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ENG 2003-001: Creative Writing, Poetry

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“Ends are what define poetry. Line breaks. Mortality. If you want middles, go read a novel. If you want happy endings, go read a cook book.”

—Dean Young

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- *The Great Fires* by Jack Gilbert
- *A Raft of Grief* by Chelsea Rathburn
- *Poetry: A Pocket Anthology, 7th Edition*, Edited by R.S. Gwynn. (Bring to every class.)
- A writer’s notebook of your choice. (Bring to every class.)
- Three-ring binder or folder to keep all of the poems and handouts.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This introductory creative writing course emphasizes the art and craft of poetry. Through intensive reading and analysis of contemporary poetry, we will learn how to identify, define, and apply literary devices to our own poetry. We will keep regular writing notebooks where we will begin poems and hone our craft. In addition to improving our writing skills, this course will provide opportunities to interact with some of the assigned poets, thus exposing us to the vibrant world of contemporary poetry.

Since part of the writing process is the revision process, workshop will play a fundamental role in our course. In workshop, our poems will be read, critiqued, and evaluated with the goal of a polished manuscript being presented by each writer at the semester’s end.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To express one’s ideas in poetic form.
2. To learn fundamental poetic techniques and determine how such techniques are applied depending on genre, audience, and purpose.
3. To analyze major poetic forms such as sonnet, villanelle, and sestina, and write poems using these received structures.
4. To develop a critical, constructive vocabulary that will aid in future literary studies and within the workshop setting.
5. To apply critical reading skills to the genre of poetry.
6. To engage with the act of contemporary poetry and appreciate the role of literature as part of our cultural and intellectual history.

**Course Requirements**

**Ten poems** will be submitted to the class over the course of the semester. Starting our fifth week, one poem will be submitted to the class every Tuesday. The following Thursday, we will workshop a few of these poems. Please use a standard font such as Times and in the right hand corner include your name, the date, and “Poem #.” Many weeks, we will be writing poems from assignments that I provide based on the class’s current needs and interests.

**A writer’s notebook** is key to the writing process and a requirement for this course. Most weeks, I will provide writing exercises. Some of them will be turned in for workshop and some of them will not be. All of the writing exercises will stretch your creativity and help you practice craft elements that can be used for later poems. We will also write in class together, so always bring the notebook to class. Most writers I know carry a notebook with them at all times to record images, bits of dialogue, poem ideas, etc., so this is a good habit to acquire. I encourage all of you to try to write at least six lines a day in this notebook since a writer is simply one who writes often. I will collect these notebooks twice during the semester and grade based on completed exercises and regular entries.

In addition to the writing exercises, I also ask that you do six one-page responses (three before the mid-term and three after) to a poem that has been assigned. Within the 300-350 word response, do not comment on if you liked or didn’t like the work. Instead, comment on an element of craft and how the poet is using it in the poem of your choice. For example, you might want to track the use of the “s” sound and what tonal effect that gave the poem. Or, you might want to comment on an interesting metaphor that added a few layers of development. Another example might be to look at the effect of the line breaks. If short, how did the short lines alter your reading of the poem? As you can see by the examples, the idea here is to look at how the poem is built so that you might be able to apply the same techniques to your work. This is called a craft analysis and is a common practice among writers. To gain the most from this assignment, it is key that you do the analysis before coming to class.

**Reading and writing assignments** will be our way to learn about the craft of writing. In order for the class to be both challenging and organic, I will assign many of our readings and writing assignments on a weekly basis. So, check in with your D2L email regularly and be aware that it is your responsibility to keep up with the assignments not only listed in the syllabus but on D2L as well. I also may include a few pop quizzes if I do not feel as if the class is keeping up with the reading. These quiz grades will be factored into the participation
portion of your final grade. (Note: the mid-term also serves as a “reading quiz” in that it asks questions about our past readings.)

