

Dr. Tina Barr, Creative Writing: Introductory Poetry Workshop, Course 200
Class meets 12:30 to 1:45pm T/Th in Barrett 020, Office, 308 B Palmer Hall, 843-3979.
 Office Hours Tuesdays 11:00 to noon, Wednesdays 1 to 3 & by appointment. **Kindly consult your syllabus, before you ask me questions the syllabus covers.**

Course Description: This course will introduce students to poetic techniques and methods of analysis through outside reading and student practice. Students will be assigned exercises in writing poetry, in both free verse and in received forms, using models by poets such as Yusef Komunyakaa, Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, Adrienne Rich, Seamus Heaney, Charles Bukowski, Robert Burns, Gwendolyn Brooks, Theodore Roethke, and James Wright. In addition the Handbook, a Xeroxed handout, will include examples by former poetry students.

Required “Texts”: *Poetry Handbook*, by Tina Barr (*students will be using a first version/draft*)

The Wadsworth Anthology of Poetry, edited by Jay Parini

Volume of poetry by Jeffrey Levine

Course Requirements:

- 1.** Students must attend carefully to the **reading requirements and contribute significantly to class discussion. (20%)**
- 2.** Students must turn in **a portfolio (60%)** 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 **One Oral Report (20%)** on either an essay or a specific poem or series of brief poems by one of the poets we are reading. **These presentations require you to present your straightforward reading of the work. If I really feel, as someone who has been reading poetry longer, that I need to “correct” a point of view that seems a misinterpretation, I will. But I want you to be able to “try out” your own ideas. Essentially, I want you to “teach” the poem or subject to the class; do not simply lecture necessarily, ask the students questions. Oral reports should be rehearsed to take no more than 15 minutes of class time. You provide an entry into the poem, but not necessarily an exhaustive discussion, depending on the length and complexity of the poem, by asking questions of the students!**

Grading: Grades are based on talent as demonstrated in the poems, but achievement in poetry is the result of **the work of editing and revising**.

Procedures:

If you are absent, bring in your 16 copies when you next come to class. You may only turn in **typed copies in class or in conference**. Students will be responsible for turning in the requisite **copies** of each poem they want discussed in class. Although I will give

you a few assignments, generating subjects for poems is up to you as a burgeoning writer. Thus, you can workshop whatever poems you like, but do fulfill the assigned writing exercises. Please note: You should **prepare the weekend before**, for the coming week. **Thus: “Assignment for next week” is due the following week.**

Weekly Requirements for Poems: *Students will turn in a poem every week for class discussion;* they are required to complete revisions as they progress. Students should be continually revising their work. **You may generate your own poems, without recourse to the exercises as well, and feel free to bring them into workshop. You are considered a writer, and it’s up to you to produce the poems for the portfolio by midterm and end of term. The forms and subjects of poems are up to you, but do complete the assignments, because they are designed with particular goals in mind.**

Attendance: Students **should miss no more than 3** 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 will result in a reduction in the final grade for the course. Do not come to class or conference when you are sick.** 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.

Week 1 1/10

Introduction to course. Paired Interviews.

Assignment for next week: type up your poem based on aromatherapy exercise, after you have sufficiently worked on it, and bring it to me in conference. In addition type up your “chocolate” exercise, and bring both of these in to conference next week. Since these poems are only for me to look at, you need not bring in the 16 copies you normally would, for class, but bring in just 2 copies to your conference.

Week 2 1/15 & 1/17

See Dr. Barr in conference this week, so that she can look at your first efforts and get to know you a bit further. Since classes will be cancelled to meet with her in conference, you do not have class this week in poetry. Employ the extra time to generate a third poem. She will give you the exercise in conference.

Assignment for next week: Work on all 3 poems: 1. the aromatherapy poem 2. the chocolate poem and 3. the narrative poem. Bring 16 copies of each of the poems so that the entire class can workshop each other’s poems during the 2 workshops this upcoming week.

Week 3 1/22 & 1/24

During both class meetings, we will workshop your poems, devoting this week to developing and revising your poetry, before we begin the main part of the course, which

will examine the work of others. We do not meet during **Week 4. Professor Barr will be at the AWP conference in New York. Devote this time to revision and a 2nd narrative poem.**

Assignment for Week 5 (2/5 & 2/7): Bring in 16 copies of the 2nd narrative to class on 2/5.

