

Dr. Tina Barr Creative Writing: Introductory Poetry Workshop, Course 200
 Class meets 2:00-3:15 pm T/Th in Palmer 203 Office, 307 Palmer Hall, 843-3979.

Office Hours Mondays 1:00 to 2:45 pm, Tuesdays 12:45-1:45 and Thursdays 9:30-10:30.

You have the opportunity to speak with me during the week outside of class during the above office hours, and by appointment. You can also email me at:

TinaBarr@rhodes.edu. I am available on my teaching days, Mondays through Thursdays, to work with you, but set aside time for my own work during weekends. If you anticipate a need to consult with me on papers, poems, etc. outside of class please call or email to schedule a time during office hours that I can set aside just for you.

Course Description: This class will introduce students to principles of good poetry, including prosody, through readings of work by outside writers in *Good Poems*, edited by Garrison Keillor, and through essays from Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town* and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters To A Young Poet*. You will complete writing exercises assigned in class and in *The Practice of Poetry* edited by Robin Behn and Chase Twitchell. (4 texts) Students are expected to analyze and prepare to discuss the poems and essays they read, so that they will make significant contributions to class discussion. **Please don't hesitate to share your own interests with the class, by bringing in work by writers whose poems you admire.** The more each member contributes in different ways to the workshop the more interesting it will be.

A word here---students sometimes think that this course will be an "easy" one, but instead find it can be one of their most difficult classes. Most of us have written poetry to express our feelings, but **poetry is an art, and it requires perhaps more discipline and hard work to achieve a decent poem** often, than to write a good essay. You will have to relinquish the idea that you can express your feelings on paper, and that will be enough. It won't. You'll need to edit extensively, to re-think and re-write sections of your poem in order to make it a piece of thoughtful work, rather than purely and solely an expression of self. In addition, because you *are* expressing your feelings, you'll have to be willing to *examine* them and share them, and that takes courage.

Required Texts: *Good Poems* selected by Garrison Keillor, Viking, 2002; *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo, Norton, 1979 and *Letters To A Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke, Norton, 1934. *The Practice of Poetry* edited by Robin Behn and Chase Twitchell.

Course Requirements:

- 1.** Students must attend carefully to the **reading requirements and contribute significantly to class discussion.** (30%) You must also **memorize a poem** for the last day of class.
- 2.** Students must turn in a **portfolio** (50%) of poems at midterm and at end of term; these should consist of a folder that contains only the **final revisions of all** the *poems you have worked on from the beginning of term through midterm and then from the beginning of term through the end of the semester.* Portfolios should consist of a

minimum of 8 and up to 14, **BUT NO MORE THAN 14**, of your best poems. Excellence is more important than quantity, and usually comes after careful revision. Midterm grades tend to be conservative, so grades *can* go up considerably, but *may also remain the same* for a final grade if you have been unable to improve your work.

- 3.** Students will prepare a presentation (20%) on a poem of their choice from our anthology.

Grading: Grades are based on talent as demonstrated in the poems, but achievement in poetry is usually the result of the *work of editing and revising*. *Writers must employ clear grammatical construction, complete sentences, and careful punctuation. They must make use of concrete imagery and careful diction. Poetry is a discipline. The use of abstract terms and generalized imagery will not result in good poetry.* Careful reading of fellow students' work, careful reading of assigned texts, class participation, effort and attitude also count. The professor has been known to reduce a final grade based on attitude alone. (This falls under contributions to class discussion 30%.)

Procedures: Students will be responsible for turning in **two copies** of each poem they want discussed in class. One will go into the packet read and prepared for discussion; the other will go to the excellent department secretary for duplication. **The poem will be returned to the student unless he or she turns in two copies.** *When packets are handed out, students should go over them before the next class period, make written comments and notations, and be prepared to offer feedback.* Please note: You should prepare the weekend before, for the coming week. Sometimes we will discuss the assigned readings on Tuesdays, and the student work on Thursdays; at other times we may begin discussion with student poems on Tuesdays. **Thus: "Assignment for next week" is due the following week.**

Weekly Requirements for Poems: *Students generally will turn in a poem every week for class discussion;* however they are required to complete revisions as they progress. Students should be continually revising their work. **Note: we will not necessarily workshop every poem that is turned in. I may elect to focus on poems which illustrate specific elements for the class.**

Conferences: Conference time is built into the syllabus as part of the opportunity offered by this course. Once a student has signed up for a conference he or she must attend. **Conferences that are missed cannot be rescheduled.** Students should use this time to consult if they have difficulty with their writing, would like to share poems they'd rather the class did not see, or have questions about editing procedures. Always bring your poetry folder to conference.