You will also submit a response to a poetry reading of your choice on D2L (through dropbox). In this response, comment on the experience of the reading itself. How did the poet’s portrayal of his/her work affect your reception of the poem? What poems left an impression and why? What are the benefits or drawbacks from sharing poems in a public setting? These are just a few examples of what you might want to ask. Word count: 350 words.

Workshops will encompass half of the in-class work that we will do. We will divide our class into two or three groups to make the workshops more in-depth. For each workshop, you are required to write editing and revision suggestions on each poem in that group. If you are not being workshopped that week, you only need to turn in one copy of your weekly poem to me. If you are being workshopped, you will need to bring copies for every person in the class. No emailed workshop poems will be allowed.

We will discuss proper workshop etiquette in class, but the general guideline is to braid together honesty, specificity, and kindness since one without the others will not serve the writer. Also keep in mind that poems for workshops should have undergone at least two to three drafts before bringing them to us for suggestions. Not everything you write will be wonderful and not everything you write will be horrible. These are the extremes. What is more likely is that you will write poems that are somewhere in between—and we will help each other move the poems in the direction the poem wants to be moved.

A final manuscript of your poems will be submitted for the final exam. The manuscript needs to be submitted in a black paper folder (no three-ring binders). Within this manuscript, include—in this order—a title page, a table of contents, an epigraph, six poems that you have heavily revised followed by the poems that you submitted throughout the semester with my comments on them. For the six revised poems, I would like the original workshop poem placed directly behind it so that I can see how extensive the revisions are. The majority of the final manuscript’s grade stems from the seriousness of revision. Also include the poem that you memorized in this final manuscript. (If you quote from a poem, be sure to cite it appropriately with footnotes and quote poetry lines according to MLA guidelines.) Please note: it is your responsibility to keep your work throughout the semester.

In addition to the above material, also include a 2-3 page critical introduction on what you wanted to revise, why, and how you went about the process with three of the six revised poems. In this reflection, be sure to explain how you came to decide what needed to be revised and why. Also, be sure to note how your revision strategies were specifically tailored to your poem’s needs.

Participation is critical in this course. The time we spend together is our opportunity to expand our views on what is poetry, to build a writer’s community, and to learn the craft behind the art. In Mystery and Manners, fiction writer Flannery O’Connor reflects on the value of writers interacting with one another. She says that unless the writer “has gone utterly out of his mind, his aim is still communication, and communication suggests talking inside a community.” At the end of the semester when I reflect on your participation, I will consider
not only how often you contributed to class discussions, but the quality of those comments. I will also consider your seriousness with in-class writing assignments, and any pop-quizzes if given, in the participation grade as well. One of the more challenging aspects to writers is being able to shut off the world in order to write. Therefore, we will practice mindfulness in class. Text messaging (even once) and other distractions such as checking email in class (again, even once) will result in a failing participation grade for the semester. Since cultivating a supportive and challenging writers’ community is critical to our growth as writers, participation counts as 20% of your grade.

**Attendance, punctuality, and meeting deadlines** are all part of the writing life. There are days you may not want to write, but writers write—when they feel inspired or not. Coming to class is part of your obligation to your creativity and to your writing community. To help build a writers’ community, the course depends upon everyone’s participation and attendance. Therefore, missing four courses will lower your final grade by five points. Five absences will lower your final grade by ten points. Six absences will result in failure of the course. To allow adequate time for class discussion and in-class writing, arrive on time. Being late twice (or leaving early twice) will be considered an absence. This attendance policy applies to all students regardless of whether one is missing class due to a school-sanctioned event, university athletics, or illness. And be aware that there is no such thing as an “excused absence.” Finally, if you arrive without the day’s reading printed out or in book-form in front of you, you will be counted as absent.

Also, I do not accept **late work** which includes occasions when you are absent. If you must be absent, you may email me your work before the class to receive credit for it. Also, if you miss a day that you are workshopped, you will simply miss your workshop. (Fifty points will also be deducted from your participation grade for each missed workshop.) The reason for this strict policy on not accepting late work is to help build discipline as writers. Procrastination can be the creative killer to writers, so I am trying to take the option of “later” off the table.

