

Spring 1-15-2008

## ENG 2003-001: Creative writing: poetry

Kilgore

*Eastern Illinois University*

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### Recommended Citation

Kilgore, "ENG 2003-001: Creative writing: poetry" (2008). *Spring 2008*. 55.  
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2003-001  
Kilgore

English 2003-001  
Creative Writing: Poetry  
Spring, 2008  
2-3:15 TR, CH 2771

Notes & Announcements

Current Assignment

Last updated: 1/1/2008

## SYLLABUS

**Course Description:** An introductory, workshop-style class devoted primarily to discussion of the students' own writing. Early on the approach will be fairly prescriptive, with exercises devoted to the basics of versification, voice, and figurative language. Later on, in very careful discussion of poems by class members, we will wrangle long and heatedly about what works and what doesn't, what choices are open and why they matter, what the poem is trying to be and how to help it get there. Be ready to think harder about words and language than you ever have before. Attendance and participation will be very important. Requirements include two portfolios of your own poetry, several workshop appearances, and a prose paper on any poet of your choice. An enjoyable class, but plenty of work. (Old curriculum Group 6; new curriculum Group 5.)

**Instructor:** John Kilgore. Office: 3331 Coleman Hall. Hours: TR 3:30-4:30, W 12-4. Also usually available right after class, and often here late on Monday. Phone: (217) 581-6313 (office); (217) 345-7395 (home). E-mail: jdkilgore@eiu.edu. Please feel free to call my home at reasonable hours. When leaving voice mail at the office, include date and time of call, and do not trust voice mail for urgent messages – try me at home instead. I prefer that you NOT visit me with questions just before class begins; just after is fine.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Attendance and participation (15%)
- First Portfolio (25%)
- Final Portfolio (40%)
- Critical Paper & Report (20%)

I reserve the right to depart somewhat from these percentages.

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION.** I will take attendance at each meeting by passing around a sign-up sheet which you must find and sign. The scale for your participation grade is as follows: 0-3 absences = A, 4 = B, 5 = C, 6 = D, 7 = F, 7 or more – continuing, proportional grade penalties (the attendance grade will become a negative number, averaged into your overall course grade). This basic grade will be adjusted somewhat for the quality of your class contributions. A's in particular will require something substantially beyond mere physical presence.

Note that you have three free absences. Use these as insurance to cover you in the case of illnesses and other unforeseen emergencies. I will listen sympathetically to excuses, but I **will NOT award attendance credit for days when you have not actually been here**. Exceptions to this policy may be warranted in truly unusual circumstances, but substantial make-up work will be required, and you will need to show good reason both for having used the free days and for having missed any additional days you need excused. Note that, per University policy, you remain responsible for material covered on any day that you have missed, and that time constraints simply do not permit me to "catch you up" in any substantial way.

There may be one or two optional attendance days, announced in advance, which will not be counted against you if you are not here.

**PROSE PAPER AND REPORT.** Very early in the term, you should select a poet you want to read in more depth and "reserve" him or her by signing up with me. No more than two students will be allowed to choose the same poet. In Week 11, you will turn in a 4-5 page critical "appreciation" of your writer. See my online page of Writing Guidelines for advice on general format. This paper, however, should be a bit more personal in tone than those guidelines suggest -- and a little less narrowly focussed on an analytical thesis. Your goal is to show a *discerning* appreciation of a writer you admire. Introduce his or her work to us, commenting and analyzing in a way that helps us get started as readers. Talk about what makes the work worthwhile. Comment on some poems briefly, on some in more depth. Quote and excerpt liberally, but aim for 1000-1500 words of your own prose to be in the paper. If the works you are discussing are not included in either of our texts, include them as appendices to your paper, not counted in the suggested 4-5 page guideline.

Meanwhile in Week 11 or 12 you will make a class presentation of 10 minutes or so, parallel to the paper. Bring in one or two poems of your chosen writer, provide copies, and discuss them with us. You may quote your paper if you like, but make this a talk, not a reading. Share your enthusiasm for the poems, showing a discerning appreciation and an awareness of technique. Exact observations are in every way preferable to vague effusions. Resist the compulsion, felt by many in the presence of a peer audience, to mumble, shrug, fidget, drop your eyes, and play dumb. Life is short and we don't have time for your modesty; entertain and enlighten us instead.

