

## ENGLISH 200: INTRODUCTION TO POETRY WRITING

Fall Semester 2012

Tu/Th 12:30–1:45 PM, Buckman 216

---

Dr. Caki Wilkinson  
Phone: x3426  
Email: wilkinsonc@rhodes.edu

Office: Palmer 304  
Office hours: M/T/W 2:00–3:00 PM, and by appt.

### TEXTS

Harmon, William, ed. *The Poetry Toolkit*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

McClatchy, J.D., ed. *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Vintage Books, 2003.

“As a rule, the sign that a beginner has a genuine original talent is that he is more interested in playing with words than in saying something original; his attitude is that of the old lady, quoted by E.M. Forster—‘How can I know what I think until I see what I say?’”

– W.H. Auden

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to help participants broaden their understanding and appreciation of the craft of poetry. Bearing in mind that the English word poetry derives from the Greek *poēsis* (an act of “making” or “producing”), we will approach writing as a means of producing ideas rather than simply expressing them. Throughout the semester we will be, as Auden put it, “playing with words,” and our work will focus on elements of poetry such as diction, rhythm, images, and arrangement. We will read a large sampling of contemporary poetry; we will do a lot of writing, from weekly exercises to more polished poems; we will discuss this writing in a workshop format; we will learn how to make it better.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Eight writing exercises
- Six poems and a final portfolio
- A poetic catalog consisting of ten reading lists
- Memorization of fourteen lines of poetry

**Writing exercises.** You will be assigned writing exercises nearly every week for the first half of the semester. These exercises will push you to experiment with different registers and forms, and they will serve as a springboard for later poems.

**Poems and final portfolio.** Over the course of the semester, you will submit six poems. The first two, developed from your writing exercises, will be due at midterm; the other four will be

staggered over the remaining weeks, and a good chunk of our time will be spent discussing and critiquing them in workshop. At the end of the semester you will submit a portfolio that includes these six poems in their original form (with my comments) and four substantial revisions. For each of your revisions you will include a 2-3 paragraph description of your writing process; for example, you might consider the reasons you changed the poem from its original version and the specific techniques you used, or you might describe the decisions you made about line lengths, verb tense, voice, and so forth.

**Poetic catalog.** Reading like a poet means paying close (microscopic!) attention to the inner workings of poems—and, more specifically, to the ways other poets use language. With this in mind, you will construct ten separate lists made up of poetic elements you find surprising or appealing in the poems you read. Your lists will be divided into the following categories (note that the required number of entries varies for each list):

- Concrete images (15)
- Figurative language (esp. similes and metaphors; label accordingly) (20)
- Effective line breaks (15)
- Sounds effects (esp. assonance, consonance, and alliteration; label accordingly) (15)
- Useful adjectives (10)
- Strange or startling first/last lines (label accordingly) (10)
- “Descriptive” Verbs (10)
- Three additional lists with headings of your choosing (10/list)

The key is to add to these lists *as you read*. With respect to format, you do not need to explain why you chose a particular entry (though you are welcome to do so); all you need to do is list the line(s), the poet, and the name of the poem. An entry for a line break list should look like this:

- 1) “For they live / only in the kingdom / of suspended wishes . . .”  
Kay Ryan, “Mirage Oases”

An entry for a figurative language list should look like this:

- 1) “my brothers huddled like stones” – simile  
Yusef Komunyakaa, “April Fools’ Day”

Lists will be collected twice, at midterm and at the end of the semester.

★ All work must be typed, and assignments must be submitted at the beginning of class on the scheduled due date. I not accept late work unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand; the same goes for work sent through email. Late assignments will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter grade per day (from A to A-, from A- to B+, and so forth). Assignments received more than a week late will receive an F.

**Memorization.** You will memorize at least fourteen lines of poetry (a short poem or a few stanzas of a longer one). Recitations will take place on November 20.

## Workshop

I have divided the class into three groups, and we will workshop one group nearly every week. The class before your group is up for workshop, you will bring in copies of your exercise/poem to distribute to the class. Please be sure to make a copy for yourself.

Prior to workshop, members of the class will read the exercises/poems in that week's group and write a critique of each piece that takes the form of a letter addressed to the author; you will distribute these letters to their respective authors at the end of class. Each letter should be roughly half of a double-spaced page in length. The focus of your critique will change depending on the week's assignment, and we will talk more about these procedures during the first weeks of the semester.

