

Developments in Contemporary Literature: American Poetry, Course # 373

Dr. Tina Barr, Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00-4:30

Office Hours for this course: Mondays & Wednesdays, 1-3 pm. Office number: 843-3979. If you need to reach me and I am not in the office, call 725-1443. You may also email me at TinaBarr@rhodes.edu. I do not have email at home.

Course description:

Twentieth century poetry has developed in response to many influences, including wars, political and social movements, the recognition of diverse cultural groups and their literatures, and innovations in critical theory. We will begin our discussion and exploration of this century's poetry in America by reading from the work of two anthologies, each of which offers a focus on two divergent styles, symbolist and objectivist. We will move from that discussion into close scrutiny of collections by individual poets: the work of Stephen Dunn, who won the Pulitzer in 2001, Li Young Lee, Matthea Harvey, a young poet who studied with Jorie Graham at Iowa, and Yusef Komunyakaa, who will read at Rhodes on February 20th, and won a Pulitzer in 1994.

Required Texts:

American Poetry Since 1950, an anthology edited by Eliot Weinberger, Marsilio Publishers, copyright 1993, ISBN 0-941419-92-4

The Harvard Book of Contemporary Poetry, edited by Helen Vendler, hardback ISBN 0-674-37340-5

The Range of the Possible, interviews with contemporary poets, edited by Tod Marshall Yusef Komunyakaa, *Pleasure Dome*, Wesleyan, 2001, ISBN 0-8195-6425-7

Stephen Dunn, *Different Hours*, Norton 2000, ISBN 0-393-04986-8

Matthea Harvey, *Pity the Bathtub Its Forced Embrace of the Human Form*, Alice James, 2000, ISBN 1-882295-26-9

Li-Young Lee, *The Book of My Night*

Supplementary materials, including essays, letters, etc. Please read these materials carefully.

In addition I will put essays on reserve in the library. See supplementary reading list.

Course requirements:

Students must: **1.** attend carefully to the **reading requirements** and **contribute significantly to class discussion.** **2.** Students will be required to turn in **two essays** on particular aspects of craft and technique. The essays should be concise, focused, and illuminating. **The first should be no more than 4-6 double-spaced pages.** You are free to quote, (include a works cited) from secondary sources, but I am most interested in a close reading, so secondary sources are not compulsory. I want you to come up with your own analysis. For the final paper, Students will be required to complete a **8-10 page paper on a particular poet, on a topic of the student's own choosing, to be submitted for professor's approval**, due at the end of the semester. *Students should be thinking about ideas for topics* **3.** Students will be required to turn in **3 response papers.** The response papers should be 2-3 double-spaced pages in length. You should analyze some

aspect of the reading due for that day, a response to a particular poem or group of poems, a stylistic point, an aesthetic approach. They are a way of reflecting, carefully, on the reading and articulating ideas, questions and observations. **You are required to incorporate a response to the supplementary reading on reserve for the day your response paper is due as well.** (These will be turned in on a rotating basis; I'll present you with a schedule.)

Grading:

Reading, participation and attitude, 20%; Essay #1, 20%, essay #2 30%; Response papers 30%

Policies:

I will apply the English Department's expectations and policies to this class. You are expected to attend all classes; if you miss a class you must let the professor know your reason. You are limited to two excused absences, based on health or family emergencies.

All materials must be handed in on-time, or receive a reduced grade.

Week 1 1/15

Class requirements, class discussion, response paper schedule

Assignment for next week: Read Vendler's introduction to *The Harvard Book of Contemporary American Poetry*. Read section on Stevens, be prepared to discuss "Sunday Morning," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "Anecdote of the Jar," "The Paltry Nude," "Final Soliloquy," "Not Ideas about the Thing," "Of Mere Being." Read supplementary handouts by Vendler, etc. **As you read these poets in the Vendler anthology, remember to refer to the brief bios beginning on page 413.**

Week 2 1/20 no class MLK day & 1/22

Response papers due group A, Discussion of **Stevens**

Assignment for next week: Read over the poetry by Stevens for continued discussion.

Week 3 1/27 & 1/29

Continued discussion of work by **Stevens**, video excerpts Bishop and Lowell

Assignment for next week: Read Williams Carlos Williams' work in the Weinberger anthology. Read essay at the close of the book, page 395 and on. Read handouts on WCW by Stevens, etc.

Week 4 2/3 & 2/5

Response papers due group B, discussion of **WCW's** poetry.

Assignment for next week: Read sections on Roethke, and Bishop in Vendler anthology. Check syllabus for sheets on Bishop and Roethke.

Assignment for 2/10 continued. Decide on a particular poem you will write about for your first 4-6 page essay. You may write on any of the poems we did not discuss in class that are included in the Vendler anthology. In addition, you may write on a poem by a poet whose work we did not discuss in class, but if you do so, and the poem is not in the anthology, please attach a copy to your proposal as well as your paper. **Turn in proposal for topic, (see page attached to syllabus) next Monday. The paper itself is due on 2/19.**

Week 5 2/10 & 2/12

Turn in proposal for first essay Response papers due group C, Discussion of **Roethke and Bishop's** work

Assignment for next week: Read sections by Lowell and Wilber in Vendler anthology. See handout and bios attached to syllabus, as well as assigned poems. Work on essay, due on 2/19.