**A memorized poem** of your choice (of at least ten lines) will be recited to the class. This is going to be a spontaneous event, so whenever you are ready and feel moved by the poetic spirit, recite to us your poem with full gusto. I would recommend you do it early, so you can enjoy the show.

**A mid-term** will be given and will cover poems we have read in class and poetic terms we have learned. You will also write a short analysis of a poem for this exam. Your writing journals will be graded at this time.

“A poem is an event, not the record of an event.”

—Robert Lowell
GRADING

We have a total of 1000 possible points in this class. Assignments are proportioned as follows:

- **Ten weekly poems** worth ten points each: 100 points (10%)
- **Writer’s Notebook Pre-Midterm**: 50 points (10%)
- **Writer’s Notebook Post-Midterm**: 50 points (10%)
- **Mid-Term Exam**: 100 points (5%)
- **Analysis of attended poetry reading**: 50 points (5%)
  (Submit on D2L under the dropbox folder up until last day of class)
- **Class Participation, which may include pop quizzes**: 200 points (20%)
- **Final Manuscript/Final Exam**: 400 points (40%)
  - The final manuscript grade will include the following:
  - Six revised poems: 200 points (33.33 points each poem)
  - Presentation of manuscript: 30 points
  - Past weekly poems with my comments: 20 points (2 points each)
  - **Memorized poem**: 50 points
  - **Critical Introduction**: 100 points

Grading scale is as follows:

- A = 90-100
- B = 80-89
- C = 70-79
- D = 60-69
- F = 0-59

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

**Academic integrity**

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.

Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be dealt with according to university policy, which can be found on the Office of Judicial Affairs pages. First offense will be referred to the Office of Judicial Affairs and **will result in a grade of F** for this class. I think we all know what plagiarism is by now: the willful “appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one’s original work” (from Random House Dictionary of the English Language). In sum, do your job, which means do your own work.

**Students with disabilities**

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.

**The Student Success Center**

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, test taking, 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.

“Poetry is a verbal means to a nonverbal source.”
—A.R. Ammons from A Poem is Walk

RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY SOURCES

- Various anthologies that compile what is being published right now such as The Best American Poetry series, Pushcart anthologies, and Best New Poets series.
- Anthologies that compile work by our important poets. Some of my favorites include:
  - Strong Measures, an anthology of poems in received form with explanations
  - Poetry 180 edited by Billy Collins
  - Contemporary American Poetry edited by A. Poulin, Jr.
  - Vintage Book of Contemporary World Poetry
  - Poet's Choice by Edward Hirsch, a collection of 130 poets from all over the world with Hirsch's reflections on each poem.
- A Poetry Handbook by Mary Oliver for craft
- Writing Down the Bones by Natalie Goldberg for warm-up exercises
- Poet's Guide by Michael J. Bugeja for publishing and performance guidelines
- The Art of the Poetic Line by James Logenbach and any book in this series by Graywolf
- The Triggering Town by Richard Hugo for craft and workshop discussions
- Neruda and Vallejo translated by Robert Bly and James Wright
- Blood Dazzler by Patricia Smith
- Otherwise by Jane Kenyon
- Above the River by James Wright
- Neon Vernacular by Yusef Komunyakaa
- Embryo by Dean Young
- What the Living Do by Marie Howe
- Rare Earth by Bradford Tice
- The Smallest Muscle in the Human Body by Alberto Ríos
- Beowulf translated by Seamus Heaney
- Region of Unlikenes by Jorie Graham
- The Girlhood Book of Prairie Myths by Sandy Longhorn
- The Rose by Lee Young-Li
- The Niagara River by Kay Ryan
- Lighthead’s Guide to the Galaxy by Terrance Hayes
- Poetry Web sites such as Academy of American Poetry, Poetry Daily, Poetry Foundation, Verse Daily, and The Writer's Almanac.
- Literary journals such as Fence, Bluestem (national journal based out of EIU), Missouri Review, Ninth Letter, Ploughshares, Prairie Schooner, Southern Review, and Tin House.
- Online journals such as Best New Poems Online, Blackbird, Diagram, and Typo.
“Beauty plus pity—that is the closest we can get to a definition of art.”
—Vladimir Nabokov

