

Dr. Tina Barr, Creative Writing: Introductory Poetry Workshop, Course 200  
*Class meets 12:30-1:45 pm T/Th in Barret Library, 020, Office, 307 Palmer Hall, 843-3979.*

Office Hours Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:00 to noon, & by appointment.

**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:**

**NEVER email poems to me.** If you are absent, bring in your 16 copies when you next come to class. You may only turn in **typed copies**. *I will not look at handwritten copies in class or conference.* Students will be responsible for turning in 16 **copies** of each poem they want discussed in class. 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.

**Conference:** Conference time is built into the syllabus as part of the opportunity offered by this course. Once a student has signed up for her or his 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. 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 4 absences may result in a reduction in the final grade for the course. Do not "use up" your absences. Save them for when you are truly sick, I guarantee you will be at some point during the semester.

**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.

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the semester, you will have learned to write a narrative, concrete poem, so I'll ask you to focus on editing and development.

**Student Reports: Find a poem we have not discussed in class, from your anthology.**

You should focus on **several technical aspects** 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     1/11**

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

*Assignment for next week:* type up in-class writing assignments and submit 16 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    1/16 & 1/18**

Distribute student poems. Field questions on syllabus, class contract, quiz. Go over drafts Barr handouts. In class---self-portrait

*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 16 **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    1/23 & 1/25**

Turn in your 16 copies of the poem(s) you wrote. **NEVER email poems to me.** If you are absent, bring in your 16 copies when you next come to class. You may only turn in **typed copies**. *I will not look at handwritten copies in class or conference.*

Turn in 16 copies of poems. Discuss Rilke's *Letters*. 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 Conference Week: work on narrative poem at the back of the syllabus--- Bring a copy to your conference—it is imperative that you allow enough time to work through several drafts of this exercise BEFORE you bring it to conference.*

*Assignment for 2/8:* Work on poem based on exercise on page 22 in *The Practice of Poetry*. Over next 2 weeks revise it so that it becomes a poem, not just an exercise.

**Hand in 16 copies on 2/8.** Read chapters 1 and 2 in *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo.

## **Week 4    1/30 & 2/1 Conference Week**

See Professor Barr in Conference during your scheduled time. Bring your narrative poem. These conferences will take place during scheduled class periods to allow for individual meetings. Since conferences will be taking place, we will meet in my office, Palmer 307, instead of class. Missed conferences cannot be rescheduled. During the time you would normally meet in class, work on your revision of the exercise on page 22, see above, while I meet with other workshop participants.

## **Week 5    2/6 Final Conference day; Class meets on 2/8**

**Conferences with Professor Barr, so we do not meet in class on 2/6. Bring your narrative poem to conference.**

Bring your revision, with copies for all, of your narrative poem to class on 2/8 for discussion. Bring in poem based on exercise on page 22 as well. Small group discussions for revisions. Discussion of *The Triggering Town*.

*Assignment for next week:* Complete the REVISION of the narrative exercise, *bring 16 copies on Tuesday of next week*. Read in Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town*, chapters 4 and 5. Be prepared to discuss your opinion of his "best advice."

#### **Week 6    2/13 & 2/15**

Discussion of chapters 4 and 5 by Hugo. Grading student poems. Discussion of student poems. Read page 35 and on in *The Practice of Poetry*, and bring in an object so we can do this exercise on Thursday.

*Assignment for next week:* Revise narratives based on recent comments. Revise other poems on which you are working and bring copies for discussion in workshop.

#### **Week 7    2/20 & 2/22**

Workshop student revisions on narratives on Tuesday. For Thursday, turn in your portfolio AND: **bring in your object!!!! Bring your volume of *The Practice of Poetry* in to class on Thursday.**

*Assignment for 3/6 & 3/8:* Complete an exercise of YOUR choosing in the Aspects of Voice section, pages 63 through 84, section of *The P of P*. Remember the "exercises" are just an excuse for a poem: revise sufficiently so they are moved beyond exercises and made into poems. Bring in 16 copies of poem on 3/6. 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 8    2/27 & 2/29**

Writing Assignment to do in lieu of classes. There will be no class this week. Dr. Barr will be participating in the Associated Writing Programs Conference. You cannot do this on-campus. This needs to be a real-world experience. This is an exercise in observation of details, appropriation of dialogue, and in development. IF you skip any of these steps, it will show in your work. Go for lunch during the class period to CK's coffee shop or Starbucks, or a similar venue, and sit and write a narrative poem, about some exchange/event you witness. OR: use yourself as a character in the poem who is in the coffee shop. Write in the first person (I) or the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (He/She). Do NOT use the 2<sup>nd</sup> person: You. Return on Thursday, same time, same place and add in to the poem. Develop it.

