

ENGLISH 200: INTRODUCTION TO POETRY WRITING

Fall Semester 2014

TH 9:30–10:45 AM, Palmer Hall 210

CRN: 15657

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Office hours: Tu 2-3 PM, W 1-4 PM, and by appt.

TEXTS

Harmon, William, ed. *The Poetry Toolkit*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

McClatchy, J.D., ed. *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*. 2nd edition. New York: Vintage Books, 2003.

“Poetry is language in orbit.”

– Seamus Heaney

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course aims to help participants broaden their understanding and appreciation of the craft of poetry. Keeping in mind that the English word “poetry” derives from the Greek *poēisis* (i.e. an act of “making”) we will approach writing as a means of producing new ideas—not just expressing past experiences or preexisting views. Throughout the semester our work will focus on elements of craft such as imagery, diction, rhythm, and form. We will read a broad sampling of contemporary poetry; we will do a lot of writing, from weekly exercises to more polished poems; and we will discuss this writing in workshop format and learn how to make it better.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Eight writing exercises
- Four poems and a final portfolio
- Memorization of fourteen lines of poetry
- Active participation in workshop and written responses to poems

Writing exercises. You will complete eight writing exercises, many of which will begin with an activity in class. These exercises will push you to experiment with different registers and forms, and they may serve as a springboard for later poems.

Poems and final portfolio. In addition to the exercises mentioned above, you will write four poems, all of which will be discussed in workshop and revised as part of a final portfolio at the end of the term. This portfolio will include the original versions of the four poems, your most recent revisions, and a narrative statement (two double-spaced pages) describing your writing and revision process.

Memorization. You will memorize at least fourteen lines of poetry (a sonnet or a few stanzas of a longer poem). Recitations are scheduled for Thursday, 12/4.

Workshop

During workshop weeks, we will discuss 4-5 poems in a class period. The formats for specific workshops may change as the semester progresses, but this is how the submission process will work:

- 1) The day your poem is due, you will email it to me **before** class. I will compile three or four workshop packets and post them to Moodle later that day. 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 poems.
- 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 thoughtfulness and respect. If you come to class without the required materials (stories for workshop, workshop letters, handouts, books, and so forth), you will lose points from your participation grade.

Additionally, I may give quizzes. These will be short (3-4 questions), and if you have done the reading you should not have trouble passing them.

POLICIES

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 specific arrangements with me beforehand. This is a firm policy. With the exception of poems submitted for workshop, I will not accept work via email.

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 workshops, you will fail the course.

Grading

Poems and final portfolio	60%
Writing exercises and memorization	25%
Participation (includes attendance, quizzes and workshop letters)	15%

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

SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Reading and writing assignments are listed on the day they are due. Unless otherwise noted, poems referenced are from *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*. Handouts will be available on Moodle.

Thursday, 8/28

Introductions / syllabus review

Tuesday, 9/2

Read: Handout: Mark Doty, "A Tremendous Fish" (Moodle)

Write: Exercise 1 (Ways of Looking)

Thursday, 9/4

Read: "In the Waiting Room" (34-7)

Handout: First-Person Narratives (Moodle)

Tuesday, 9/9

Read: "Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg" (186-7); "Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry, Ohio" (289); "Belle Isle, 1949" (314); "My Father's Back" (547-8); "Adolescence—II" (557)

Handout: Richard Hugo, "The Triggering Town" (Moodle)

Write: Exercise 2 (Narrative Angles)

Thursday, 9/11

Read: "A View" (139-41); "Korean Mums" (176-7); "The Best Slow Dancer" (212-13); "Corson's Inlet" (267-70); "Dear John, Dear Coltrane" (439-40)

Write: Exercise 3 (Line Breaks)

Tuesday, 9/16

Read: "Mule Team and Poster" (202-3); "Why I am Not a Painter" (208); "Willowware Cup" (248-9); "Facing It" (537-8); "San Sepolcro" (550-1)

Handout: Ekphrastic Poems (Moodle)

Write: Poem 1 (Narrative)

Thursday, 9/18

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Tuesday, 9/23

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Thursday, 9/25

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Tuesday, 9/30

Read: “The Woman at the Washington Zoo” (58-9); “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner” (58); “Cinderella” (59-60); “The Twins” (138-9); “Einstein’s Bathrobe” (153-4) “The Tourist from Syracuse” (200-1); “The Mad Potter” (334-7); “Prodigy” (437-8); “Orpheus and Eurydice” (552-3)

Write: Exercise 4 (Ekphrasis)

Thursday, 10/2

Read: Reread “The Mad Potter” (334-7)

Handout: Gary Jackson and Carol Ann Duffy (Moodle)

Tuesday, 10/7

Read: “Having a Coke with You” (209-10); “Howl” (225-9); “Morning Song” (370); “Coal” (402-3)

Handout: William Stafford, “Against Good Diction” (Moodle)

Write: Poem 2 (Character)

Thursday, 10/9

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Tuesday, 10/14

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Thursday, 10/16

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Tuesday, 10/21

FALL BREAK

Thursday, 10/23

Read: “The Night of the Shirts” (261); “Her Kind” (304-5); “The Horse” (311-12); “You Can Have It” (314-6) “Winter Field” (529); “Ode to the Maggot” (538-9)

Handout: Tropes and Figures (from *Poetry Dictionary*)

Write: Exercise 5 (Diction)

Tuesday, 10/28

Read: Handout: Selected Poems (II)

Write: Exercise 6 (Rhetoric)

Thursday, 10/30

Read: Handout: Sonnets (I)

Tuesday, 11/4

Read: “The Illiterate” (111) and “The Feast of Stephen” (168-9)

Handout: Sonnets (II)

Write: Poem 3 (Pattern)

Thursday, 11/6

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Tuesday, 11/11

Read: Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Thursday, 11/13

Read: TBA

Tuesday, 11/18

Workshop packet

Write: Workshop letters

Thursday, 11/20

Read: TBA

Write: Poem 4 (Sonnet)

Tuesday, 11/25

Read: Workshop packet – group workshops

Write: Workshop letters

Thursday, 11/27

THANKSGIVING

Tuesday, 12/2

Read: TBA

Write: Ex. 7 (Titles and First Lines)

Thursday, 12/4

→ Recitations: 14 lines of poetry

Read: TBA

Write: Ex. 8 (Revision)

Tuesday, 12/9

Read: Workshop packet – group workshops

Write: Workshop letters

Monday, 12/15

Final portfolios due in my office by noon