do expect each of you to attempt these assignments, and I hope you’ll enjoy them and find them an intriguing challenge, but I don’t expect you to become an overnight Auden or Donne. Do the best you can, and if you’re having trouble, please see me.

At the end of the term you’ll submit a longer piece as a final project. Most of you will likely write complete short stories or other prose narratives (though the assignment is open), and I’d like each of you to employ strategies like those we’ll look at this term. Please make every effort to avoid the conventional and to break out of your comfort zones, and bring this piece to your highest level of polish; for this reason, you should not leave the assignment until the last minute. A statement of purpose and revisions of two exercises will accompany your submission.

Finally, one last written assignment, due in November. Attend a public literary event and create a one-page reaction—using the term reaction extremely loosely. Your page may be a response in kind, a dramatic monologue, biting satire, tragic screenplay, lavish Broadway musical, power point presentation or anything else you can dream up, but not a straight review or critique.
Please note:
It goes without saying that all writing you submit for this course must be your own. (An exception will be made for creative work that is metafictional or pointedly collaged out of found texts, but even in these cases the writer’s intention should be clear and the attributions made available to the reader.) Speak to me if you have questions about this policy; suspected plagiarism will be handled in accordance with Gallatin’s student discipline rules and the following statement, reprinted by departmental request:

“As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html) for a full description of the academic integrity policy.”

Please also note:
It’s essential that you do the courtesy of proofreading your work before offering it to me or your fellow students. I recommend printing out a hard copy for proofreading, rather than attempting to do so onscreen. Sloppy manuscripts arouse everyone’s ire.

II. READING

As a graduate level course, this course is heavy on reading. At times you will be reading a book a week, and it may be necessary for some of you to pace yourselves and work ahead. Please think seriously about the readings, and come to class prepared to thoroughly discuss. Here are some starting points:

Because this is a course in narrative strategies, think strategically. What choices has the author made, whether in the imagining of scenes and introduction of characters or in questions of style and diction? How are these choices serving the story? What are the liabilities of such decisions, and how are they resolved?

What is the author doing formally? (Can you describe it?) How is basic necessary information limned in? What about more flexible elements, like theme?

What is the relationship between author and reader? How is that relationship achieved?

Work considered will be primarily fiction, nonfiction and poetry, but will include a graphic novel, two films, and perhaps other media. Some readings will be available as handouts or on the course blackboard site; books to be purchased, in the order that we’ll read them, are as follows. (You may use other editions.)

Alfred Corn: The Poem’s Heartbeat (Copper Canyon Press)
Damon Galgut: In a Strange Room (Europa Editions)
Gertrude Stein: The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (Vintage)
Marjane Satrapi: Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (Pantheon; note: only the first volume (red) is required)
Ryszard Kapuscinski: Shah of Shahs (Penguin Books)
Vladimir Nabokov: Pale Fire (Random House)
Nicholson Baker: The Mezzanine (Grove Press)
Vikram Seth: The Golden Gate (Vintage)
III. CLASS PARTICIPATION

You are expected to join in every classroom discussion; a portion of your final grade is keyed to participation. Whether we’re discussing the course reading or student exercises or something presented in class, please take the opportunity to join the discourse at all stages of the class.

Occasionally I’ll ask that exercises be shared. If for some reason you’re uncomfortable reading your work aloud, just let me know. I do expect you to turn in all assignments.

At least twice during the term, you will bring the week’s exercise in and present it to the class. These presentations can be short, but I’d like you to include an explanation of your methods, including points of inspiration, points of difficulty, ways the work shifted in process, how it did or did not surprise you, and so on. Put some thought into how you discuss these issues so you do not waste our time. At least two students will formally present at each class, but others are always invited to share their work as well. In most cases the student presenters will get their work to me before class so I can make copies for the group.

When commenting on fellow students’ work, please be aware that there’s a human being beyond the page. Writers are natural egotists (and depressives!), and most of us invest significantly in our work, even if we don’t pull off every attempt. That’s especially true in a class where experiment is encouraged. If you find it necessary to tell someone a hard truth (a particular tactic isn’t working, the payoff is unsurprising, or a certain character strains credulity), remember that it behooves us to be precise and clear in our criticism and to avoid undue wounding.

No matter what you say, think before you speak, and please be clear and concise. Our time together is short, and a moment’s reflection will benefit both you and your listeners.

IV. ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory, and absences are strongly discouraged.

If you miss a class, you remain responsible for all reading and writing assignments. If you miss your date to present an exercise, let me know in advance (if possible), and make arrangements to reschedule. If you miss more than three classes, you will not pass the course.

Emergencies, of course, are a different matter. If you are unable to fulfill your responsibilities due to a personal or family emergency, please contact me at your earliest convenience so we can accommodate everyone’s needs.

V. CLASSROOM DECORUM

I expect you to be on time to class and to pay attention during our sessions. Don’t carry on private conversations while others are speaking. You may leave the classroom for personal reasons, but please minimize these interruptions. Cell phones and other devices should be turned off during class. Do not step out of the room to make phone calls or conduct personal business. I also prefer that you leave your laptops closed during class. Each class session will include a short break midway through.