**DRAFTS.** I am happy to respond to drafts as my time permits, especially by email. Several caveats, however:

- Don't over-rely on my help. Writing is an inherently individualistic enterprise, best accomplished by ornery cusses who jealously guard their creative independence. The well can run dry if you think too much about what I want from you – rather than what **you** want from you.
- Conferences are for brainstorming and general advice, not evaluation, which comes later, after you hand in the completed poem. Nothing I say in advance comments should be construed as a hint (much less a promise) of what grade seems likely. I assume that your goal is to improve, and will try to make suggestions that lead in that direction; but it is up to you to put them into effect and make them work – or to ignore them if they don't seem useful.
- My suggestions are always brilliant :-), but you really will have to ignore many of them. Writing is just like that; don't worry about it. When it comes time to grade your portfolio, I won't even remember what my advice was, and will respond to one thing only: how successful the work seems to be as it sits there on the page.
- I do get busy and will not always be able to respond quickly. For email drafts, I should get back to you in 2 days or so. If I haven't and you still need my feedback, send a follow-up query.

**LATE WORK POLICY:** I am willing to be somewhat flexible providing you have been in touch with me **before** the missed deadline. Otherwise late papers will be penalized one third grade (e.g., from "A" to "A-" or from "A-" to "B+") for each calendar day of lateness, weekends and holidays included. In addition, late work forfeits the right to "feedback"; it will be returned with a grade, but no marks or comments.

Please be aware that the penalty for plagiarism or cheating – which I trust I will not have to impose – is automatic failure of the course. See me if you have any questions about this policy.

I will be more than happy to make reasonable accommodations for any student with a documented disability. Please contact me if you will need such an accommodation; or call the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services, 581-6583.

#### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

- Robert Wallace, *Writing Poems*, 3rd edition (Abbreviated as **W** in the schedule)
- Ramazani, *et al.*, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Vol. 2 -- *Contemporary Poetry* (Abbreviated as **N** in the schedule)

Please bring both of these to class every day. Sorry, I know it's inconvenient; but we will be jumping between the books often and unpredictably.

# SCHEDULE

Note: Please complete the readings for each session before the class meets. In particular, please read poems scheduled for workshop discussion quite carefully.

Please read all poems included in the assigned chapters in the Wallace textbook, including the "Poems for Discussion" at the end of the chapter.

Please bring both textbooks every day.

To keep track of schedule adjustments, please make a habit of bringing a hard copy of the syllabus to class with you, and check the online version periodically.

## 1) January 8, 10

Course Introduction. In-Class Drills.

**READ:** Wallace, Chapter 1.

**WRITE:** Haikus.

**Choose favorite poem or lyric and email it to me by Monday Morning.**

## 2) January 15, 17

Sign up for reports.

**DISCUSS:** Favorite poems submitted by class; assigned readings.

**READ:** Wallace, Chapters 2 & 3.

**WRITE:** Run-on free verse poem; end-stopped free verse poem.

## 3) January 22, 24

Sign up for reports.

Continue discussion of Wallace, Chapters 2 & 3.

**READ:** Wallace, Chapter 4.

**WRITE:** Limericks, Ballad Stanza, and Blank Verse.

## 4) January 29, 31

**READ:** Wallace, Chapter 5.

**WRITE:** Inscription Poem OR Found Poem. Descriptive Moment Poem.

**THURSDAY: HAND IN MINI-PORTFOLIO FOR COMMENT AND ADVISORY GRADE. INCLUDE SHORT POEM FOR WORKSHOP, IN 20 COPIES.**

## 5) February 5, 7

**READ:** Poems for Workshop.

**WRITE:** Inscription Poem **OR** Found Poem. Descriptive Moment Poem.  
**DISCUSS:** Model poems from Assignment List.  
 Workshop.

**6) February 12, 14**

Workshop and catch-up.  
**WRITE:** Third Person Poem **OR** First Person Poem. Chain of Metaphors **OR** Extended Metaphor.