Week 4 1/29 & 1/31 Professor Barr will attend Associated Writing Programs Conference. NO class this week. Use this time to fulfill the writing assignment, which was distributed on 1/24. Work on it on Tuesday; revise it on Thursday, so you are NOT bringing your first draft into class. This poem should demonstrate some level of editorial engagement.

Assignment for week 5: Read the section **Advice for Beginning Writers** in the “handbook.” Read Rilke and Hugo handouts. Bring in 16 copies of all poems you want discussed in workshop, including the 2nd narrative you worked on during 1/29 and 1/31.

Week 5 2/5 & 2/7

Discussion of Hugo and Rilke. Go over 2nd narrative by all students. Workshop student poems.

Assignment for next week: Read **The Poem’s Agenda**, in your handbook, do the verb exercise. Rethink, in light of your reading, all titles for the poems you have written so far this term. Read the following narrative poems in your anthology, and consider the import of the titles and endings. Hughes’ poem “Theme for English B,” page 222 in the **Wadsworth Anthology**, “Home Burial,” by Frost, page 217, Bishop’s “The Moose,” page 224. Revise your narrative poems and bring in copies of revisions for class discussion.

Week 6 2/12 & 2/14

Adjectives exercise in class. Handout on grading student poems. **Student reports on and discussion of Hughes, Frost & Bishop.** Revisions of Student poems.

Assignment for next week: Read **Transition versus Juxtaposition**, in the poetry handbook and the poems as assigned for discussion.

Week 7 2/19 & 2/21

Discussion of revisions of student poems in preparation for Midterm Portfolio, due on 2/26. Discussion of work by Williams, Pound, Smith, Burns and Spens.

Assignment for next week: **Revise poems for Midterm Portfolio, due on 2/26.** 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 anywhere from 4 to **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. Read the short section in the poetry handbook on **Expansion and Contraction**, with the poems by Dickinson, Wright and Tennyson. **Students to report on poems by Tennyson and Wright.**

Week 8 2/26 & 2/28

Two Students to each present a report on the Wright and Tennyson poems. Collect student portfolios on 2/26. On 2/28, you will have an out of class exercise, “Unexpected Encounters, Outside of the Expected” which is attached to the last part of the syllabus. Be sure you complete the correct exercise!

Spring Break/Week 9 *Assignment over the break:* Read the poems of Jeffrey Levine, who will be coming to visit the Thursday after break, 3/13. His book has been ordered for you and you need to pick it up in the bookstore, under the correct course, 200. He is a wonderful poet.

Week 10 3/11 & 3/13 Poetry Reading by Jeffrey Levine, 7:30 on Thursday, required for all—he’s terrific! The reading takes place in the Orgill Room. No class on 3/13, but you are REQUIRED to attend the reading.

Discussion of the poems of Jeffrey Levine on 3/11. Handout 16 copies of “Outside of the Expected” poems students wrote over the break. No class on 3/13, instead you are required to attend poetry reading.

Assignment for next week: Read the section entitled **Prose and Poetry, How to Tell the Difference**, in the poetry handbook. **Two Students to prepare their reports on use of lines and stanzas in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “The River Merchant’s Wife.”**

Week 11 3/18 & no class on 3/20 (Easter Break)

Discussion of the ideas on lineation, etc. from the handbook, and handouts of poem by Komunyakaa, “Venus’s Flytraps” as well as excerpt from David Foster Wallace. Discussion of poems by Shakespeare and Moore and Cummings.

Assignment for next week: Complete the exercise “Process Poem Exercise,” at the end of the syllabus, and pay special attention to the issues you have discussed as you revise it and other poems. **Two Students to prepare their reports on use of lines and stanzas in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “The River Merchant’s Wife.”** Third student to report on a poem of his or her choice from anthology, with a focus on 2 techniques.

Week 12 3/25 & 3/27

Complete discussion of anthologized poems. Two Students to report on use of lines and stanzas in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “The River Merchant’s Wife.” Third student to report on a poem of his or her choice from anthology, with a focus on 2 techniques. Discuss student poems on a process.

