

Syllabus, Rhodes College, Spring 2012

ENG 400

CREATIVE WRITING: ADVANCED POETRY WORKSHOP/POETICS (THEORY)

T 3:30-6/6:30

Clough Hall 300

Professor Molinary

Palmer Hall, 304

843-3426

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Office Hours: (with noted exceptions)

Thursdays 11:45-2:45 or by appt.

### The Dark Times

#### •• Culture •• Poetics •• Creative Practice ••

*In the dark times, / Will there also be singing? / Yes, there will also be singing / About the dark times.*

—Bertolt Brecht, “Motto”

*as author I have no desire to stop the choir at this party celebrating birth. on the banks of O-Aza Kamiogawa in the village of Kamiogawa in the district of Iwaki in the prefecture of Fukushima. a party of points tinier than sesame seed as yet. this ecstasy's swaying echoing flowing place. but actually snow sifting outside, me in my poor kotatsu, sitting crosslegged in heavy dark. meditation ending with what was born. (in my body some of the singing staying. now far faint ripples.) O already the strung lights of the fireflies have all gone out. a tangle of torn goldfish-weed only catching vainly at the big full moon.*

—Kusano Shimpei, epilogue to “Birthday Party”

*All power is saved, having no end. Rises / in the green season, in the sudden season / the white the budded / and the lost. / Water celebrates, yielding continually ...*

—Muriel Rukeyser, “The Dam”

*There is an immense gulf between homo sapiens and homo scribens.*

—Joseph Brodsky

#### REQUIRED TEXTS

Poetry in Theory, Jon Cook (Available at Rhodes Bookstore)

Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, James Agee and Walker Evans (order online or borrow from any library)

thisconnectionofeveryonewithlungs: poems, Juliana Spahr

Poems for the Millennium, Vol 1, 2, OR 3 (choose which you prefer & obtain; should be many used copies available)

There will be other required texts—a few more you will need to purchase from small presses—that you will choose from the reading landscape. Other required readings will be made available as handouts.

#### NOTE

To participate in this class, you need not have had a prior, formal poetry writing experience but you must be a junior or senior who has advanced to the theoretical level of some field. In other words: at this time, the mechanics of writing poetry are not as important as the ideas & the methods of inquiry & practice.

## DESCRIPTION/OVERVIEW

Are these dark times? Yes. And it may be worse than that: as many claim, language (that which makes us human) has been absconded. Away with. & yet. Poetry remains. That which makes us most human, most capable stands at the ready to leap. From tongue, hand, fingertip. Not all cultures have had or have visual art or conceptions of deities, but they all have had and have poetry—poetic language. Poetry remains. Among us. Of us. Us.

What, then, do we need poetry to do, here & now? What does poetry require of us? What do these times demand of poetry, of all art? These are the questions of this course, early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The task before us is to place our own work in context of continuing & current Poetics. I choose the term “poetics” rather than “aesthetics” because simply placing our work in a context of vague & dangerous conceptions of “beauty” serves neither poetry nor us. Are we dispensing with “beauty”, then? No. (It’s just harder to see beauty in the dark.) Moreover, I choose “poetics” because it implies a continuum—a work in progress. The Making of the thing.

In order to discuss your work in the current, then, we will need to use categories at first, however contrived. For our purposes, out of initial theoretical discussions, this course will be arranged in four very useful but broad *contrivances*, then: Documentary Poetics; Eco-poetics; Ethnopoetics; and Performance Poetics. Students will be asked to find the tendencies in their own work & to choose one contrivance with which to work critically & creatively. (Already the contrivances quake: what about gender, what about music, what about visual art, science, formalism? & so on.) Ultimately, as Gertrude Stein and many others have done, we will also challenge those categories. To see what remains.

## COURSE OBJECTIVE & STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Students must come to class prepared. Students must fully engage their own work theoretically and in praxis this semester. Students must engage one another’s work theoretically and at the level of craft this semester. Students must read in fully engaged manner this semester. Students must research according to individual need.

Each student will present/lead a portion of class according to her or his contrivance.

Each student will produce an annotated bibliography with ten entries according to creative & theoretical concerns, toward the writing of a brief poetic statement.

Each student will produce a final portfolio of work with poetic statement (OR a critical essay).

Collectively, the students will produce a Chapbook intended for publication (this may override the final portfolio depending on initial class decision).

Each student will participate in a reading or performance of some sort.

## GRADING

<u>Reading &amp; Daily Participation</u>	10%
<u>Presentation/class</u>	20%
<u>Annotated Bibliography</u>	20%
<u>Final Portfolio with Poetic Statement</u>	20%
<u>Chapbook points</u>	20%
<u>Reading/performance</u>	10%

Grade Ranges:

F = Work incomplete &/or attendance issues.

D = Work complete but lacking any obvious sign of curiosity or effort; participation lackluster; &/or attendance issues.

C = Fine. All work complete with signs of curiosity & effort; attendance & participation also fine. At least one or two drafts for each poem. Good.

B = Very good verging on excellent. All work completed with verve & curiosity. At least two significantly different drafts for each poem. Passionate engagement is evident.

A = Above & beyond. All assignments completed with flair; impeccable participation; remarkable work in drafts; evidence of further work, i.e. suggested reading or work beyond the basic requirements.

#### POLICIES

- In any space of collective learning, but in a creative writing class in particular, generosity, courtesy & respect are, perhaps, the most important policies.
- Attendance is crucial, but keep in mind that “attendance” means more than the presence of your physical body in the classroom; your mind & voice need be present & active as well. To count you “present” for any given day, I’ll need to see evidence of a heartbeat—of blood coursing through your veins, lungs taking in air supplying oxygen to your brain & your mouth with words. The classroom is a space of collective learning & it may be a dying breed. Take advantage of this space—actual human bodies in a room, engaged together in human thought, imagination, & the history of ideas.
- No whining or public displays of disaffection. See me straight away if you have a problem. Trust. Trust that there are reasons for everything we do in class even if you can’t yet imagine how or why. Trust that this class is designed to help you become better writers, readers, thinkers—better humans. In that spirit, attempt everything. Don’t simply dismiss any given exercise or assignment. \*\*See me about any documented disability.
- Generally speaking, no late work will be accepted.
- Generally speaking, if you miss class, do not expect comments on work for that week or to have your poem workshopped.
- This classroom is a “safe zone.”
- Professor reserves the right to expel from the class any student who behaves like a troglodyte. The interpretation of “troglodyte” is in the sole purview of the professor.
- Antithetical to the current climate, in the realm of this course, all students are considered adults & all will be treated as such & expected to act as such. You choose to learn or not.
- Please review the Rhodes Honor Code pertaining to plagiarism & etc.
- Finally: because words & their meanings are arbitrary & because one of the purposes of this course is to help students think more deeply, imaginatively, & critically about languages & their implications, the professor retains the right to cuss &/or use language in colorful manner in order to make students think about words.