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FDGA Report for Creative Activity

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# DISQUIET International Literary Program

## Lisbon, Portugal

From June 22 to July 6, 2019, I attended the DISQUIET International Literary Program in Lisbon, Portugal. During the two weeks of the DISQUIET Program, I participated in a core Fiction Workshop on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings; attended literary readings and editing panels in the afternoons and evenings; and engaged in events to foster appreciation of Portuguese history and culture.

My core Fiction Workshop was taught by Jenny Offill, award-winning author of the novels *Last Things* and *Dept. of Speculation*. During the workshop, I received feedback on two key sections of my in-progress manuscript, a collection of short stories linked by the presence of “monsters.” Offill and other workshop participants confirmed strengths in my story submissions and offered clear suggestions for development (which I have already worked to incorporate since returning from the DISQUIET Program). In workshop, we were also given daily assignments meant to inspire ideas for writing and to engage with Lisbon around us: *find something that others would consider ugly but that you find beautiful, find your doppelganger, find a color and follow it around the city for twenty minutes*. Being part of Offill’s workshop, I appreciated the attention that she dedicated to issues of craft, isolating moments in each participant’s fiction to discuss in the abstract, why something works, why something doesn’t, and what can make something work better from a rhetoric perspective.

Another highpoint of the program was an afternoon editing session led by Emily Nemens, editor of *The Paris Review*. During this session Nemens described her own history as an editor and writer and discussed the acquisition process under her leadership. She then shared a draft of a nonfiction manuscript by the writer Claire Vaye Watkins that we engaged as a group, offering editing insights, complemented by Nemens’ own, before she shared the published version of the essay, which was radically different from the initial draft.

During the program, I attended literary readings by Jenny Offill, Jacinto Lucas Pires, Susana Moreira Marques, and Justin Torres, as well as the Open Mic where participants read from their fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. Also noteworthy was that the workshop, readings, and events were hosted by literary and cultural locales throughout Lisbon: the Centro Nacional de Cultura, the Loreto Palace, the Livraria Ferin, the Gremio Literario, the Jose Saramago Foundation, and the Luso-American Development Foundation. This became a great way to experience the city’s beautiful architectural spaces, outside and inside.

My work as a fiction writer has direct impact on the writing courses that I teach at FIT: EN301 Imaginative Worlds, EN361 Creative Writing, EN363 Fiction Writing and EN390 The Uncanny. As a teacher, I draw on my own experiences—both successes and failures—to share with my students as part of our ongoing dialogue about writing. Engaging with other working writers provides me with new texts to share with my students. I also find that the experience of being in a writing workshop—as a student, as opposed to its teacher—is a valuable reminder of the humility and vulnerability it takes to share one’s writing with others and to hear it discussed, with the goal of moving both the writing and the writer forward.