COURSE SYLLABUS

Please note that the following syllabus may be altered and that additional assignments will appear on D2L. I will email to your D2L account when I post these assignments. Be sure to check both the syllabus and your D2L email for each class.

(I will refer to The Poet’s Companion as “P.C.” in the following assignments.)

FOCUS: INTRODUCTION TO POETRY
WEEK ONE
Tuesday 8/26: Introduction to class.
Thursday 8/28: Reading due: Mary Oliver’s “The Black Walnut Tree,” “Honey at Table,” and Simon Ortiz’s “The Serenity in Stones” from your anthology.
In-class writing and discussion on concrete language.

FOCUS: CONCRETE LANGUAGE AND DISCOVERY
WEEK TWO
Tuesday 9/2: Reading and writing due: “Writing and Knowing” pp. 19-29 from P.C. and read all of the “Ideas for Writing” at the end of the chapter and choose one exercise to do. Write this exercise in your writer’s notebook.
More reading: Introduction to our anthology (1-18), poems by James Wright, Sharon Olds, and Yusef Komunyakaa.
Thursday 9/4: Writing due: Prose paragraph. Assignment on D2L.
In-class critique of prose paragraphs.
Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately?

FOCUS: MORE ON CONCRETE LANGUAGE AND DISCOVERY
WEEK THREE
Tuesday 9/9: Reading due: First half of The Great Fires, by Jack Gilbert and the chapter “The Shadow” from P.C.
Writing due: Choose two exercises from “The Shadow” chapter and do them in your writer’s notebook.

Thursday 9/11: Reading due: Finish The Great Fires by Jack Gilbert
Continued discussion in-class on specificity and unexpectedness.

**FOCUS: FIGURES OF SPEECH**  
**WEEK FOUR**  
**Tuesday 9/16:**  
**Reading due:** Section on figurative language in our anthology (pp. 18-29) and poems by Brian Turner, Suji Kwock Kim, and A.E. Stallings.  
**Writing due:** Exercise #2 on page 102 of P.C. in your notebook. Try for ten attempts.  
Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately?

**Thursday 9/18:**  
**Reading due:** Chapter from P.C. on “Simile and Metaphor.”

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**FOCUS: FINDING A SUBJECT**  
**WEEK FIVE**  
**Tuesday 9/23:**  
**Poem due:** Work Poems  
Discuss workshop etiquette and process

**Thursday 9/25:**  
Poetry Workshop for Group ___

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**FOCUS: IMAGES**  
**WEEK SIX**  
**Tuesday 9/30:**  
**Poem due**  
**Reading and writing due:** Read chapter on “Images” from P.C. and do exercise #3 in your notebook.  
Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately?

**Thursday 10/02:**  
Poetry Workshop for Group ___

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**FOCUS: LINE BREAKS/SYNTAX**  
**WEEK SEVEN**  
**Tuesday 10/7:**  
**Poem due:** Metaphor Poem  
**Reading due:** Read “Music of the Line” in P.C. and do one exercise of your choice from the end of the chapter.  
**Reading and Guest Lecture:** A Journey with Two Poets of Color: Marcelo Hernandez and Derrick Austin

**Thursday 10/9:**  
Poetry Workshop for Group ___

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**FOCUS: MID-TERM AND REFLECTION ON THE SEMESTER**  
**WEEK EIGHT**  
**Tuesday 10/14:**  
TBA
Thursday 10/16: Writer's Notebook due
Mid-Term Exam

**FOCUS: LINE BREAKS/SYNTAX CONTINUED**

**WEEK NINE**
Tuesday 10/21:

**Poem due**
**Reading and writing due:** Selected poems by Terrance Hayes on D2L. In your notebook, rewrite one of your poems using line breaks as Hayes would.
Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately?