VI. OFFICE HOURS

Feel free to schedule private conferences with me as needed. I’m happy to discuss your work, the mystery of writing, the progress of the course and a variety of other topics. I will be in my office at 5pm on class days, but if that’s impossible for you, let me know, and we’ll work something else out. I do my best to be available to students, though I am generally not around on weekends. I’m also available to read rewrites and other extracurricular work.

VI. GRADES
I do not expect this to be a difficult course. The exercises require mostly care and engagement and will be marked somewhat casually with a √, √+ or √-. Other evaluations will key to my sense of the student's involvement.

Final grades are based on the following factors:
- Completion of all exercises plus two revisions
- Final project, assignment to be described later
- Class participation

Grading one’s fellow human beings is never agreeable, and in the past, students have sometimes said they were mystified about their class standing. That’s not my intention, so if you’d like to know this kind of information, feel free to ask.
Section ELEC-GG 2545 Fall, 2011 e-mail: davekingwriter@gmail.com
Wednesdays, 6:20-9pm, room 401, 1 Washington Place tel: 718 834 0382, cel 917 971 6216
Office hours Wednesdays 5-6pm and by appointment office 403, 1 Washington Place

**Course Schedule (subject to change)**

**Wednesday, Sep 7**
Course introduction; instructor and student introductions; creation of schedule
Robert Frost: “For Once, Then, Something”

**PART I: The First Person**

**Wednesday, Sep 14**
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Preface & Introduction
Ali Smith: “True Short Story”
Steven Millhauser: “Eisenheim the Illusionist”
John Gardner: “Basic Skills, Genre and Fiction as Dream” (selected paragraphs)
Assignment due: Two prose paragraphs, one descriptive, one narrative
Heather McHugh: “What he Thought” (in class)
Carolyn Forché: “The Colonel” (in class)

**Wednesday, Sep 21**
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 1 – Line and Stress
Damon Galgut: “The Follower” from *In a Strange Room*
Elizabeth Bishop: “The Fish” (in class)
Assignment due: Rewrite paragraphs in lines of ten syllables each

**Wednesday, Sep 28**
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 2 – Accentual-Syllabic Verse
Gertrude Stein: Selection from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*
Assignment due: a short narrative told using nontraditional grammatical or syntactic means

**PART II: Inspiration**

**Wednesday, Oct 5**
Marjane Satrapi: *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*
Su Friedrich: *Sink or Swim* (in class; film)
Gertrude Stein: Selections from “Tender Buttons” (in class)
Ten lines of unrhymed iambic pentameter

**Wednesday, Oct 12**
Ryszard Kapuscinski: *Shah of Sháhs*
Assignment due: Skeleton of a story told graphically; focus on image and dialogue

**Wednesday, Oct 19**
Jim Shepard: Various stories TBD
Oliver Sacks: “A Surgeon’s Life” from *An Anthropologist on Mars*
Robert Frost: “The Death of the Hired Man” and “Out, Out” (in class)
Assignment due: Short narrative inspired by a collection or grouping of any kind

**PART III: Commentary**

**Wednesday, Oct 26**
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 3 – Metrical Variation
Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”
Edgar Allen Poe: “The Raven” (in class)
Assignment due: Short narrative including a public (historical or political) event or issue
Wednesday, Nov 2
Vladimir Nabokov: *Pale Fire*
Assignment due: Three quatrains rhyming ABAB, tetrameter or pentameter AND/OR at least 20 lines in ballad form

Wednesday, Nov 9
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 4: Phonic Echo
Nicholson Baker: *The Mezzanine*
Assignment due: A narrative in which the reporter or observer is a participant or has a stake in the proceedings
Assignment due: response to a public literary event

PART IV: Form

DATE TBD: Make-up class
Alfred Corn: *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, Chapter 5: Stanza
2nd reading TBD
Assignment due: TBD
Wednesday, Nov 16
Alfred Corn: The Poem’s Heartbeat, Chapter 6: Verseforms
Amy Hempel: “Weekend,” “The Uninvited,” and other stories TBD
Kenneth Anger: Fireworks (in class; film)
Assignment due: sonnet
Student Presenter: Ramsey Chahine
Student Presenter: Madeleine Pryor
Student Presenter: Annie DeVito

Wednesday, Nov 23 THANKSGIVING EVE; no class

Wednesday, Nov 30
Vikram Seth: The Golden Gate
Assignment due: a piece of writing in which sensation is especially present; consider also working outside conventional chronology
Faculty evaluation forms
Student Presenter: Tonantzín Esperanza
Student Presenter: Michele Berninger
Student Presenter: Alisa Houghton

Wednesday, Dec 7
David Foster Wallace: “Octet”
Lorrie Moore: “How to Become a Writer”
Final Assignment due: long open assignment involving some form of experimentation; also author’s statement of purpose
All other assignments due, including public reading
Wrap-up

Remember: Interest generates interest.