Fall 8-15-2001

ENG 2003-002: Creative Writing: Poetry

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English 2003--002
Creative Writing: Poetry
Fall, 2001
CH 3139

Texts:
Allison, Norton Anthology of Poetry
Hall, To Read A Poem, 2nd. ed.
Wallace, Writing Poems, 3rd. ed.

Course Description:

This is a course in both the reading and the writing of poetry. It is based on the old-fashioned notion that reading and writing go together: a good writer knows how to read, accurately and critically. Because you are a good reader of poetry, however, does not guarantee that you will be an equally good poet. That may come but only with practice through apprenticeship, the way young Japanese potters learn from a mentor or beginning cooks from a head chef. However, if you have no love of language--of its sounds and textures--the good poems will not come at all.

The first half of the semester will be the reading part. You will also write, but not as much on your own as you will during the second half of the term. That is, your first writing assignments will be designed to get you to practice various forms and techniques. But from mid-term on, you'll be expected to adopt what you've tried into original poems.

In both halves of the semester, I want you to be physical with language, to be concrete and specific and to avoid cliches at all cost. Use your hands when you write and your mouth when you read. For this class, toss the computer out the window and buy a bic, or a quill if you can find one. Poetry is slow work, both the reading and the writing.

Grades:

The most difficult task I have in this course is determining your grade. You won't be examined on anything, and I resist giving grades to your poems because they are not finished. So, I ask you to try to live without quizzes and tests and to concentrate instaed on the following:

1. class participation--hard to do if you are not here;
2. exercise assignments completed and revised as needed;
3. 100 lines of original poetry:
   a. at least two poems in traditional forms
   b. all poems revised at least once
4. a daily reading log and/or personal journal;
5. 3-5 page critical evaluation of your writing;
6. a portfolio made up of 2-5 above, due the last class day.

Although I will not grade your exercises or your poems individually, my comments on them or about them in class will give you a pretty good idea of what I think. We will also meet in conferences during the term and you may ask me then how you are doing. Remember: a "C" means "satisfactory," not failure. If you do no more than satisfy the above course requirements, you will get a "C." You will impress me most by your willingness to improve which means being honest about your work and being tenacious enough to revise it.

Revision is not correction. It means "to see again." Always be willing to stare hard at what you've written and to try it again from a new perspective. Writing provides us what life and love usually do not: another chance.

Schedule:

Week 1: General intro to class
Week 2: Frost parody, selected readings in Hall
Week 3: Imagery--making sense of the senses
Week 4: Figures of Speech--how to figure them
Week 5: Symbols and Signs--to stop or speed at the yellow light
Week 6: The Sounds of Speech--snarf, snide, snot, snow
Week 7: The Forms We Make--the distance from home to first

Week 8: Individual Conferences

Weeks 9-14: Workshop Sessions--revise, revise, revise

Final Comments:

A class like this is different than any other you'll take. There is no set body of material you are to master and there are no exams. You will learn, instead, as an explorer does, and the undiscovered country is yourself. A poet is the detective of "why?" and leaves no piece of evidence unturned in trying to answer it.