Spring 1-15-2022

ENG 4762-600 Advanced Poetry Writing

Colleen Abel
Eastern Illinois University

English 4762 / 4762Z: Advanced Poetry

Colleen Abel

Spring 2022: online

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Office: CH 3811

(Please allow 24 hours for a response)

Office hours: TR 12:30-2:00; W 5-6 (virtual)

Required Texts

Francis, Vievee. *Forest Primeval.*

Nguyen, Diana Khoi. *Ghost Of.*

Sloat, Sarah J. *Hotel Almighty.*

Young, Dean. *The Art of Recklessness.*

Miscellaneous readings (D2L)

Course Description

Sparrows were feeding in a freezing drizzle
That while you watched turned to pieces of snow
Riding a gradient invisible
From silver aslant to random, white, and slow.

There came a moment that you couldn't tell.
And then they clearly flew instead of fell.

--Howard Nemerov, "Because You Asked About the Line Between Prose and Poetry" (1980)

Poetry readership is on the rise, as more and more people turn to poems to provide solace, or to reflect their feelings in our uncertain times. This course will focus on the writing and revising of poems at an advanced level. Using some of the best collections of poems from the past few decades as our guide, we'll craft and revise poems that showcase each student's individual voice. Through intensive workshops, students will end the course with a complete chapbook of poetry.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, you should be able to

--Identify poetic techniques and use terminology when reading poems

--Critique and explicate poetic works

--Understand the historical and contemporary context of poetry

--Write and revise your own original works of poetry

--Evaluate, constructively, the works-in-progress of your peers

--Reflect upon your own creative processes and practices

Instructional Philosophy

The course is divided into what I consider the two most important activities in learning to become a better writer: reading and writing. We will spend a great deal of time learning terminology and reading examples of poems that exemplify the techniques we are exploring. As the following writing advice attests, the way one learns craft is first by reading, then by writing.

> *"Read, read, read. Read everything -- trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it's good, you'll find out. If it's not, throw it out of the window." -William Faulker*

Then, you will be asked to synthesize all that you have learned by writing your own work. You will continue reading, though the emphasis will be on your classmates' poems, and your task will turn from explicating to critiquing via workshop.

Course Delivery Method

This course will be delivered online through our learning management system, D2L Brightspace, http://www.eiu.edu/d2l. As far as I can tell every single one of you has used D2L for this class already to turn in assignments. However, if you need help: Contact ITS User Services for technical support issues.

Email: support@eiu.edu

Phone: (217) 581-4357

Support Hours: 7:00 AM - 4:30 PM, Monday-Friday with your EIU NetID account or password, contact Campus Technology Support at (217) 581-4357 or support@eiu.edu.

Grade Breakdown

Class Notebook: 100 points

Discussion Posts: 150 points

Poems (3): 150 points

Revision Plans (2) 50 points

Annotations (2) 150 points

Workshop Participation (2) 200 points

Podcast: 200 points

1000 points total

Note: Students taking this course for graduate credit will have slightly different requirements. See below.

Learner Participation Guidelines

This class is asynchronous, which means "not happening at the same time." This means that we aren't going to be meeting at a specific time all together. Instead, most of our "meetings" will take place on the discussion board throughout each week. Our use of the discussion board will fall into three categories: discussion questions, creative exercises for the course notebook, and workshops. Workshops are their own category with their own rules; you can see D2L for more information, and I'll also address this in class quite a bit. When it comes to the discussion board questions and the creative exercises, you can think of this as our class meetings. These cover activities we would otherwise be doing in face-to-face meetings. They are attendance, participation and in-class writings all rolled into one.

Specific instructions will be given each week for the discussion board expectations, but the above guidelines should give you a general sense of what to expect. Please note that I will give a short grace period of one week and then the board will close to new posts.

Class Notebook: Most weeks, we will be doing a creative exercise to generate new works. You should not treat these as demands for full drafts; these are designed to get you on the track toward something you may want to develop further. I suggest you write what you can in one sitting of about 15 minutes. You will be posting these to designated threads on the discussion board, but if you'd rather the piece remain private, you do have the option to email me your exercise by the due date. I'm asking you to do 11 prompts over the course of the term, but will grade 10, so you have one expendable exercise.