Week 6 Note: Thursday, 2/20: Yusef Komunyakaa reads his poetry at 7:30 pm in McCallum Ballroom, BCLC---this is an experience not to be missed!

2/17 & 2/19 Discussion of **Lowell and Wilber**

Assignment for next week: Reading on Rich and Graham. See bio and information sheet in syllabus.

Week 7 2/24

Discussion of poetry by **Rich and Graham.** Dr. Barr will be a presenter at the Associated Writing Programs Conference in Baltimore, so we will not meet on **2/26.**

Assignment for next week: Your assignment for 3/3 and 3/5 is to read the sections in the Weinberger anthology, *American Poetry Since 1950*, by Charles Olson, Robert Creeley (in syllabus) and Muriel Rukeyser. Also read handouts attached to syllabus.

Week 8 3/3 & 3/5

Response papers due Group A. Discussion of work by **Olson, Creeley and Rukeyser.**

Assignment for over Spring Break: I've tried to come up with a popular assignment, one you might read late at night in New Orleans bars (?) or on the beach. Read the selections by Ginsberg in the Vendler as well as the Weinberger anthologies. See 3 handouts on Ginsberg attached to syllabus.

Week 9 3/17 & 3/19, Viewing of Ginsberg Video on 3/17 in class
Discussion of **Ginsberg's** work on 3/19.

Assignment for next week: Read work by Gary Snyder, Clark Coolidge and Michael Palmer in Weinberger anthology.

Week 10 3/24 & 3/26

Response papers due Group B, discussion of work by **Snyder, Coolidge & Palmer.**

Assignment for next week: Read selections from Stephen Dunn's *Different Hours*.
Begin to think about a topic for your final paper, due the last day of class, April 30th.

Week 11 3/31 & 4/2

Response papers due Group C, discussion of **Dunn's** work.

Assignment for next week: Read selections from Matthea Harvey's *Pity The Bathtub Its Forced Embrace of the Human Form*. See brief review attached to syllabus. Turn in your topic proposal for your final paper on 4/7.

Week 12 4/7 & 4/9

Topic proposals due for final paper. Response papers due Group A, discussion of work by **Harvey.**

Assignment for next week: Read selections from Li Young Lee's *Book of My Night* and interview in the Marshall text. Response papers due Group B for next week.

Week 13 4/14 & 4/16

Response papers due Group B, discussion of work by Li-Young Lee.

Easter Weekend -- Assignment for next week: Read selections from *Pleasure Dome*, by Yusef Komunyakaa. See bio attached to syllabus. Response papers due Group C.

Week 14 4/21 & 4/23

Study Group discussion on **Komunyakaa's** poetry on 4/21, continued discussion on 4/23. **Response papers due Group C.**

Week 15 4/28 & 4/30 Conference day on 4/28—I will be in my office during class time for drop-in conferences. **Final paper due on 4/30, class party and evaluations.**

Topic Proposal for Essay # 1

You need to find a poem you want to work on; it can be by one of the poets whose work we've discussed in class, but not a poem we have already discussed in class. Or, you may write on a poem by a poet in one of the anthologies, whose work we won't be discussing in class.

Then, find a particular mode or technique that you want to discuss. It could be that poet's use of a particular image, symbol or metaphor, or group of images. You might want to talk about the choices made in form, in voice, in tone, in stanza or line lengths, rhythm, rhyme, etc. You'll need to focus on one or two avenues of approach to the poem, and your avenue of approach depends in large part on the poem as it is structured.

Since you are limited to writing a brief essay, it's important not to try to cover the poem comprehensively, unless it is quite brief. Make sure you find a poem you have understood, or are willing to grapple with.

Student's Name:

Current telephone number:

Email address:

Proposed idea for Essay #1: Include name of poet and poem

Proposal for Final Essay Topic

Name:

Current Phone Number:

Email address:

Name of poet and your proposal:

Video Screening Schedule: We will meet in Palmer 208 at 6:30 pm, promptly. I've spoken with security, to ensure that the door to the north cloister entrance will be open. If it isn't, go to the security office or call and ask them to open the door. The listed videos will be on reserve in the library; it is your responsibility to watch the video in the library if you miss the screening. It's a lot more fun looking at it with the group in the classroom!

I think you might enjoy seeing the video before the discussion:

Wednesday, 1/23: viewing of Bishop video

Wednesday, 1/30: viewing of Lowell video

Monday, 2/4: viewing of Wilber video

Wednesday, 2/6: viewing of Plath video and possible partial viewing of Rich video –

Monday, 2/25: viewing of Creeley video, if available

Wednesday, 3/13: viewing of Snyder video, if available

We'll look at the Ginsberg video in class in 3/11.

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