Attendance: Students should miss no more than 2 classes a semester, based on a medical absence or family emergency. If you need to miss a class based on an absence of this sort, please call or email the professor. More than 3 absences may result in a reduction in the final grade for the course.

Course Structure: The [first half](#) of the course will be based on class discussion of outside poems, and during this explication and analysis I will be teaching you to focus on and isolate *techniques in craft, also known as prosody*. It will be your responsibility to learn about these techniques. They are based on the idea that poets use **patterns**, visual patterns and sound patterns. Poets make **rhyme or off-rhyme** sounds and their techniques for sound include **alliteration, assonance, consonance**. Poets make **images, metaphors, similes; these are pictures** based on the sensory experience of **seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling**. They create **structures** in their poems, based on patterns of **repetition, based on line lengths, stanzas, shaping**, a structure based on a **received form** like a sonnet, or a **conceived form** like Whitman's, based on biblical line length and the sound of the King James's version of the Bible in translation, or a hanging line, like William Carlos Williams's in his early work. You will learn to analyze a poem based on its **form as well as its content**. You must do this in order to prepare for the [second half](#) of the semester, which will include your presentation of a poem in the anthology edited by Keillor, *Good Poems*. These highlighted words are terms you need to learn to use.

Student Reports: Find a poem we have not discussed in class, from your anthology. You should focus on **1 technical aspect** of the poem you've selected to present. You should begin by giving the page number and reading the poem aloud to the class. You should then focus the discussion by asking 3 to 4 questions of your fellow class participants in order to generate discussion on this 1 technique or aspect. Your job is NOT to lecture or summarize or tell the students what the poem is about. You should take **NO MORE than 15 minutes of class time**.

Responsibilities: My job as your professor is to instruct you in techniques of poetic analysis and model for you the terms and approaches to that analysis during the first half of the term. That means during the first seven weeks you need to attend all classes and pay close attention. Your job is to assimilate those terms through careful attention to reading and discussion, so that you can learn how to explicate or analyze a poem, how to find its meanings. A good poem always presents more than one meaning. A poem has meanings in the plural. It presents an array of ideas. My job is also to assist you in learning to improve your writing of poems. It is not to write the poem for you. Your job is to assimilate my suggestions and revise your work accordingly. You will not progress by assuming that you know better. You don't. You have to trust me. I've been teaching students to write since the early 1980s and my students have gone on the graduate school, publication in national journals and sometimes chapbooks and books of their own. The most difficult challenge in writing poetry is to separate your emotional defenses from making a piece of art, a finished thing, a scrutinized thing. You have to know that technique is crucial in all fields, whether it's playing basketball, taking a car engine apart, dancing, playing an instrument, driving a car, baking a cake, or writing a poem. You have to practice. You have to work. You have to measure carefully the distance between the ball and the hoop or the amount in a teaspoon, or the verb you want to use that really does some *work*.

Week 1 8/25

In-class interviews, distribute syllabus prior to class contract, to be signed on Tuesday, with quiz on syllabus. in-class writing (self portrait & aromatherapy)

Assignment for next week: type up in-class writing assignments and submit **two** copies of each poem on Tuesday, read **entire** syllabus over word by word prior to signing class contract on Tuesday. **Read all 11 pages**, so you will also understand how the course is structured and where I am taking you. You will be quizzed on the contents of the syllabus.

Week 2 8/30 & 9/1

Field questions on syllabus, class contract, collect poems. Go over drafts Barr handouts. Go over previous student poems (wrestling & cks). Begin discussion of what makes a good poem. Revision strategies. (Verbs, (Roethke exercise) editing extraneous words, images) see page 11 of syllabus on editing advice.

Assignment for next week: Read Introduction to *The Practice of Poetry* by Robin Behn and Chase Twitchell. Do exercise by Thomas Lux on page 5; do the work and hand in **two copies** of a poem you have worked on according to step 8. Read *Letters To a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke, with a focus on letters 1,3,4,7 & 8. If you don't know references: poets, painters, sculptors, google them. In order to be an educated person you need to familiarize yourself with the work of other artists.

