

## ENGLISH 300: INTERMEDIATE POETRY WRITING

Spring Semester 2015

M/W 2:00 – 3:15 PM, Palmer Hall 203

CRN: 25327

---

Dr. Caki Wilkinson

Phone: x3426

Email: wilkinsonc@rhodes.edu

Office: Palmer 304

Office hours: Tu/Th 2:00-3:30 PM, and by appt.

If you're a poet smitten with English, you love it for its drive and not its drone. The rhythms of a language must be irresistible—while the humdrums of it have to be resisted. No linguistic habit is, per se, of interest—but ah! when the unsung (underlying) nun informs it—with a sensual twist or quick shape-shift! Well, that's the trick: the sudden unexpectedness inside the overknown.

– Heather McHugh

### TEXT

Finch, Annie and Kathrine Varnes, eds. *An Exaltation of Forms: Contemporary Poets Celebrate the Diversity of Their Art*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.

### FOR REFERENCE AND REPORTS

Fussell, Paul. *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*. Rev. ed. New York: McGraw Hill, 1979.

Hollander, John. *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

Strand, Mark and Eavan Boland, eds. *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. New York: W.W Norton, 2001.

Turco, Lewis Putnam. *The Book of Forms*. Rev. and expanded ed. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2012.

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course builds on material from Introduction to Poetry Writing, with a special emphasis on poetic form. Understanding that all poems make use of form, our discussions will focus primarily on metrics, stanzaic patterns, and received forms such as the sonnet, sestina, and pantoum. We will consider both visual and aural aspects of form: the poem on the page and the poem read aloud. We will read a large sampling of poetry, from Anglo-Saxon verse to contemporary lyrics, and we will compose poems in a variety of forms, experimenting with structure, shape, texture, rhythm, and sound.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **Weekly poems and final portfolio.** Over the course of the semester you will write ten poems, four of which will be workshopped (three with the whole class and one with a smaller group). At the end of the semester you will submit a final portfolio that includes the original drafts of these ten poems (be sure to save the drafts with my comments) and

six revisions. For each of your revisions you will include a brief description (2-3 paragraphs) of your writing process. For example, you might describe the poem's transformation from first to final draft, or you might discuss specific decisions you made about rhythm, lineation, voice, and so forth.

- **Report on a form.** Once during the semester you and a partner will present a short report (5-10 minutes) on a form related to the week's reading. For this report you will prepare and distribute a handout that meets the following objectives:
  - 1) Provides a brief history of the form: when and where did it originate, and with whom?
  - 2) Describes the form, outlining its specific rules or constraints
  - 3) Includes four examples of the form: two examples from published authors (past and contemporary if possible), as well as your own attempts at the form
  - 4) Adheres to the MLA guidelines for formatting and documentation

\* A list of forms and pairings is included on p. 4.
- **Memorization.** You will memorize at least twenty lines of poetry (a short poem or several stanzas of a longer one). Recitations will take place on April 20.

### Workshop

We will workshop 5-6 poems nearly every week. The formats for specific workshops may change as the semester progresses, but this is how the submission process will work:

- 1) The day the poem is due, everyone will email a copy to me **before** class. I will compile and post to Moodle a packet of 5-6 poems to be discussed in the upcoming workshop. (Poems not in the packet will be handed back with my comments.) You **must** submit your poems on time, and they **must** be a complete draft. Late and/or incomplete poems will receive a 0.
- 2) Prior to workshop, everyone will read the poems in the packet and write a one-page letter to each author critiquing his or her poem.
- 3) You will print out and bring to class the workshop packet and **two** copies of your workshop letters (one copy for the author and one copy for me).

### Participation

Active participation is an essential component of this course. A workshop cannot succeed unless everyone in the class attends and participates. Even if you are the quiet type, you will be expected to contribute to class discussions and to critique the work of your peers with diligence and respect. If you come to class without the required materials (poems for workshop, handouts, both books, and so forth), you will be marked as absent for the day.