*Assignment for next week:* **Revise poems for Midterm Portfolio, due on 3/8** Students must turn in a **portfolio** of poems at midterm; staple together or put into a folder 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 **up to 6** 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 or even go down* for a final grade if you have been unable to improve your work.

The Southern Literary Festival takes place at Rhodes on 3/30 & 3/31, with workshops and readings by serious and well-published writers, from whom you can learn. In order to participate, you **MUST REGISTER** on Friday from 3 to 4 pm in Middle Ground, OR on Saturday from 9 to 10 in Buckman Hall reception area, outside Blount. This is the only way to confirm your workshop place and to obtain a lunch ticket. If you wish to attend a workshop, early registration is suggested. To do so, obtain a schedule from the bin outside Dr. Barr's office door, and email [tinabarr@rhodes.edu](mailto:tinabarr@rhodes.edu). Do not tell her in person.

#### **Week 9 3/6 & 3/8**

Discussion of café poems and Aspects of Voice poem. Discussion of Music poems from anthology. On 3/8 turn in portfolios.

No assignment over Spring Break, but bring in your anthology when you return on 3/20 to class.

#### **Week 10 3/20 & 3/22**

**Bring your anthology to classes: Six student reports.** Feel free to bring in poems to workshop. Hand out Dave Smith poems. Hand out poems on animals by Marianne Moore and D.H. Lawrence.

#### **Week 11 3/27 & no class on 3/29, instead go to the zoo and write about an animal there---describe the animal in detail.**

Discussion of Dave Smith poems on 3/27. Attend Required Dave Smith reading, at 7:30pm on Friday, 3/30 in Blount Auditorium, Buckman Hall. The Southern Literary Festival takes place at Rhodes this weekend, on 3/30 & 3/31, with workshops and readings by serious and well-published writers, from whom you can learn. In order to participate, you **MUST REGISTER** on Friday from 3 to 4 pm in Middle Ground, OR on Saturday from 9 to 10 in Buckman Hall reception area, outside Blount. If you wish to attend a workshop, registration confirmation is required.

*Assignment for next week:* Work on, revise and develop zoo poem. 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."

### **Week 12 4/3 & Easter Break**

**Three student reports and discuss poems you read in Anthology; bring your anthology to class.**

*Assignment for next week:* **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.** Complete another revision of the zoo poem. Complete the exercise on Love at the end of the syllabus. Prepare final versions to turn in on 4/10.

### **Week 13 4/10 & 4/12**

**Four student reports.** Bring your anthology to class. Discuss zoo poems and Love assignment poems. Barr to discuss villanelle and go over exercise on page 200 of *The Practice of Poetr.*

*Assignment for next week:* *Continue to work on memorizing a poem.* 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. Complete a villanelle. tudents 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.

### **Week 14 4/17 & 4/19**

Bring in copies of your villanelle on Tuesday, and poems you want discussed. Final workshops before the end of term.

### **Week 15: 4/24 & 4/26**

**4/24 is your final workshop day. Bring in poems for discussion.**

**Please bring in contributions, food & drink, for final class and party**

Recite memorized poem!!! Turn in portfolio. Bring in an extra copy of your best poem to read to the class.



## 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?

## Department of English Expectations and Policies

A college course is more than simply a set of assignments; it is an intellectual process, one which requires active engagement from beginning to end in order to achieve its intended results. With this in mind, the Department of English has formulated a number of expectations and the policies that support them. If you have questions about how these policies relate to the syllabus for a particular course, you should address them to the instructor.

**Attendance:** The success of a course depends to a significant extent upon the presence of students alert and prepared to address the subject under discussion. Unavoidable absences should be discussed with the instructor, ideally before they occur. Excessive absences will result in a lowering of grade, in some cases to an F.

**Deadlines:** Writing assignments, test, etc., are carefully scheduled as stages toward the fulfillment of the course's goals and cannot be indefinitely deferred without frustrating those goals. Brief extensions for good reasons may be permissible with the instructor's prior approval; otherwise, late assignments will be penalized and may result in their not being accepted for credit.

**Submission of all work:** All major assignments are integral to the goals of the course. Failure to complete any major assignment will result in a grade of F for the course.

**Intellectual honesty:** All work is assumed to be the student's own and produced exclusively for the course in which it is submitted. Papers written for one course, even if revised, are not to be submitted in another without the instructor's prior approval. Borrowing of ideas or language from other sources (including published material, other student papers, the internet or other electronic resources, etc.) must be carefully documented. Students are advised against posting their work on the internet since doing so may lead to suspicion of plagiarism. Students are advised to maintain drafts of their work to verify its originality. Cases of suspected plagiarism will be referred to the Honor Council, and the student if convicted will receive a grade of F in the course in addition to sanctions assigned by the Council. Carelessness in documenting sources, even if not technically plagiarism, will be penalized as the instructor deems appropriate. If you are uncertain about how or whether to document sources, consult your teacher.