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ENG 4762-600: Advanced Poetry Writing

Colleen Abel

Eastern Illinois University

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Writing 4762 / 4762Z: Advanced Poetry

Online Spring 2021

Colleen Abel

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Virtual office hours (via Microsoft Teams)

Office: CH 3811 (remote for Fall 2020)

Mon and Tues. 9:30-11:00 a.m. and

Thursdays from 5 to 6 p.m.)

Required Texts

Carson, Anne. *Autobiography of Red*.

Francis, Vievee. *Forest Primeval*.

Gluck, Louise. *Meadowlands*.

Nguyen, Diana Khoi. *Ghost Of*.

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 Faulkner

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

Writing Prompts: 100 points

Technique Poems: 150 points

Discussion Boards Posts: 200 points

Explications: 150 points

Workshop Participation: 200 points

Podcast: 200 points

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

Creative Exercises: Most weeks, we will be doing a creative exercise to generate new poems. You should not treat these as demands for full drafts of poems; these are designed to take about fifteen minutes. You will be posting these to a special forum 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**. You can always choose to expand on any of these exercises to include in your workshop or your final portfolio!

Technique Poems: These poems are a chance for you to pick one technique that we have studied so far and write a poem which uses it in a conscious way. In addition to the poem, I would like you to also turn in a paragraph explaining which technique you selected, and what your poem does with it. I do not grade these poems on quality, but on the effort you put into exploring and utilizing the technique at hand. You will hand in three of these, and each should spotlight a *different* technique. If you want to use the same poem for this assignment as a poem you also turn in for workshop, that's completely fine with me.

Explications: The purpose of an explication is to analyze the component parts of one poem and, based on this analysis, to interpret the poem's overall meaning as you see it. Your final papers should be about 3 pages each. You will do two explications over the course of the term. (Students taking the course for graduate credit will do three). Do not simply paraphrase the poem's literal meaning. Your goal, instead, is to apply the literary terminology we've been discussing in class to one specific poem. For example, you might discuss how the poem's sound, images, metaphors, tone, and form all work together to create an overall theme. The only thing I ask is that, in your explications, you 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 four times over the semester, twice in a full-class workshop, and two times in small groups. You should plan on turning in one poem for each small group workshop. You may submit either one or two for the final workshop. 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 Monday of the workshop week. **I do not accept late work** because it's unfair to your peers, who need ample time to give feedback.

The second part of your workshop grade is your feedback to others. I would like you to prepare written feedback for each person being workshopped. Try to aim for a paragraph or so, and at least aim to give them two suggestions for improvement and two things that are successful in the present draft. These must be completed by Wednesday at noon.

Your total workshop participation grade will be broken down thusly: You will receive 50 points for each workshop, to be divided equally between your timely posting of your own poem, and your production and discussing of feedback for your peers.

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

Explications will be docked two points for every day they are late. Late portfolios will not be accepted. Late workshop posts will not be accepted. If you need an extension, please let me know as far in advance as you're able.

Instructor Response Time

For emails, please allow me up to 24 hours to respond to your message. For grades, please allow up to 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.

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, and workshops. Workshops are their own category with their own guidelines; 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. You can see in the grade breakdown below that they are worth the most points, and that's to reflect the fact the discussion board is our classroom for the next fifteen weeks.

My expectation is that each week you have a discussion board question due, you can write your response by the due date. I'll be looking for about 200-250 words in your response; the more specific, the better. The second part of the discussion board will be

responses to two of your classmates. These responses should be at least 75 words, and should be more than simply saying “Good point!” or “I agree!” If you respond to their discussion question, you should be adding to what they say, not merely echoing what they say. If you’d like, you can also respond to someone’s creative exercise, as well, which would count as one of your two responses. In this case, I would ask that you remember that your goal is not to critique their exercise, but to perhaps reflect on where they could take things next.

Specific instructions will be given each week for the discussion board expectations for the week to come, but the above guidelines should give you a general sense of what to expect.

**It is my intention, as I did last fall, to offer optional synchronous sessions to walk through assignments, answer questions, and chat about the readings. I will likely do this most non-workshop weeks. I will let you know on D2L when these will take place.

Classroom (N)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. Speaking our minds is a fantastic privilege of this environment, but doing so in an aggressive or hostile way helps no one. 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? One exception here: if your poem contains hate speech or bias toward protected groups, I am obligated to report this to the university.

EIU Policies

- Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). 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 (www.eiu.edu/~success) 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 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.
- 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 Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

Course Schedule

Week One: January 11

Introductions

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Week Two: January 18 (No class Monday, 1/18)

Gluck

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Week Three: January 25

Gluck

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Technique Poem 1 due

Week Four: February 1 (No class Tuesday, 2/2)

Responding to poetry: Workshops & Explications

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Week Five: February 8 (No class Friday, 2/12)

LG Workshop

Week Six: February 15

LG Workshops

Week Seven: February 22 (No class Wednesday, 2/24)

Carson

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Explication 1 due

Week Eight: March 1

Carson

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Week Nine: March 8

SG Workshop

Week 10: March 15 (No class Thursday, 3/18)

Francis

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Technique Poem 2 due

Week 11: March 22

Francis

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Week 12: March 29

SG Workshop

Explication 2 due

Week 13: April 5 (No class Wednesday, 4/7)

Nguyen

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Technique Poem 3 due

Week 14: April 12

The work of revision

Discussion Board Posts & Reponses

Week 15: April 19

LG Workshop (No class Thursday, 4/22)

Week 16: April 26

LG Workshop

Final Exams: Week of May 3

Podcasts are due May 5, 11:59 p.m.

A Note on Workshop

Sharing creative work is an exciting, but vulnerable process. There are things to remember if you are the artist, as well as if you are the audience. Here are a couple of foundational principles that successful workshops are based on.

1. This is a semi-public space. If you don't believe that audience matters—in other words, if you write only for the purposes of self-expression—this may not be the right environment for you. Dismissing what a roomful of people think about your work because you are only “writing for yourself” places your audience in an uncomfortable position. Self-expression is private and requires no external input. Art is dialogic: it requires both a creator and a receptor (audience) to make it come alive.
2. Revision is the most important part of writing. If you are interested in others' opinions, but not open to changing your work based on feedback, this may not be the right environment for you.
3. You must trust that a roomful of people have valuable things to say about your work. The people here are smart and generous; they care about literature and about reading. If you are frustrated if they seem to be “not getting it” perhaps this is a sign that something in your work needs to be clarified. This is not a sign that we didn't read it carefully ahead of time. It means that we're working through our questions and individual interpretations, and that is often the most useful part of workshop, if you are listening with an open mind to your audience.
4. All of the above may be summed up as: be open-hearted and open-minded.