

Dr. Tina Barr

Creative Writing: Introductory Poetry Workshop, Course 200

Office, 307 Palmer Hall, (901) 843-3979, Office Hours Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. and by appointment. You can also email me at: TinaBarr@rhodes.edu **If you need to reach me, I am often working at home (725-1443), so please call me at home if you don't reach me in the office. I don't have email at my house.**

Course Description: This course is designed to introduce students to principles of good poetry, with readings in a manual of prosody, readings of work by outside writers and several brief essays from Hugo's *The Triggering Town*. 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*. Some assignments will be more difficult and require more effort than others. If you apply yourself and make a strong effort to work at the reading and writing, your experience of this course will be richer. **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.

Required Texts: *The Poem's Heartbeat* by Alfred Corn, Story Line Press, 1997; *Coursepack of Selected Poems*; *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo, Norton, 1979; *The Practice of Poetry*, edited by Robin Behn and Chase Twitchell, Harper, 1992.

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, and **arrange your schedule now to attend fiction reading by Rosa Shand on 9/19 at 7:30 p.m. in Blount**. **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 thus far. Portfolios should consist of 8-14 poems. Excellence is more important than quantity, and usually comes after careful revision, but include all the poems you've written, since the grade will be based on the strongest elements in the work. Midterm grades tend to be conservative, so grades *can* go up considerably, but may also remain the same for a final grade. **3.** Students will prepare **responses to and questions on the work of a particular poet** included in the syllabus; they will open up class discussion as a respondent on that poet, with reference to the assigned reading in the Alfred Corn manual on prosody and, if relevant, the Hugo chapters. Each student will prepare a required essay of three to four pages on a poem by the poet they signed up for as respondent. The essay should cover one technique or aspect, perhaps two, of the poem in question. The essay is due on the day of the discussion. **Late essays are unacceptable.** Consider these **essays** (20%) seriously. You will be graded on them. If I feel the class needs to be prodded in terms of careful attention to the assigned reading, I may surprise the class with spontaneous quizzes, which will be graded as part of class participation.

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. **Students must turn in two typed copies. Less than two copies will be returned to you.** 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.**

Weekly Requirements for Poems: Students will turn in a poem every other week for class discussion; however they are required to complete revisions as they progress. Students should be continually revising their work. A provisional "grade" will be indicated on the poems returned with comments. ALL students need to complete the weekly exercises in *The Practice of Poetry*, but will turn in two copies of his or her **best effort at a poem** every other week. Thus, group A (first half of alphabet) will turn in poems on Tuesday of week 3, group B on Tuesday of week 4, etc.

Conferences: Conference time is built into the syllabus as part of the opportunities offered by this course. 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.

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 2 absences may result in a reduction in the final grade for the course.

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.

Week 1 8/29

Introductions, class requirements, in-class exercises, (smell/five senses) sign up for conferences next week.

Assignment for next week: Work on revision of drafts done for in-class writing exercise. (aromatherapy) **Bring copies of both poems to your conference, as well as any other poems. If you were unable to sign up for a conference, call and arrange a time.**

Week 2 9/3 & 9/5 Conference Week. See Dr. Barr in Palmer 307, her office, during the conference time you scheduled on the first day of class. She will

post the list on her office door. Bring your typed-up drafts of the in-class exercise, aromatherapy, when you come to conference. Even if you did not manage the exercise well, or feel embarrassed, this will be an opportunity to get to know the professor better!

Assignment for 9/10 & 9/12 Read in *Coursepack* poems by May Swenson, Ellen Bryan Voigt, & Lucille Clifton. Read in Hugo's *The Triggering Town* chapters 1 and 2. Do an exercise from Part 1 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Group A will turn in **two copies** of the results of this effort, and the revised drafts of the aromatherapy exercise on Tuesday 9/10 during the class period.

Week 3 9/10 & 9/12 Tina Barr reads from her chapbook, *Red Land, Black Land*, at Burke's Bookstore, 1719 Poplar, at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday evening. Call 278-7484 for information.

Discussion of "Movie" poems on Tuesday and excerpts from *The Triggering Town*, and Barr drafts, revision recommendations handout. Students poems will be discussed on Thursday.