Poems: Three times over the semester, you will turn in poems to me via Dropbox. In the cases of poems #2 and #3, these will be the poems you workshop in your large groups. Poem #1 is a chance for you to turn in a poem that just I will see. Feel free to include a statement of purpose with it—what you were trying to achieve with the piece, any struggles you had in executing the piece, etc. Students taking the course for grad credit must include these statements.

Revision Plan: For your revision plan, I would like you to take a paragraph to attempt to synthesize the feedback you received in your workshop. Discuss what you found most valuable in your feedback for sparking a direction forward. What specific changes do you plan to make to your piece?

Annotations: The purpose of an annotation is to analyze one specific element of a poem and, based on this analysis, to interpret the poem's overall meaning as you see it. So, you might decide to look specifically at how line breaks work in a particular piece, or at the use of extended metaphor. Your final papers should be about 3 pages each. You will do two annotations over the course of the term. (Students taking the course for graduate credit will do three). The goal here is to **read as a writer**. English classes often ask you to read as a scholar, looking for a theme: feminist interpretations of a play,

depictions of race relations or Southern society, Catholic imagery. Reading as a writer means looking closely at how the author puts the poem together, with an eye toward learning something for your own writing.

Workshop Participation: Each of you will be workshopped twice. We will discuss workshop expectations more thoroughly but please note that there are two equal components to your workshop grade. The first is your own readiness for your workshop. You must turn in your piece to D2L by noon on the first day of that round of workshops, regardless of when your specific day is. Everyone posts at the same time. If you post more than 24 hours late, you forfeit the right to feedback.

The second component of your grade is feedback to others. What does good feedback look like? Good feedback gives the reader a sense of your response to the piece as an audience member. Over many years of teaching I've found that students most appreciate:

- A description of what you think their piece is about, what you think it's trying to achieve, and what the main idea or theme seems to be. Sometimes this means stating things that seem obvious, but often this is something people see differently, so it helps to have many perspectives
- Things that you respond to with excitement or surprise. Everyone loves hearing where their piece really took off and flew. This is helpful, too, because authors want to try to preserve in revision those things that the audience is responding well to (usually!)
- Questions that you have. Is there anything confusing? Are you especially curious about why the author did or did not make a particular choice?
- Ideas you have about what they could do in revision to experiment with different directions. This isn't quite the same as saying you didn't like something or that an element wasn't "working. These are "constructive possibilities": what if this were shorter? Longer? Included research? What might that do for the piece?

All of this will probably take a generous paragraph to achieve.

Podcast**: For your final project, I'd like you to create a poetry podcast. Many poetry podcasts center around two primary objectives: to deliver oral readings of a writer's poems and to discuss / offer insights about the work's inspiration, composition, revision, etc. If you listen to a podcast like, for example, the New Yorker's Poetry Podcast, you will hear authors read their work and sometimes the work of others and talk about it. (Think of this like the DVD commentary or bonus features on a film.)

In your poetry podcast, I would like you to take this as your model. I would like you to record yourself reading between six to eight of your own poems, with discussion of each one. The discussion does not have to be of equal length for each, and it does not have to tackle the exact same issues for each. Think about the most interesting feature of each poem, and what the most interesting story associated with it is.

For example, you might choose to discuss:

- What particular techniques you were grappling with in the poem
- What the poem's inspiration was
- How the poem was influenced by another work of art
- How the poem came to be written or conceived
- How the poem changed through revision
- References or allusions in the poem that might enrich the listener's experience of it

I don't want to put strict time guidelines on the finished product, but this should probably take at least twelve to fifteen minutes. If it's longer, that's fine. If it's much shorter, re-evaluate and see what else you can include, reach out to me for ideas, or visit one of the podcasts for inspiration. And feel free to be creative. If you can rope a friend into pretending to interview you or if you want to include musical interludes, or something else, go for it!

**students taking this course for graduate credit should also include a discussion of two poems by other poets that have been influential on their own work, as well as a reading of those poems.