**7) February 19, 21**

**READ:** Wallace, Chapters 7, 10.  
**WRITE:** Third Person Poem **OR** First Person Poem. Chain of Metaphors **OR** Extended Metaphor.  
**DISCUSS:** Model poems from Assignment List.

**8) February 26, 28**

**READ:** Wallace, Chapter 11.  
**WRITE:** Two of three: Confessional Poem, Hidden Emotion Poem, Ironic Poem.  
**DISCUSS:** Model poems from Assignment List.

**THURSDAY: HAND IN FIRST PORTFOLIO FOR GRADE. INCLUDE TWO POEMS FOR WORKSHOP, IN 20 COPIES.**

**9) March 4, 6**

**READ:** Poems for Workshop.  
 Workshop.  
**WRITE:** Two of three: Confessional Poem, Hidden Emotion Poem, Ironic Poem.

--- Spring Break, March 10-14 ---

**10) March 18, 20**

**READ:** Poems for Workshop.  
**WRITE:** Critical Paper.

**11) March 25, 27**

**READ:** Poems for Workshop.  
**WRITE:** Critical Paper. 3-6 additional poems.  
**Begin Reports.**

**THURSDAY: CRITICAL PAPER DUE.**

12) April 1, 3

Readings TBA.

Reports.

WRITE: 3-10 additional poems. Revise earlier work.

13) April 8, 10

WRITE: 3-10 additional poems. Revise earlier work.

Readings TBA. Volunteer Workshop.

14) April 15, 17

Readings TBA. Volunteer Workshop.

Work on Revisions.

THURSDAY: FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE IF YOU WANT WRITTEN COMMENTARY.

15) April 22, 24

Volunteer Workshop and group reading.

THURSDAY: LAST DAY FOR FINAL PORTFOLIO.

## Assignment List

(Required types are asterisked and keyed to the schedule above. Note that *either* the found poem or the inscription poem is required -- not both. And just two of three of Confessional Poem / Hidden Emotion Poem / Irony Poem are required. Types without asterisks are suggested and optional. Depart very freely from the models as you think best.)

### **\*Haiku.**

See W, 419-20, for definition and examples. Write several.

### **\*Run-on Free Verse Poem.**

A poem, probably in short lines, that makes heavy use of the run-on effect of lines breaking unexpectedly. Models: "The Girl in The Red Convertible," W 21; "Hazel Tells Laverne," W 183; "We Real Cool," N 145.

### **\*End-Stopped Free Verse Poem.**

A poem in longer lines whose breaks occur mainly at grammatically logical points, but with varying line-lengths and internal pauses that create surprise and variety. Models: "Song of Myself," W 15; "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer," W

110; "Howl," N 337; "The River-Merchant's Wife," W 169;  
"Shopping in Tuckahoe," W 167.

**\*Limericks.**

See Wallace, 421. 248-49 for examples and definition. Write two or three.

**\*Ballad stanzas.**

See handout for definition and examples. Write two or three.

**\*Ten lines of blank verse.**

Unrhymed iambic pentameter: the basic ta-dum ta-dum of English epic and Shakespearean tragedy. Avoid monotony with enjambment, caesura, substitute feet (one or, rarely, two per line), and omitted unstressed beats. Models: "An Old Man's Winter Night," W 77; "Ruby Tells All" W 69; any Shakespearean soliloquy.

**Epigrams, epithets, and epitaphs.**

These are short and simple, so write more than one. See Wallace, 420-21 for definition and examples. An **epitaph** is a line or two to be written on a gravestone. But parodies in this mode can be fun: "Here lies the body / Of Lester Moore / Shot through the heart / With a Colt .44 / No less. No more."

**Tercets and Quatrains.**

These can be fragments if you want. See Wallace, pp. 413-414, for definition and examples. Other models: "Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening, W 330; "Provide, Provide" (by Frost -- find online).

**\*Inscription Poem.**

A poem you imagine as being written in a specific, carefully defined place, like a graffito. The place is usually mentioned in the title, which is sometimes very long in proportion to the poem itself, e.g., "Verses Inside the Cover of My Chemistry Book." Models: Williams, "This is Just to Say" (find online). "A Centenary Ode . . .," N 421; "In Response to . . .," N 420; Herrick, "Upon a Child That Died" (find online); Jonson, "On My First Son" (find online). Stretch the definition if you like to include **occasional poems** -- pieces written for a specific event.