Assignment for next week Read in *Coursepack* poems by contemporary poets Lux, Weaver & Wilber, the introduction and chapters 1 and 2 in *The Poem's Heartbeat* in conjunction with the poems you read in the coursepack, and another exercise from Part 1 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Turn in **2 copies** of your exercise and/or any other poem(s) on the date your poems are due. Study questions: Can you determine the kinds of patterns the poets use, as discussed by Corn on page 5. Can you ascertain differences in the way lines are determined and stress is used, based on your reading of the first two chapters in Corn? Be prepared for a quiz! When you work on an exercise from part 1 of *The Practice of Poetry*, realize that these exercises get you started on the process of making a poem. You need to transform the results of the exercises into poems by revising them. Group B will turn in poems on Tuesday.

Week 4 9/17 & 9/19 Rosa Shand, author of the novel, *The Gravity of Sunlight*, will read on Thursday evening at 7:30 p.m. in Blount auditorium. Attendance is required.

Discussion of Lux, Weaver and Wilber and Corn chapters, student poems.

Assignment for next week Read in *Coursepack* poems by Sharon Olds. Complete an exercise from Part 2 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Group A will turn on poems on Tuesday.

Week 5 9/24 & 9/26

Discussion of Olds' poems, as well as student poems. Discussion of poems and grading, including examples of poems.

Assignment for next week Read in *Coursepack* ballads and sonnet, “Lord Randal,” “Sir Patrick Spens,” “Whose List to Hunt”. Read chapter 3 on “Metrical Variation” and 4 on “Phonic Echo” in *The Poem’s Heartbeat*. Complete another exercise from either part 1 or part 2 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Group B will turn in poems on Tuesday.

Week 6 10/1 & 10/3

Discussion of ballads & sonnet, and chapter 3 & 4 of Corn, student poems.

Assignment for 10/15: Read in *Coursepack* poems by Etheridge Knight, both in his *New and Selected* and from the Norton anthology; read poems by Billy Collins. Attend to the differences and similarities between their work and the features of the older ballads and sonnets you’ve considered. Read chapters 5 & 6 in *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, thinking about the stanzaic and verse forms you’ve encountered in your reading. Be prepared for a quiz! Complete an exercise in *The Practice of Poetry*, part 3A. Bring a copy when you see me in conference. Group A poems due 10/22.

Midterm portfolios due on 10/15, no exceptions.

Week 7 10/8 & 10/10 Conference week—no class.

See Professor Barr in Conference. Use this time to ask about specific poems, general questions about your progress, grades, questions on the reading, etc.

Assignment for 10/15: Read in *Coursepack* poems by Etheridge Knight, both in his *New and Selected* and from the Norton anthology; read poems by Billy Collins. Attend to the differences and similarities between their work and the features of the older ballads and sonnets you’ve considered. Read chapters 5 & 6 in *The Poem’s Heartbeat*, thinking about the stanzaic and verse forms you’ve encountered in your reading. Be prepared for a quiz! Complete an exercise in *The Practice of Poetry*, part 3A. Group A poems due 10/15.

Week 8 10/15 & 10/17

Discussion of poems by Etheridge Knight and Billy Collins.

Assignment for after break: Read in Richard Hugo’s *The Triggering Town*, chapters 4 and 5. Complete exercise from Part 4 of *The Practice of Poetry*. Read poems in coursepack by Robert Hass.

Week 9 10/24

Discussion of Robert Hass’s poetry on 10/24.

Assignment for next week: Skip ahead in the coursepack and read poems by John Ashbery and Matthea Harvey. These are very different from many of the poems we’ve

read before. Consider what they have to offer you and the ways they work, focusing on “The Instruction Manual,” and “Nude on a Horsehair Sofa by the Sea.” Revise exercises. Group B poems due on 10/29.

Week 10 10/29 & 10/31

Discussion of work by Ashbery and Harvey. Discussion of group B poems.

Assignment for next week: I’d like you to read Bishop’s “The Fish,” & Lowell’s “Skunk Hour.” Please do an exercise from part 5 of *The Practice of Poetry*.

Week 11 11/5 & 11/7

Discussion of poems by Bishop and Lowell. Discussion of group A poems.