Late work

See above for my late policies on discussion boards and workshop. Late annotations will be docked two points for every day they are late. Late portfolios will not be accepted.

What You Can Expect From Me

For emails, please allow me up to 24 hours to respond to your message; I may take slightly longer on weekends or in-semester breaks. For grades, please allow ten days for me to get back to you for large assignments, though it will likely take less time than this. For discussion board posts, I will grade all posts and responses the week they are completed. Please note that I read and grade all discussion board posts, responses, and exercises, though I may not necessarily respond to each one, as the discussion board is a space that is designed to be student-centered, just as our classroom would be.

Classroom Etiquette

Perhaps the most important classroom policy of all concerns our learning environment. A successful learning community is one in which we can learn from people whose perspectives we might not necessarily share and I ask everyone to be constructive and mindful. There is a separate document on D2L in the Workshops module giving you some thoughts about how to be a successful workshop citizen.

***DISCLAIMER: One question that students often ask: is it okay if I write about ...? Usually, they want to know if I will be upset if their work contains profanity, violence, sexuality, drug use, etc. The short answer is no. What I care most about is the quality of your writing. That being said, *please do consider your audience* before you workshop a piece. Is it worth it to you to spend one of your valuable workshop slots writing a piece that will almost certainly be offensive? You may also want to consider putting content warnings on pieces that contain graphic violence, depictions of abuse, etc. This is up to you, but I have found many of your peers appreciate it.

EIU Policies

- Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct. Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.
- Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center for assistance with time management, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to McAfee 1301.
- If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by McAfee 1210, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

Course Schedule (subject to revision)

Week One: Monday January 10

Introductions, syllabus, course construction
What is a workshop for?
Notebook entry #1

Week Two: Monday January 17 (no class Monday, 1/17)

Francis, Forest Primeval
Notebook entry #2

Week Three: Monday January 24

Young, The Art of Recklessness
D2L Poems
Notebook entry #3
Event: journalist Rachel Monroe, January 27, 5 p.m.

Week Four: Monday January 31

Young, The Art of Recklessness
D2L Poems

Notebook entry #4
Poem #1 due, Friday 2/4 by 11:59 p.m.

Week Five: Monday February 7 (no class Friday, 2/11)

Nguyen, Ghost Of
Explication #1 due, Thursday 2/10 by 11:59 p.m.

Week Six: Monday, February 14

Sloat, Hotel Almighty
Notebook entry #5
Poem #2 due Friday 2/18 by 11:59 p.m.
Event: Todd Kaneko, February 17, 5 p.m.

Week Seven: Monday, February 21

LG Workshop 1
Notebook entry #6

Week Eight: Monday, February 28

LG Workshop 1
Notebook entry #7

Week Nine: Monday, March 7

LG Workshop 1
Explication #2 due Friday 3/11 at 11:59 p.m.

Monday, March 14 Week of Spring Break

Week Ten: Monday, March 21
LG Workshop 1
Notebook entry #8

Week Eleven: Monday, March 28

Revision tips and tricks
Notebook entry #9
Poetic Series due Friday 4/1 at 11:59 p.m.

Week Twelve: Monday, April 4
LG Workshop 2
Notebook entry #10

Revision Plan 1 due Friday 4/8 at 11:59 p.m.
Event: English Studies Conference, Wednesday 4/6

Week Thirteen: Monday, April 11
LG Workshop 2
Notebook entry #11
Explication #3 due for graduate-credit students Friday 4/15 at 11:59 p.m.

Week Fourteen: Monday, April 18
LG Workshop 2
Course Notebook due by Friday 4/22 at 11:59 p.m.

Week Fifteen: Monday, April 25
Last day of classes: Friday, April 29
LG Workshop 2

Podcasts due Wednesday, May 4

Other Important Dates

Students with questions about these deadlines should contact the Registrar [(217) 581-3511, (217) 581-3831, records@eiu.edu].

- Jan. 14: Last day to add a class
- Jan. 24: Last day to drop a course with no grade
- Jan. 24: Last day to withdraw from all classes with full tuition and fees refund
- Feb. 7: Last day to withdraw from all classes with 50% tuition and fees refund
- Apr. 1: Last day to withdraw from a class