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ENGL 310-01, Creative Writing: Advanced Poetry, Spring 2008

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Dr. Tina Barr, Creative Writing: Advanced Poetry Workshop, Course 310
Class meets 9:30 to 10:45 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 provide ample opportunity for students to write. The class will be held as a tutorial, which means we read, we meet in seminar and you write, but the point of the course is to educate you in recent methods in contemporary poetry, its theories of practice, through reading the work of poets currently publishing and for you to work to improve your writing. Tuesdays will be the day we discuss the work of outside poets, their ideas, and how you respond to them, with class presentations. Thursdays will be an open workshop, so that you can “try” your poems out on an audience. I expect students to lead discussion, and to ask the workshop for a response to their poems. **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 note to recent Introductory Poetry students: The Introductory workshop allows for enrollment by students outside the major, who may have a passing or possibly a developing interest in poetry. This course, however, assumes that by enrolling, you want to work at a higher level, both in terms of setting your work up for scrutiny and in increasing your level of knowledge. Introductory students expect and initially require a good deal of support and contact, but in this course, I expect much more of a self-generated attention to the discipline and study of poetry on your part. And I’m delighted to have you in the class!

Required Texts: Aleda Shirley, *Dark Familiar*, Charles Simic, *Aunt Lettuce I Want To Peek Under your Skirt*; Matthea Harvey, *Sad Little Breathing Machine*; Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle*; Eleanor Wilner, *The Girl with Bees in Her Hair*; Dave Smith, *Little Boats*; Lucie Brock-Broido, *Trouble in Mind* plus essays, books on reserve and handouts.

Course Requirements:

- 1.** Students must attend carefully to the **reading requirements** and **contribute significantly to class discussion.** (30%)
- 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 **Two or more Presentations** and **One Response Paper** on either the theories of the author or the collection we’re reading. **These presentations require you to articulate and “argue” your perspective on the work of others; rather than holding forth from a central position of authority, I prefer, as your professor, to**

require your engagement. 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. (30% of grade)

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**. Students will be responsible for turning in the requisite **copies** of each poem they want discussed in class. 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.

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 will 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: Tuesdays seminar on contemporary poets/ Thursdays workshop

Week 1 1/11

In-class interviews, distribute syllabus prior to class contract, to be signed on Tuesday

Assignment for next week: type up your latest poem and submit 16 copies next week--- read Seamus Heaney’s *District and Circle*, along with his essays, “Feeling Into Words,” “The Redress of Poetry,” and “Frontiers of Writing.” Write a poem that in some way is an imitation of or a reference in your own terms to his poem, about digging, referred to in the first essay “Feeling Into Words.”

Week 2 1/16 & 1/18

Discussion of Heaney’s poems in his collection, and his essays. Distribute student poems.

Assignment for next week: Continue to read Heaney, revisit essays. Write.

Week 3 1/23 & 1/25

Bring copies of the poem(s) you want response to. Discuss Heaney. **Student report** on some aspect of Heaney's work.

Assignment for Next Week: Read Aleda Shirley's *Dark Familiar*. Write a poem inspired in some way by your reading, either in terms of Shirley's subject matter, narrative stance, or technique.

Week 4 1/30 & 2/1

Three Student Reports: Two on the poems in the collection, another to research Aleda Shirley to find any interviews, statements on her aesthetic, etc. Poetry Workshop.

Assignment for next week: Read Charles Simic's "Aunt Lettuce," read essays on reserve, by Barr, Heaney, Contoski, Doreski, and Rivard. Read chronology and interview handouts. Because Simic is a more difficult poet for most students to encounter than Shirley, Heaney or Wilner, whom we read next, I've given you more background reading to help you understand his poems and his aesthetic purpose. Write a poem that either incorporates myth or is set in a surreal arena, à la Simic. Work on your poems.

Week 5 2/6 & 2/8

Three Student Reports: two on Simic's volume of poems, another in response to the essays, workshop student poems. Read Eleanor Wilner's volume of poems and her essay, "Playing the Changes."