Assignment for next week: Read in coursepack poems by Yusef Komunyakaa (end of coursepack) “Salt,” “Work,” “We Never Know,” “Tu Do Street.” Complete a writing exercise from Part 6 of *The Practice of Poetry*.

Week 12 11/12 & 11/14

Discussion of work by Komunyakaa on Tuesday (video?) and group B poems.

Assignment for next week: Read in coursepack poems by Sylvia Plath, (end of coursepack). Work on revisions of your poems and complete an exercise of your choice from *The Practice of Poetry*. **Pick a poem you want to memorize, from any period, by any poet, to recite on the last day of class. Begin the memorize it.**

Week 13 11/19 & 11/21

Discussion of poems by Sylvia Plath and student poems by groups A and B.

Assignment for next week Read poems by James Wright, “Hook,” and “To a Blossoming Pear Tree.” Complete an exercise from section 7 of *The Practice of Poetry*.

Week 14 11/26

Discussion of poems by Wright.

Assignment for next week: **Work on revisions of poems in preparation for turning in your portfolio on 12/5.** Read poems by Adrienne Rich and Louise Bogan in coursepack. **Continue to work on memorizing a poem.**

Week 15 12/3 & 12/5 (Conferences on 12/3 or 12/4)

Discussion of poems by Bogan and Rich on 12/5. Turn in portfolio. Evaluations.

Week 16 12/10 Class party. Bring in the favorite poem you wrote this semester to share with the class. Have a poem memorized, recite it.

Poets Under Discussion for student response.

You should prepare your essay for the date specified. **Attention, consult your syllabus now to plan ahead for your essay, since some of these dates come immediately after a break, and you will need to be prepared ahead of time.**

Name & Phone #

9/17: Thomas Lux (comic and quirky)

Afaa (Michael) Weaver (African-American, narrative, elated)

Richard Wilber (formal use of metaphor, serious & emotive)

9/24: Sharon Olds (strong imagery, sexuality)

10/1: anonymous ballads

Thomas Wyatt's sonnet (early 16th c diction, formal style)

10/15: Etheridge Knight (African-American, oral focus, irreverent)

Billy Collins (colloquial, direct)

10/24: Robert Hass (postmodern, meditative, inventive, deep themes)

10/29: John Ashbery (intellectual, meditative, innovative)

Matthea Harvey (non-narrative, cryptic, inventive, playful)

11/12 Yusef Komunyakaa (contemporary master, Black poet)

11/26: James Wright (direct images, emotionally resonant)

12/3: Louise Bogan (traditional forms, conservative)

Adrienne Rich (radical contemporary)

For your essay, (3-4 pages) focus on one or two aspects of a particular technique in a particular poem. Don't try to cover every aspect of the poem unless it is extremely simple or short. For example, if you were to write on the movie poem by Ellen Bryan Voigt, you might want to focus on the ways in which she uses repetition (it's a. structural, b. thematic, c. emotional aspects, for example) OR your paper could focus on the images she uses to portray the whites OR the imagery she uses to portray blacks OR the way she evokes a setting OR her use of sound (rhyme, alliteration, consonance, assonance) and meter. These are examples of 5 separate approaches to the same poem. But your paper is short, and you want to write a close analysis, with reference to the text by quoting the words, lines, etc. you are discussing. So you must *focus* your topic. Do feel free to discuss it with me, either by telephoning me with ideas, or by email, or making an appointment with me.

Quiz # 1

Choose one of the poems you read for today by Lux, Weaver or Wilber. Discuss how you see patterns, in EITHER *aural* (sound) or *visual* (imagery) terms.

Quiz #2

A. Pick a line from the ballad, “Sir Patrick Spens,” and scan it. Write out the line below, and then indicate, based on your reading of the first 4 chapters by Alfred Corn, how you would scan it, where you would place stress or emphasis---indicate which syllables you would stress, and which you would not stress.

B. Now, using another line, copy it out below, and point out if or where the poet used alliteration, consonance or assonance.

Quiz #3

Take a moment to record your responses to either the poem by Ashbery OR the poem by Harvey. Answer ONLY this question. How does the particular use of line length contribute to the poem's meaning?