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## ENGL 200-01, Introduction to Poetry Writing, Spring 2007

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## Creative Writing: Introductory Poetry Workshop, Course 200, Barrett 020

Dr. Tina Barr's [New Office](#) is 308B Palmer Hall, 843-3979 Office Hours Mondays 1:30 to 3:00 pm, Tuesdays, 11:00 to 12:30, and by appointment. You can also email me at: [TinaBarr@rhodes.edu](mailto:TinaBarr@rhodes.edu) & [TinaBarr@bellsouth.net](mailto:TinaBarr@bellsouth.net). Extra copies of the [syllabus](#), and [Recommendation request guidelines](#) are in folders in the bin outside my office door. Any forms can be left and will be signed mornings between Mondays and Thursdays. Stop back at the end of the day to pick up your form.

**Course Description:** This class will introduce students to the principles of good poetry, including prosody, through readings and exercises designed to engage your interest and develop your skills. **Required Texts:**

1. *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo
2. *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rainer Maria Rilke
3. *Good Poems* edited by Garrison Keillor

Students are expected *to analyze and prepare to discuss the poems and essays they read ahead of time, so that they will make significant contributions to class discussion*. The more each member contributes in different ways to the workshop the more interesting it will be. You will also be working on the following Creative Writing Exercises, designed to lead you to making a portfolio of poems. These are REQUIRED and you must complete them on-time, although you can always revise your work. YOU MUST TURN THEM IN every Tuesday. **1. aromatherapy exercise 2. self-portrait exercise 3. feather exercise 4. fruit exercise 5. White Glove exercise 6. poem on a process 7. Object exercise 8. Outside of the Expected exercise 9. villanelle exercise**

A word here--- 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, than to write a clear 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.

### **Course Requirements:**

- 1.** Students must attend carefully to the **reading requirements by preparing the reading outside of class**, and **contribute significantly to class discussion including an oral reports---see below**. (20%).
- 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 the *best poems you have worked on from the beginning of term through midterm (first portfolio) and then from the beginning of term through the end of the semester (second portfolio)*. **Portfolios should consist of 8-10 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 an **oral presentation** on topics to be selected. (30%) You will be graded. 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 20%.)

**Procedures:** Students will be responsible for turning in **copies for each class member and for the professor** 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 will turn in a poem every week for class discussion.* Students should be continually revising their work. *ALL students need to complete the weekly exercises.*

**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 of poems you are writing this semester to class and to conference,* Keep extra copies of all your poems, not just in your hard drive.

**Attendance:** Students should miss no more than 3 classes a semester, *based on a medical absence or family emergency.* Thus, barring surgery, if you get sick, you will be covered. So *do not miss class unless you inform the professor.* If you need to miss a class based on *either a family emergency or an illness,* please call or email the professor. More than 3 (unexcused) absences will likely result in a reduction in the final grade for the course.

**Student Report:** You will give an oral report during the semester. You should take about **20 minutes of class time.** **Focus on asking questions of the class, so you don't lecture so much as engage the class in a discussion that brings them to a conclusion**

**about the poem you've chosen to present. Choose 1 to 3 techniques, like word choice, or imagery of verb choice or title or rhyme or assonance, etc. to address the meaning of the poem.**

**Responsibilities:** 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**.

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. 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. Your job is to assimilate my suggestions and revise your work accordingly. 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, 8/23**

Introductions, class requirements, sign up for conferences and oral reports.

Aromatherapy Exercise. **We do not meet on days when conferences are scheduled. Pay careful attention to the syllabus to follow the requirements of the course, including cancelled classes due to conference days or off-campus writing assignments.**

*Assignment for next week:* Read in *The Triggering Town* by Richard Hugo the first 2 chapters and mark what seems cogent. Bring in **enough copies of the typed up aromatherapy exercise for each member of the class for discussion next Tuesday**. Self-Portrait Exercise.

### **Week 2, 8/28 & 8/30**

Students should turn in **copies** of the self-portrait poem on Tuesday. Discussion of Hugo. **No class on 8/30 I will meet students in conference.**

*Assignment for next week:* Read chapters 4 & 5 in Hugo. Feather poem by former student; feather exercise for next week. Begin reading *Letters To A Young Poet* by Rilke. Read at least first half of book.

### **Week 3, 9/4 & 9/6**

Turn in copies of feather exercise. Discuss Hugo and Rilke. In-class exercise on Fruit, with poem by former student.