## Participation

A workshop cannot succeed unless everyone in the class participates; even if you are the quiet type, I will count on you to contribute to class discussions. Likewise, you are expected to complete your reading, to critique the work of your peers with diligence and respect, and to come to class with all the required materials (poems for workshop, handouts, both books, and so forth). Failure to do any of these things will result in a lower participation grade.

Additionally, I may give quizzes. We will read a lot of poems each week, and we may not be able to discuss them all in class. Quizzes will help me keep track of your progress. These will be short (3-5 questions), and if you have done the reading you should not have trouble passing them. If you fail a quiz, you will be marked as absent for the day.

## POLICIES

### Attendance

You are allowed three absences, excused or otherwise. For each absence after the third, your final grade will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter grade. If you miss more than eight classes, you will fail the course.

### Grading

<b>Poems and final portfolio</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Writing exercises</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Poetic catalog and memorization</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Participation</b> (includes attendance, quizzes and workshop comments)	<b>10%</b>
Total	<b>100%</b>

When evaluating writing exercises and poems, I will ask the following questions:

- 1) Does the writing fulfill the guidelines of the assignment?
- 2) Does the writing reflect sustained effort and careful presentation?
- 3) Does the writing make use of ideas and techniques we have discussed in class?

4) Has the writer taken risks, investing his or her imagination and intellect?

When grading your final portfolios, I will consider all of the above as well as the quality and scope of your revisions. We will talk about specific strategies for revision in class.

I will assign midterm grades to give you a sense of where you stand, and you are always welcome—and encouraged—to discuss your progress with me.

**Academic Honesty**

All work in this course should be original and individual, unless I have made a group assignment. Evidence of collusion (someone helped you write the assignment), plagiarism (using someone else's published or unpublished words without acknowledgement), or multiple submissions (handing in the same work to different classes) will not be tolerated. All students are expected to honor their commitment to the Honor Code.

<b>SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS</b>
---------------------------------

Reading and writing assignments are listed on the day they are due.

Unless otherwise noted, all poems referenced are from *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*. "PT" refers to *The Poetry Toolkit*.

**Thursday, 8/23**

Introductions / syllabus review

**Tuesday, 8/28**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Story-Telling" (1-15)  
 Robert Pinsky, "Poem About People" (453-5)

Write: Exercise 1

**Thursday, 8/30**

Read: Bishop, "In the Waiting Room" (34-7)  
 Ed Hirsh, "My Father's Back" (547-8)  
 Rita Dove, "Adolescence—II" (557)

**Tuesday, 9/4**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Story-Telling" (16-29, 32-39)  
 Write: Exercise 2

**Thursday, 9/6**

Read: Anthony Hecht, "Third Avenue in Sunlight" (163-4)  
 Richard Hugo, "Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg" (186-7)  
 James Wright, "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" (289)

**Tuesday, 9/11**

Read: May Swenson, "Unconscious Came a Beauty" and "Stone Gullets" (98-9)  
 David Wagoner, "The Best Slow Dancer" (212-13)  
 A.R. Ammons, "Corson's Inlet" (267-70)

Write: Exercise 3; Group A brings copies for workshop

**Thursday, 9/13**

Read: James Schuyler, "Korean Mums" (176-7)  
 Mary Oliver, "Hawk" (415-6)  
 Workshop Group A

Write: Workshop letters

**Tuesday, 9/18**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Character" (40-51)  
 Robert Lowell, "The Mouth of the Hudson" (12)  
 Elizabeth Bishop, "The Bight" (22-3)

Write: Exercise 4

**Thursday, 9/20**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Character" (54-58)  
Randall Jarrell, "Cinderella" (59-60)  
William Meredith, "Country Stars" (115)  
Donald Justice, "Men at Forty" (199)

**Tuesday, 9/25**

Read: Randall Jarrell, "The Woman at the Washington Zoo" (58-9)  
John Hollander, "The Mad Potter" (334-7)  
Charles Simic, "Prodigy" (437-8)  
Handout: Gary Jackson and Carol Duffy  
Write: Exercise 5; Group B brings copies for workshop