Assignment for next week: Read all the villanelles in the villanelle section, page 489 to 499. Two students who will offer their reports on a villanelle, to choose which villanelle they will discuss on 4/8. Email Dr. Barr with title. tinabarr@rhodes.edu

Week 13 4/1 & (class cancelled on 4/3-----write a villanelle on 4/3)

Barr to lecture on the villanelle and discussion of villanelle. On 4/3 you will each devote the time you would have been in class to devising a villanelle.

Assignment for next week: Write a villanelle on 4/3, edit it over the weekend, and bring in 16 copies for discussion on 4/8. Two students to report on how the form works within their choice of villanelle from the section in the *Wadsworth Anthology*.

Week 14 4/8 & 4/10 (no class on 4/10, Dr. Barr at Southern Literary Festival in Louisiana.) See below for what to do on 4/10.

Discussion of villanelles from the anthology, as well as student villanelles. Two students to report on how the form works within their choice of villanelle from the section in the *Wadsworth Anthology*.

Assignment for next week: **During the class session on 4/10, while you will not be in class, you need to fulfill the following assignment: skim and read through section 21 in your anthology, about animals. Find at least one poem that captivates you. Analyze what about it is arresting. Over the weekend, or during the class period, go to the zoo and write a poem with a focus on a particular animal, writing clearly and descriptively, in the manner of D. H. Lawrence, in his poem on the snake. Bring in 16 copies for next week. Since your final portfolio is due on 4/22, you will want to begin to look at all your work and revise it carefully. This upcoming week will be your final opportunity to workshop your revised work before the portfolio is due.**

Week 15 4/15 & 4/17

Discussion of student poems on 4/15 & 4/17. Two student reports, each on a poem of his or her choice from the anthology.

Assignment for next week: Work on revisions of poems for portfolio, due on 4/22.

Week 16 4/22 & 4/24

On 4/22 no class, students can see me about ONE poem, and one poem only, in conference. I will be available on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of this week for conferences. On 4/24, turn in final portfolio, class party. Three student reports, each on a poem of his or her choice from the anthology.

Unexpected Encounters: Outside of the Expected **Off-Campus Writing Assignment**

As you can tell, I'm a strong believer in writing from the experience of the world. I want my writing students to take themselves **outside of the expected**. When you do this, you SEE differently. You experience reality outside of what you've observed with expectation.

I would like you to take yourself for an hour off campus, to an unexpected place. It could be you drive over to the park and watch what is happening with people there. You could walk to Dinos and check out the last of the breakfast crowd. You could walk to University Park Cleaners. You might walk into the Brooks Museum and go find a painting to observe. You could go over to the shoe repair man on Union and hang around with the guy, asking him how he came into that business. You could go over to the post office and watch the people in the line. You could go into a shop and interview the owner or clerk or salesperson about his or her life.

Find a place and catapult yourself into some level of observation or attention or interaction that takes you outside of your zone of experience. Bring to it some sense of **curiosity, even wonder**. You've read poems that do this. Seek out an encounter, with a person, with a baby warthog at the zoo, with a world you have never entered, but find one.

Work on the resulting poem and bring in copies for all next time we meet in workshop, after Spring Break.

Process Poem Exercise

One kind of poem to think about is to describe a process.

I want you, during the class period when you have time off, to write a poem on a process. It could describe baking brownies, making vegetable soup, some aspect of playing basketball, practicing a yoga move, like downward dog, preparing a canvas for paint, bringing a player to the mat in a wrestling match, repotting a plant, bandaging a wound, putting on a headscarf, painting your fingernails, playing an instrument, dissecting a frog. Think of a process and don't assume the reader is going to know what you are talking about, or has any familiarity at all with how to put a basketball into a hoop.

Write the first draft, wait a day and go back to it, revising while asking yourself the following questions:

- 1. is my meaning clear**
- 2. am I using the vocabulary of this field**
- 3. have I used smell, touch, taste, sight and hearing elements to evoke my subject or situation**
- 4. what is the meaning for the reader**

Edit accordingly. Bring in final copies for next class meeting.