Week 3 9/6 & 9/8

Turn in your two copies of the poem you wrote. If you do not turn in **TWO** copies **YOUR** poems will not be included in the packet. When I receive your poems I read one set myself and give the other copy to the department secretary to make into a Xeroxed packet for distribution to the class. If I don't have **TWO** copies I will simply dispose of your poem. **NEVER email poems to me.** You may only turn in **typed copies**. *I will not look at handwritten copies in class or conference.*

Discussion of Rilke's work. Narrative poems: "Entrenched," & "Fishawi" ---discuss images, verbs, extraneous words, details. "A Blessing" and do exercise in class. Discuss student poems. Discuss how to "grade" student poems. See below for assignment:

Assignment for next week: Work on poem based on exercise on page 22 in *The Practice of Poetry*. Hand in 2 copies next Tuesday. Read chapters 1 and 2 in *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo.

Week 4 9/13 & Conferences on 9/15, so no class on Thursday

Turn in 2 copies of your poem. Discussion of *The Triggering Town*. See Professor Barr in Conference during your scheduled time, whether it is a meeting **this Thursday** or your meeting is scheduled for **next week**. Bring one copy of each of the poems you've written so far this semester to conference. See next page:

Assignment for next week: Complete the narrative exercise at the back of your syllabus for next week and read in Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town*, chapters 4 and 5. Be prepared to discuss your opinion of his "best advice."

Week 5 9/20 & Conferences on 9/22, so no class on Thursday

Discussion of chapters 4 and 5 by Hugo. Discussion of narrative poems and revision process.

Assignment for next week: **Part 1** Revise the narrative poem you wrote last weekend based on what you have learned in conference about revision. Bring in final copies of poems you revised based on your conference. Remember to turn in TWO copies of each poem or they will not be included in the packet. **Part 2** Read poems by Gerald Stern in our anthology *Good Poems*, on pages 193 & 328. Analyze the structure of "Stepping Out of Poetry." How are the 4 "sections" set up in terms of sentences? The poem is "about" what theme? Write your own "version" of a poem based on this 4 part structure of sentences which converge upon one general theme. In "Waving Good-Bye" how does Stern use the technique of "enjambment"----that is, sentences that **run over** the end of the line rather than stopping with a period at the end of a line? How many sentences are there in this poem? Write your own poem on the theme of the title. Bring in **two copies** of each of the **two poems** you write based on Stern's poems with you to class on Tuesday.

Week 6 9/27 & 9/29 National Book Award winner Gerald Stern to read his poetry at 7:30 pm on 9/29 in Blount Auditorium, Buckman Hall, attendance required.

Handout of Stern poems and discussion of his poems in your anthology. Discuss student poems.

Assignment for next week: Read page 35 and on in *The Practice of Poetry*, and **bring in an object** so we can do this exercise on Tuesday. Work on and complete the exercise on page 54 in the *P of P*. Read poems on pages 3 through 18 in the anthology, *Good Poems*. Prepare to discuss poems on pages 4,5 & 18. **Revise poems for Midterm Portfolio, due on 10/6**, Students must turn in a **portfolio** of poems at midterm; these should consist of a folder that contains only the **final revisions** of **all** the *poems you have worked on from the beginning of term through midterm*. Portfolios **at midterm** should consist of a minimum of 4 and up to 8 **BUT NO MORE THAN 8**, of your best poems. Excellence is more important than quantity, and usually comes after careful revision. Midterm grades tend to be conservative, so grades *can* go up considerably, but *may also remain the same* for a final grade if you have been unable to improve your work.

Week 7 10/4 & 10/6 Portfolio due 10/6 (no later)

Object exercise on Tuesday; bring in your object!!!! Turn in P of P exercise poem. Discuss handout of Hass & Stern poems. Discuss "Oh Lord" poems, student poems.

Assignment for next week: Complete an exercise of YOUR choosing in the Aspects of Voice section, pages 63 through 84, section of *The P of P*. Read poems from “A Day” section of the anthology and concentrate on poems on pages 34 and 35. **Bring your volume of *The Practice of Poetry* in to class on Tuesday.**

Week 8 10/11 & 10/13

Discussion of poems on “A Day,” (possible in-class exercise from the P of P, either: page 89, OR page 91 OR page 104) Turn in student poems, discussion of student poems on Thursday

Assignment over Fall Break: Read poems in section on Music in your anthology. Prepare to discuss “Night Club,” page 48, “Her Door,” The Pupil,” “Instrument of Choice,” “The Grain of Sound” and “Piano,” Pages 53, 54, 55, 56 and 63.