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 (3-4 questions), and if you have done the reading you should not have trouble passing them.

\* Please note that the fiction writer Kevin Wilson will read from his work on Tuesday, January 27 at 7:00 PM in Tuthill Auditorium, Hassell Hall. Your attendance at this event is mandatory.

### **Assignments**

All work must be typed, and assignments must be submitted at the beginning of class on the scheduled due date. Late work will receive a 0 unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand. With the exception of poems submitted for workshop, I will not accept work via email.

### **POLICIES**

#### **Attendance**

You are allowed three excused absences but no unexcused absences. An absence is only excused if you have contacted me before class to explain the circumstances. For each unexcused absence, your final grade will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter grade. After three excused absences, your final grade will be deducted by 1/3 of a letter grade as well. If you miss more than six classes, you will fail the course.

#### **Grading**

<b>Weekly poems</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Final portfolio</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Participation</b> (includes attendance, quizzes and workshop letters)	<b>15%</b>
<b>Report and memorization</b>	<b>10%</b>

When working with rhyme, meter, and received form, you may find it harder to make your ideas and sensibilities come through in the poem. This will take practice, and you should expect to spend a significant amount of time on the poems you write for this course. When evaluating poems, I will ask some of the following questions:

- 1) Does the poem adhere to the rules of the form, or does the poet provide a convincing explanation for any deviations?
- 2) Does the poem meet the guidelines of the assignment, and does it build on skills and techniques previously discussed?
- 3) Does the writing reflect sustained effort, and has the poet taken care to avoid the various pitfalls of formal composition (the Dr. Seuss Effect, Hallmark sentiment, metrical padding, etc.)?
- 4) Has the poet attended to other aspects of craft such as diction and imagery?
- 5) Has the poet taken meaningful risks with the poem?

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

Because this course is workshop-based with an emphasis on revision, you will not receive letter grades for individual poems. However, I will assign midterm grades to give you a sense of where you stand. 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.

### **Reports**

- Terza rima (2/4)                      Davis and Spiotta
- Blues (2/11)                              Jenness and Young
- Sapphics (2/18)                         Elliott and Hendrix
- Triolet (3/4)                              Lomax and Moore
- Ghazal (3/25)                            Clements and Evans
- Cento (4/1)                                Horne and Hornsey
- Oulipian forms (4/8)                  Bagley and Washburn

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

Reading and writing assignments are listed on the day they are due. “EF” refers to *An Exaltation of Forms*. All other essays and poems referenced will be available on Moodle. Documents on Moodle **must** be printed out and brought to class (not accessed via laptop, tablet, or phone).

**Wednesday, 1/14**

Introductions / syllabus review

**Monday, 1/19**

MLK Day: NO CLASS

**Wednesday, 1/21**

Read: Margaret Holley, “Syllabics: Sweeter Melodies” (EF)  
Dana Gioia, “Accentual Verse” (EF)

**Monday, 1/26**

Read: Handouts: Fussell, “The Nature of Meter” and “The Technique of Scansion” (Moodle)  
Write: Accentual or syllabic poem

**Tuesday, 1/27**

\* Reminder: Author Kevin Wilson will read from his fiction at 7:00 PM in Tuthill Auditorium, Hassell Hall.

**Wednesday, 1/28**

Read: John Ridland, “Iambic Meter” (EF)  
Handout: “Selected Blank Verse” (Moodle)

**Monday, 2/2**

Read: Handouts: “The Heroic Couplet” and “Selected Couplets” (Moodle)  
Write: Blank verse

**Wednesday, 2/4**

Read: Workshop Group 1 (blank verse)  
Write: Workshop letters  
→ Report 1 (Davis and Spiotta): Terza Rima

**Monday, 2/9**

Read: John Hollander, “The Quatrain” (EF)  
Handouts: “The Stanza” and “Selected Quatrains and Sestets” (Moodle)  
Write: Heroic couplets