Thursday 10/23: Poetry Workshop for Group ___

**FOCUS: REPETITION AS FORM**

**WEEK TEN**
Tuesday 10/28:

**Poem due:** Sestina, Pantoum, or Villanelle
**Reading due:** “Repetition, Rhythm, and Blues” and “More Repetition” in P.C.; Bishop’s “One Art”; Dylan Thomas’s “Do Not Go Gentle…”; and selected poems by Nurske

Thursday 10/30: Poetry Workshop for Group ___

**READING AT NIGHT:** Poet D. Nurske, 5 p.m. at the Doudna Fine Arts Recital Hall

**FOCUS: PERSONA**

**WEEK ELEVEN**
Tuesday 11/4:

**Poem due:** Read pages 127-128 from P.C. and turn in a poem that comes from any one of the following exercises: 1, 9, 10, 11, or 12.
**Reading due:** Chapter on “Voice and Style” in P.C. and first half of *A Raft of Grief* by Rathburn

Thursday 11/6: Poetry Workshop for Group ___

**FOCUS: EXPANDING SUBJECTS**

**WEEK TWELVE**
Tuesday 11/11:

**Poem due:** Do the writing exercise on page 249 of P.C. titled “Talking to God.”
**Reading due:** Finish *A Raft of Grief* by Rathburn
Discussion: How Rathburn adds development to her poems.

Thursday 11/13: Poetry Workshop for Group ___

**FOCUS: STRUCTURE/SONNET**

**WEEK THIRTEEN**
Tuesday 11/18:  **Poem due:** Sonnet  
**Reading due:** “Sonnet 18” and “Winter” by Shakespeare; Donne “Holy Sonnet 10” and “Holy Sonnet 14”; Wordsworth “It Is a Beauteous Evening”; Cummings “pity this busy….”; Jarman “After Disappointment”; and Wright “Saint Judas” from your anthology.  
**Writing due:** In your notebook, do the rhyming exercise posted on D2L.  
Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately?

Thursday 11/20:  Poetry Workshop for Group ___

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**FOCUS:** Read for Pleasure and Eat Real Food

**WEEK FOURTEEN**

Tuesday 11/25:  NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

Thursday 11/27:  NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

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**FOCUS:** REVISION

**WEEK FIFTEEN**

Tuesday 12/2:  **Poem due:** Translation. See instructions below. And please bring either a laptop or your phone to class.  
**ASSIGNMENT:** Write a brief, freeverse poem, no shorter than ten lines, no longer than fourteen. Once the poem is presentable for workshop, enter the poem into an online foreign language translator. Turn in a copy of the original to me and have the translated version also ready to be turned in and typed on another piece of paper.

Thursday 12/4:  Poetry Workshop for Group ___

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**FOCUS:** REVISION CONTINUED

**WEEK SIXTEEN**

Tuesday 12/9  **Class Reading!**  Location: TBA

Thursday 12/11  **Revised Poem Due** (bring 5 copies)—see instructions on D2L under “Revision Assignment”  
In-class reading of revised poems and workshop.  
**Writer’s Notebook due**

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**Final Exam: Monday, December 15th, 12:30**

Your portfolios are due at this time. If you would like them mailed to you over the break, please provide a SASE 9x14 envelope. You’ll need about $3.50 in postage. Otherwise, you may pick up your portfolios once the spring semester begins.
2. Learning to write is a simple process: read something, then write something; read something else, then write something else. And show in your writing what you have read.

6. You do not learn from work like yours as much as you learn from work unlike yours.

15. Prose is prose because of what it includes; Poetry is poetry because of what it leaves out.

—From Marvin Bell’s “52 Statements About Poetry”