**Thursday, 9/27**

Read: Howard Moss, "Einstein's Bathrobe" (153-4)  
Jay Wright, "Benjamin Banneker Sends his *Almanac* to Thomas Jefferson" (419-21)  
Workshop Group B  
Write: Workshop letters

**Tuesday, 10/2**

Read: Harmon, "The Arts of Sentiment" (65-75)  
Sylvia Plath, "Morning Song" (370)  
Louise Glück, "Mock Orange" (508)  
W.S. Merwin, "The Night of the Shirts" (261)  
Rita Dove, "Canary" (560)  
Write: Exercise 6; Group C brings copies for workshop

**Thursday, 10/4**

Read: Sylvia Plath, "The Colossus" (369-70)  
Audre Lorde, "Coal" (402-3)  
Workshop Group C  
Write: Workshop letters  
*Reminder: Two poems and poetic catalog due next Thursday (10/11)*

**Tuesday, 10/9**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Sentiment" (75-81)  
Handout: sonnets  
Robert Lowell, "History" (18)  
William Meredith, "The Illiterate" (111)  
Anthony Hecht, "The Feast of Stephen" (168-9)  
Write: Exercise 7

**Thursday, 10/11**

Read: Henri Cole, "III" (from "Chiffon Morning") (576)  
Robert Lowell, "Fishnet" (20)

Marilyn Hacker, "14" (from "Taking Notice") (482)

Write: Poems 1 and 2 due (developed from Exercises 2 and 5)  
First round of poetic catalogs due

**Tuesday, 10/16**

FALL BREAK

**Thursday, 10/18**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Diction" (82-93)  
Frank O'Hara, "The Day Lady Died" (208-9)  
Ryan, "A Cat/A Future" and "The Old Cosmologists" (521-2)  
Write: Poem 3 (sonnet); Group A brings copies for workshop

**Tuesday, 10/23**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Diction" (93-98)  
Workshop Group A  
Write: Workshop letters

**Thursday, 10/25**

Read: Robert Hayden, "Night, Death, Mississippi" (83-4)  
Allen Ginsberg, from *Howl* (225-9)  
Philip Levine, "You Can Have It" (314-6)  
Write: Exercise 8; everyone brings copies

**Tuesday, 10/30**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Sound" (110-115; 120-1; 133-138)  
Howard Nemerov, "Storm Windows" (117-8)  
Richard Wilbur, "Mind" (129)  
Gjertrud Schnackenberg, "Signs" (572)

**Thursday, 11/1**

Read: Robert Lowell, "Epilogue" (21)  
Elizabeth Bishop, "The Shampoo" (28)  
Theodore Roethke, "In a Dark Time" (46)  
Richard Wilbur, "Hamlen Brook" (135)  
Howard Nemerov, "Learning the Trees" (121-2)

**Tuesday, 11/6**

Read: PT, "The Arts of Reaction" (158-168)  
Robert Lowell, "Skunk Hour" (10-12)  
Elizabeth Bishop, "The Armadillo" (32-3)  
Write: Poem 4; Group B brings copies for workshop

**Thursday, 11/8**

TBA

**Tuesday, 11/13**

Read: Elizabeth Bishop, "Poem" (38-9)  
Frank O'Hara, "Why I am Not a Painter" (208)  
Workshop Group B

Write: Workshop letters  
Poem 5; Group C brings copies for workshop

**Thursday, 11/15**

Read: Donald Justice, "Mule Team and Poster" (202-3)  
James Merrill, "Willoware Cup" (248-9)  
Michael Harper, "The Militance of a Photograph in the Passbook of a Bantu Under  
Detention" (443-6)  
Jorie Graham, "San Sepolcro" (550-1)

**Tuesday, 11/20**

Read: Workshop Group C  
Write: Workshop letters  
Poem 6; everyone brings copies  
→ Recitations!

**Thursday, 11/22**

THANKSGIVING

**Tuesday, 11/27**

Read: Workshop Group A and B  
Write: Workshop letters  
*Work on revisions*

**Thursday, 11/29**

Read: Workshop Group C  
Write: Workshop letters  
*Work on revisions*  
Final poetic catalogs due

**Tuesday, 12/4**

TBA

**Friday, 12/7**

Final portfolios due in my office by noon.