*Assignment for next week:* Read remainder of Rilke text. Bring in enough copies of your revision of "Fruit" writing assignment and any revisions of other poems to distribute on Tuesday.

**Week 4, 9/11** Two Events this week: **On 9/11, Tuesday, from 6 to 7:30 there will be an Open Mic Night in Rhea Lounge, with Pizza and Sodas. Sign up to read a poem. Tony Doerr reads from his fiction at 7:30pm on 9/13 in Hardee Hall, the auditorium in Tuthill, the music building. He is terrific.**

Discussion of Rilke and student poems. In class attention to "White Glove" poem. No class on 9/13, but you must do "White Glove" cw exercise off-campus.

*Assignment for next week* Read section on Love in *Good Poems* anthology. Pick a poem you like and focus on a point you want to make in class about a particular element in the poem. It could have to do with image, or metaphor, or word choice, or development of meaning, or repetition, etc. Pay attention to "A Red, Red Rose," "First Love," "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven," "Politics," "Magellan Street," and "Comin Through the Rye." Bring in result of White Glove exercise you did on Thursday, with copies of all for discussion on 9/18, Tuesday.

### **Week 5, 9/18 & 9/20 (no class on 9/20, students in conference)**

Discussion on Tuesday of White Glove poems and poems on Love from *Good Poems*.

*Assignment for next week :* Read poems in anthology, in Music section, with a flucs on "Night Club," page 48, "Her Door," "The Pupil," "Instrument of Choice," "Grain of Sound," and "Piano," pages 54-56 and 63.

### **Week 6, 9/25 No class on 9/27, Professor Barr doing poetry reading at Southern Women's Writers Conference in Georgia**

Discussion of outside reading in anthology. Look at a poem in-class on a Process.

On 9/27 do out of class exercise, a poem on a process.

*Assignment for 10/2:* Work on revision of poem on a process and bring in copies for Tuesday's class. Begin the work of assembling your portfolio for midterm. Bring in any revisions you want discussed on 10/2. **Midterm portfolios due on 10/4, no exceptions.**

### **Week 7, 10/2 & 10/4**

Workshop Day: discussion of student poems on 10/2. 10/4 Lecture and Object lesson exercise. Turn in portfolio.

*Assignment for next week:* Read poems in Good Poems, as assigned. Revise Object Lesson exercise. Students to prepare oral reports.

### **Week 8, 10/9 & 10/11**

Turn in copies of object lesson exercise. Discussion of student poems on Tuesday, as well as poems in Good Poems. Student reports from anthology. Examine Sara Rutherford's Outside of the Expected poem. Distribution of off-campus writing assignment, Outside of the Expected.

### **No assignment over Fall Break**

**Week 9, Thursday, 10/18 Complete off-campus writing assignment during class period, Outside of the Expected.**

*Assignment for next week:* Revise off-campus writing assignment you did on Thursday morning. Two students to give reports next week.

### **Week 10, 10/23 & 10/25**

Bring in copies of off-campus writing assignment you on 10/18 and revised over the weekend. Discussion of student poems and Barr lecture on poems. Two Student Reports. Barr to go over Villanelle exercise, go back to Mary Leader's "Her Door," in your anthology, which was a villanelle, with poem by former student.

*Assignment for next week:* Read in anthology, as assigned. Write a villanelle.

### **Week 11, 10/30 & 11/1**

Discussion of reading and villanelle poems. Two Student Reports. Discussion of student poems on Thursday.

*Assignment for next week:* Work on revisions of all your poems. Read poems as assigned in Good Poems. Students to report.

### **Week 12, 11/6 & 11/8**

Discussion of assigned reading as well as student villanelles, and

## Student Reports.

### **Week 13, 11/13 & 11/15 & Week 14, 11/20**

This week and a half before and after Thanksgiving Break will be set aside for **private conferences**.

We will not meet in class. Please sign up on the sheet, which will be posted on Dr. Barr's office door, Palmer 308B. Bring to **conference the 2 poems you find most difficult to revise**.

*Assignment for 11/27 & 11/29:* Bring **copies for everyone of revised poems** you want discussed during the workshop. **Final Portfolio due on 11/29, share the best poem you wrote this semester with the class.**

### **Week 15, 11/27 & 11/29**

Discussions of student poems during this week of final workshops. On Thursday, when you bring in portfolio, share best poem you wrote this semester by reading it aloud to the class. If you can memorize it, even better. **Two Student Reports on Poets on Thursday.**

### **Week 16, 12/4, ----Lunch meeting off-campus.**