Week 9 10/20

Discussion of reading over Fall break/Music exercise

Anyone who received less than a B- for midterm grade needs to sign up to see me in conference next week. Please do not sign up if you received a B- or more.

Assignment for Next Week: Read poems in “Lovers” section of the anthology and focus on “A Red, Red Rose,” “First Love,” “He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven,” “Politics,” “Magellan Street,” and “Comin Through the Rye.” Complete an exercise from the *P of P* from part 4. Turn it, through revision, into a poem. Complete the exercise on LOVE at the end of the syllabus, so you have 2 poems to write over the weekend.

Week 10 10/25 & 10/27

Discussion of poems on love. Turn in 2 copies of both poems you wrote over the weekend. **Bring in your P of P volume to class both days next week.**

Week 11 11/1 & 11/3

Three student reports; villanelle & go over exercise on page 200. Turn in poems & discuss student poems

Assignment for next week: Complete an exercise of your choice from Part 5 of *The P of P* and **revise it** until you have a poem. Turn in 2 copies on Tuesday. Complete the villanelle exercise on page 200 of the *P of P*, and recall the villanelle we read on page 53 of your anthology, “Her Door,” by Mary Leader.

Week 12 11/8 & 11/10

Four student reports; discussion of student villanelles. **See next page:**

Assignment for next week: Complete an exercise of your choice from part 6 of *The Practice of Poetry* and revise it into a poem & turn in 2 copies on Tuesday. Work on revisions of your poems. **Pick a poem you want to memorize, from any period, by any poet, to recite on the last day of class. It can be a poem we have discussed. Begin to memorize it.**

Week 13 11/15 & 11/17

Four Student Reports, discussion of poems by students

Assignment for next week: Continue to work on memorizing a poem, revise your poems, Complete an exercise, if needed, from part 7 of *The P of P*.

Week 14 11/22

Four student reports Sign up for conferences for week following Thanksgiving

Assignment for next week: Continue to work on memorizing a poem You have no assignment per se over Thanksgiving, but if needed, complete an exercise from part 7 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Your final portfolios are due on December 6th. Students must turn in a **portfolio** (50%) of poems at end of term; these should consist of a folder that contains only the **final revisions** of the best poems you have worked on from the beginning of term through the end of the semester. Portfolios should consist of a minimum of 8 and up to 14, **BUT NO MORE THAN 14**, of your best poems. **It is up to you to select them.** Excellence is more important than quantity, and usually comes after careful revision. Midterm grades tend to be conservative, so grades *can* go up considerably, but **may also remain the same** for a final grade if you have been unable to improve your work.

Week 15 11/29 & 12/1 No Classes, meet in conference with professor to focus on ONE POEM you are having difficulty expanding, revising or developing.

Missed conferences cannot be rescheduled. Work on revisions for Final Portfolio due on December 6th. Please bring in contributions, food & drink, for next Tuesday's final class and party

Week 16 December 6th

Please bring in contributions, food & drink, for Today's party. Last Class, **recite memorized poems**, class party, **turn in portfolio**.

First Exercise in Narrative-----

1. sit down with a piece of paper ---begin to free write about a time you recall from the past that had a HUGE emotional impact on you.
2. first describe the setting, where were you?, give *concrete details* incorporating a **sense of smell and hearing**
3. describe what were you feeling inside--- indicate this with an **image or a comparison**
4. tell this **as if it is a story** you are telling to someone you have not met
5. describe yourself **using first person, "I"** ---do not address the reader as a "you."

After you have written the first draft, go away from it. Return to it later, with fresh eyes and read it aloud or to a friend. What is most DETAILED or has the most sensory images? Save these parts. Edit out all general statements. Edit out all wordy parts where you are being abstract or making statements. SHOW, DON'T TELL the reader. If the poem doesn't convey concrete experience, begin again and write another version OR find another subject.

For Example: here is a freewrite

At our first xmas after my brother died we went to his grave where we had planted a tiny pine tree, no more than 2 feet tall. His grave is a flat rectangle of grey/white stone, the color that gulls remind me of. We went to the beach every summer and Riggs, my brother, liked to pick up mussel shells with my father, tearing them up out of their beds wedged into the rocks. My father would steam them and then they would both make a roux of flour and butter and then add wine. My brother would pull up the parsley from around the back doorstep. My brother's grave has a seagull engraved/etched into it, and a silver cross the minister gave him is soldered onto it. We put tiny green, blue and red glass balls on the tree. We could see our breath and the white inlets of the snow breaking onto the gravestones.