Assignment for next week: Write a poem connected to the work of Wilner, either through myth, for example, or through some phenomenon inspired by one of her poems, for example, her poems on the Canadian quintuplets, one of my favorites. Or the poem can be simply a narrative, with a preference for the didactic, a characteristic of Wilner's work.

Week 6 2/13 & 2/15

Three Student Reports: two reports on Wilner's poetry, one on her essay.

Assignments for next week: Revise your poems based on recent comments. Revise other poems on which you are working and bring copies for discussion in workshop. **Design your own creative writing exercise and turn it in, with copies for all, on Tuesday.** For example, in the essay on Simic, Contoski refers to the small boxes of Joseph Cornell. You might want to go to the Brooks or the Dixon, and write in relation to a work of art. Or, you might want to research the Canadian Quintuplets, inspired by the force of Wilner's poem, or better yet, a "myth" from your own childhood, inspired by a news item in popular culture, during your childhood. I want the creative writing "assignment" you design to reflect in some way, your reading of the poets we've been doing, or some idea or aesthetic purpose you've run across in one of the essays. Write up the "assignment" you plan to follow and turn in enough copies for every member of the class on 2/20.

Read the work of Matthea Harvey, *Sad Little Breathing Machine*, and the handouts.

Week 7 2/20 & 2/22

Two Student Reports on the poems of Matthea Harvey. Discussion of student poems. Discussion of student-designed Creative Writing Exercises.

Assignment for 3/6 & 3/8: Write up a response paper, of two pages, that you will present to the class, articulating your opinion, contention with, or reflection upon one or more of the poets you've read over the last 7 weeks. Prepare to "present" it ---reading it aloud--- to the class on 3/6. As such, it should be carefully organized and well-articulated, not just a set of notes. Because each class member will be presenting this brief paper, do not exceed 2 pages. Write and revise poems for discussion on 3/6 and 3/8!

Week 8 2/27 & 2/29

There will be no class this week. Dr. Barr will be participating in the Associated Writing Programs Conference. Use the time to write and revise, preparing to turn in your Midterm Portfolio on 3/6.

Assignment for next week: **Revise poems for Midterm Portfolio, due on 3/6** 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 **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.

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. Do not tell her in person.

Week 9 3/6 & 3/8

On 3/6 turn in portfolios. Bring in poems to workshop and present your Response Paper to the class.

Assignment over Spring Break: Read the work and essays of Dave Smith, our visiting poet on 3/30. Write a "loose" sonnet.

Week 10 3/20 & 3/22

Three Student Reports. Discussion of the work of Dave Smith, two reports on his poetry, one on a particular essay or essays. Discuss student poems.

Assignment for next week: Write a loose sonnet, or revise the one you composed over Spring Break. Bring in copies for discussion next week.

Week 11 3/27 & no class on 3/29, so that student committee members in the class can prepare for volunteer work at Southern Literary Festival this weekend.

Discussion of Dave Smith poems and student 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, workshop confirmation and lunch ticket pick-up is required, so that we know precisely what the count is for the workshops. Bring in 16 copies of a poem you would like discussed, in case the workshop leader decides to go over student poems.**

Assignment for next week: Read the work of Lucie-Brock Broido, handouts and essays.

Week 12 4/3 & Easter Break

Two student reports on Broido's work, discussion of student poems.

Assignment for next week: Continue to study Broido's poems and write your own.

Week 13 4/10 & 4/12

Complete discussion of Broido and questions on aesthetics. Discussion of student poems.

Assignment for next week: Work on revisions of poems for portfolio, due on 4/24.

Week 14 4/17 & 4/19

Bring in copies. Final workshops before the end of term.

Assignment for next week: 1. Write a poem that is a satirical imitation of one of the poets whose work we have read this semester! Bring in copies for Tuesday. 2. Be prepared to offer your verbal assessment of the poets we read, and why you feel as you do.

Week 15: 4/24 & 4/26

4/24 portfolio due, discussion of poets we've studied. Meet for breakfast off campus on 2/26.