**\*Found Poem.**

A poem you construct largely or completely out of language found "in the field," e.g. on a billboard, in the classifieds of a newspaper, in the headlines of an issue of *The Globe*. You make it your own -- and give it form -- by omitting much of what's there, imposing line breaks, repeating phrases, and interpolating your own language.

**\*Descriptive Moment Poem.**

A poem that tries to capture everything that defines a moment of experience. Freeze time, then deliver the place with a strong appeal to the senses -- vivid observations and images. Then (or simultaneously) capture the interplay of inner emotion and outer scene. Models: "At the Bambi Motel," W 162; "Lying in a Hammock on William Duffy's Farm," N 417; "January Thaw"

and "Fishing the Newfound," at  
<http://www.eiu.edu/~agora/Feb03/Guernsallb0302.htm>

### **Descriptive Place Poem.**

Again, concentrate on precise imagery and appeal to the senses. But feel free to roam through time a little more freely. Models: "At the Bambi Motel," W 162; "My Papa's Waltz," W 76; "A Supermarket in California," N 344;

### **\*Third Person Poem.**

A poem that gives a vivid sense of a person who is not you, observed primarily from the outside, but with strong empathy. Make the distance from or unknowability of this person's consciousness part of the poem's effect. Models: "The Girl in the Red Convertible," W 28; "The Girl Writing Her English Paper," W 376; "The Writer," N 200.

### **\*First Person Poem.**

A poem in the voice of a character you invent. Models: "The Racer's Widow," W 46; "Ruby Tells All," W 69-71.

### **\*Chain of Metaphors.**

A poem in which a central situation or feeling or thing is expressed by a series of metaphors. Models: "Metaphors," N 597; "The Writer," N 200; "Toad" at  
<http://www.eiu.edu/~agora/Feb03/Guernsallb0302.htm>

### **\*Extended Metaphor or Conceit.**

A poem in which a central metaphor is sustained, elaborated, and extended. Models: "The Writer," N 200; "The Affair" at  
<http://www.eiu.edu/~agora/Feb03/Guernsallb0302.htm>

### **\*Confessional Poem.**

Here it is at last: your chance to confess deeds or feelings you have never told anyone. Be brutally honest, and make sure you really are confessing -- not bragging. Whitewash is a worse defect here than in any other genre. Of course, you can make up anything you like, as long as the feeling is true (fresh, particular, complex) in its essence . . . Models: "The Truth the Dead Know," N 433; anything by Sylvia Plath, N 593; "America" N 347.

### **\*Hidden Emotion Poem.**

A poem driven by a powerful central emotion (yours or a character's) which is never named or directly acknowledged. Models: "The Racer's Widow," W 46.

### **\*Ironic Poem.**

A poem which revolves around a central irony and hence is sarcastic, satirical, or wry in tone and effect. The central emotion or meaning should be disclaimed, or expressed by way of its opposite, as when you say (of some disaster), "Oh, *greaaaaat*!" Models: "Learning By Doing," W 98; "Playboy," N 199.

**Narrative Poem.**

A longer poem, almost certainly in free verse, that tells a story in first or third person. Models: "Cherrylog Road," W 170; "Ruby Tells All," W 69; "The Fish," N 21; "Ridge Street, 1965," at <http://thescreamonline.com/poetry/poetry2-4/kilgore.html>

**Light Verse.**

If you have trouble with rhyme and meter, the good news is that, up to a point, clumsiness *works* in a funny poem. Imagining your reader as a small child -- or an English teacher -- may help. Be corny and droll; we *expect* to groan in this kind of poem.

**Dedicated Poem.**

A poem "to" or "for" someone who is not the reader, though of course in some final sense it really is for the reader too. Watch out for sappy, Hallmark-y sentiments. Often a natural, conversational voice is the key.

**MISCELLANEOUS LINKS**

- "The Uses of Euphony." On the importance of *sound* in language.
- xxx