**Wednesday, 2/11**

Read: Workshop Group 2 (couplets)  
Write: Workshop letters  
→ Report 2 (Jenness and Young): Blues

**Monday, 2/16**

Read: Handouts: Fussell, “Structural Principles: The Example of the Sonnet” (Moodle); and  
“Selected Sonnets” (Moodle)

Write: Quatrains or sestets

**Wednesday, 2/18**

Read: Marilyn Hacker, “The Sonnet” (EF)  
Workshop Group 3 (quatrains/sestets)

Write: Workshop letters

→ Report 3 (Elliott and Hendrix): Sapphics

**Monday, 2/23**

Read: Maxine Kumin, “Gymnastics: The Villanelle” (EF)  
Handout: “The Villanelle” (Moodle)

Write: Sonnet

**Wednesday, 2/25**

Read: Vince Gotera, “The Pantoum’s Postcolonial Pedigree” (EF)  
Handout: “Selected Pantoums” (Moodle)

**Monday, 3/2**

Read: Workshop Group 4 (sonnet)

Write: Villanelle or pantoum  
Workshop letters

**Wednesday, 3/4**

Read: Workshop Group 5 (villanelle/pantoum)

Write: Workshop letters

→ Report 4 (Lomax and Moore): Triolet

**Monday, 3/9 and Wednesday, 3/11**

Spring Break: NO CLASS

**Monday, 3/16**

TBA

**Wednesday, 3/18**

Read: Handouts: “The Sestina” and “Selected Sestinas” (Moodle)

**Monday, 3/23**

Read: Michel Delville and Maxine Chernoff, “Strange Tales and Bitter Emergencies: A Few  
Notes on the Prose Poem” (EF)

Handout: “Selected Prose Poems” (Moodle)

Write: Sestina

**Wednesday, 3/25**

Read: Workshop Group 6 (sestina)  
Write: Workshop letters  
→ Report 5 (Clements and Evans): Ghazal

**Monday, 3/30**

Read: Handouts: Matthea Harvey, “Don Dada on the Down Low Getting Godly in his Game”;  
and “Selected Abecedarian and Anagram Poems” (Moodle)  
Write: Prose poem

**Wednesday, 4/1**

Read: Workshop Group 7 (prose poem)  
Write: Workshop letters  
→ Report 6 (Horne and Hornsey): Cento

**Monday, 4/6**

Read: Keith Tuma, “Beyond Found Poetry” (EF)  
Handouts: Nick Flynn, “Seven Testimonies”; and “Selected Erasures” (Moodle)

**Wednesday, 4/8**

Read: Mark Wallace, “Predetermined Avant-Garde Forms” (EF)  
→ Report 7 (Bagley and Washburn): Oulipian Forms

**Monday, 4/13**

Read: Michelle Boisseau, “Free Verse” (EF)  
Handouts: TBA and “Selected Free Verse Poems” (Moodle)  
Write: Pick a form: blues, cento, ghazal, Oulipian forms, rondeau, Sapphics, or terza rima

**Wednesday, 4/15**

Read: TBA (Moodle)  
Workshop Group 8 (misc. forms)  
Write: Workshop Letters

**Monday, 4/20**

Read: Billy Collins, “The Paradelle” (EF)  
Write: Free verse poem  
→ Recitations (20 lines of poetry)

**Wednesday, 4/22**

Read: Workshop Group 9 (free verse)  
Write: Workshop letters

**Monday, 4/27**

Read: TBA (Moodle)

Write: Revision and commentary: Select one of your poems that wasn't workshopped in class and would benefit from some extra feedback. As a single document, submit:

- 1) the original draft of the poem
- 2) a revised draft of the poem
- 3) a short statement (roughly half a page) describing your approach to the revision, pointing out any weak parts you would like to fix, and posing a few questions for the readers in your group.

**Wednesday, 4/29**

Read: Revision workshop packets

Write: Workshop letters

→ Final portfolios due in my office by **noon on Wednesday, 5/6.**