Ok, I just made this up. Now I need to go back and edit, so I delete everything in parentheses:

(At) our first xmas after (my brother died) we went to his grave (where) we had planted a tiny pine tree, (no more than) 2 feet tall. His grave is a flat rectangle of (grey/white) **granite** {is much more specific as an adjective} (stone), the color (that) of gulls (remind me of.) (We went to the beach) every summer (and) Riggs, my brother, (liked to pick up) picked mussels (shells) with my father, tearing them (up) out of their beds (wedged into the rocks). My father (would) **steamed** them (and) then they (would both make) **made** a roux of flour and butter and (then) added wine. My brother would pull up (the) parsley from around the back doorstep. (My brother's grave has) a seagull **is etched onto my brother's grave**; a silver cross (the minister gave him) is soldered onto it. We (put) **hung** tiny green, blue and red glass balls (on the tree). (We could see our breath) {kind of a

cliché) (and) the white inlets of the snow breaking onto the gravestones. Maybe **the white inlets of the snow broke onto the graves. see next page-----**

So now I've got:

Our first xmas after we went to his grave we had planted a tiny xmas tree, 2 feet tall. His grave is a flat rectangle of **granite**, the color of gulls. Every summer) Riggs, my brother, picked mussels with my father, tearing them out of their beds. My father **steamed** them then they **made** a roux of flour and butter and added wine. My brother would pull up parsley from around the back doorstep. a seagull **is etched onto my brother's grave**; a silver cross is soldered onto it. We **hung** tiny green, blue and red glass balls. **the white inlets of the snow broke onto the graves**

I want to divide the sentences into lines now and continue to edit. As I write, I change ideas and words again:

The first Christmas after, we stood near him.
 We'd planted a blue spruce, two feet tall.
 His grave is a flat granite rectangle
 the color of gulls. Every summer, Riggs
 picked mussels with my father, tearing
 them from their beds. My father steamed
 them in their shells, made a roux: flour, butter,
 dribbled chardonnay. Riggs pulled parsley
 from the doorstep. An etched gull calls over
 the stone. We hung green and red
 bells, glossy, like eggshells. From its inlets
 white snow broke onto the graves.

I edited for sound/gull/bells/shells, for example, as I'm working I am thinking of sound and sense at the same time. I can get away with the eggshell comparison, for example, because it's consistent with the kitchen/cooking imagery. "Beds" has the irony of the sickbed implicit in it. I'm always trying to **say it better**.

You need to learn to work over your poems thoroughly. With equally this much effort! And if you use a sentence fragment, as I just did, for example, you need to have a reason for it. Otherwise each poem should consist of complete sentences.

Narrative and Concrete Poem about Love

1. first pick a subject –love between you and a parent, sibling, family member, animal, activity, (dance, rollerblading, field hockey, swimming, baking, etc.). (Do NOT Write about a boyfriend/girlfriend.)
2. tell the story of your relationship with this thing/person/subject by first describing a setting, incorporating 5 concrete details---using sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste. (The field was filled with clover, there were bees in the white sugared blossoms, I could smell the mashed grass, the pines branches flew in the wind and I could smell them, we ate oranges during the breaks and the juice dripped onto my green pleated uniform, sweat on my neck, etc.)
3. then describe action (I would swing down the field, running hard, pushing the white ball with the curve of my stick, just moving it along, then pass it to my inner.)
4. then describe emotion---use an image to compare the emotion TO something else

Editing Advice---You should use this for every poem.

1. go over the poem by reading it aloud.
2. edit all extraneous words---do this by going over your poem word by word.
3. underline all the verbs---is each verb as effective, active and dynamic as it could be?
4. underline all adjectives----are they absolutely necessary?
5. edit all adverbs, unless they are really significant to the meaning of the sentence.
6. distance yourself from your poem and consider whether the reader will be able to fully understand the poem?
7. is the relationship between the characters clear? Will the reader know---if this is important to the poem, what the relationship is?
8. In general, shift out of the second person (You) to the first person or third person. Narrate the poem through an "I" or by using an omnipotent "He" or "She."
9. The best way to LEARN to edit is through practice, practice, practice.

Is your poem composed in complete sentences?