ENG 2003-002: Poetry Writing

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Course Policy

Goals: Our first goal in this course will be to become better readers of poetry, to be able to better appreciate the difference between poetry and prose, but more importantly, to better appreciate the difference between more and less literary forms of expression. To that end, we will read lots of poetry, both as a class and as individual readers. You will also write a paper, do journal entries, and give a presentation on a poet of your choice. Our second goal is to help each other become better writers of poetry—which entails writing and rewriting the paper and trying again. You will write poems and pieces of poems and ideas for poems in your journal. You will also workshop the poetry you write as a class, one-on-one, and sometimes with me. Towards the end of the semester, you will turn in a short portfolio of your best work—on which I will make general commentary and which you will share with the rest of the class.

Attendance and Lateness: The attendance policy is part of the grading policy. In addition, you should know that if your lateness becomes a problem, I will begin to count latenesses as absences.

Late work: A class like this cannot run smoothly if people do not bring their work in on time, if they are unprepared for presentations or workshops. For this reason, students who expect to make As or Bs MUST bring their work in on time and MUST be prepared for presentations, etc.

Plagiarism: Taking the words or ideas of another person without crediting that person is a serious matter and will be treated as such. Cases of intentional plagiarism will result in an NC for the course. Unintentional plagiarism, however, is also serious. You are responsible for knowing how to properly cite other writers and will be penalized for failing to do so.

Grades: Rather than breaking various elements of the course into percentage points, I will use a contract grading schema to assign grades at the end of the semester. That means that, in order to get a particular grade, you must meet all the requirements for that grade. The advantage of this system is that there are no surprises—you know exactly what it will take to get a particular grade. It will, however, require of you a certain consistency. You won’t be able to pull bad grades up at the last minute or let some one element of the course slide. If you fail to meet the requirements for, say, an “A,” then you automatically slide down to a “B.”

In order to make an “A” in the class, you must make A’s on all formal written work (rewrites possible), make an A or a high B on your presentation, complete an A journal (see below), consistently participate in class (i.e. practically every day—especially in workshopping), submit 10 finished poems in your portfolio, and have no more than 3 unexcused absences.

In order to make a “B” you must make B’s on all formal written work (rewrites possible), make an A, B or a high C on your presentation, complete at least a B journal (see below),
consistently participate in class (i.e. make significant contributions more days than not); have at least 7 finished poems in your portfolio, and have no more than 5 unexcused absences.

In order to make a "C" you must make C's on all formal written work (rewrites possible), make an A, B, or a C on your presentation, complete at least a D+ journal (see below), participate in class, submit 5 finished poems in your portfolio, and have no more than 7 unexcused absences.

To make a "D" in the class you must complete each element of the course and have no more than nine unexcused absences.

**Journals:** Journals should be a significant amount of work, but they should also be fun, and they should be a place for you to try out ideas and explore poetry for other components of the class. For example, you will be asked to give a presentation on a poet of your choice, and you might decide to explore some of that poet's work in your journal. You should also be writing down words and phrases and images that come up in the process of reading poems—and you should be working on drafts of poems—all of which will help you put together your final portfolio.

You should have two entries every week, one for exploring the poetry of other poets and one for exploring your own ideas—though the two are bound to overlap. In the first entry, you should include a xeroxed poem and a detailed but informal reading of that poem. What is going on in that poem, line by line? What does it mean? What images and symbols are at work and how does each of them work? How does the poet structure this poem? Where are the line breaks and what do they mean? How long are the stanzas and what shape is the poem? How do those things contribute to your reading of the poem? How does the poem work in terms of sound? How does the sound contribute to overall understanding of the poem? How does this poem relate to other poems by the same author? How does it relate to other poems you have become familiar with? In the second entry, you should write down ideas and images, words and phrases, from your readings for this or other courses, from your discussions with other people, from your dreams or daydreams or imagination. You should also, eventually or immediately, be writing drafts of poems, some of which will later be workshopped and/or submitted in your portfolio.

An A journal will always be thorough and thoughtful. It will show detailed analyses of poems read, thoughtful explanations of structures and interpretations, as well as serious drafting and gathering of ideas and images. Pages aren't really the point, but as a guideline the writing for the week would total somewhere in the neighborhood of four (handwritten) pages—two of analysis and two of drafting.

A B journal will often be just as thorough and thoughtful as the A journal is, but will be less consistent. Some weeks the entries are rushed or repetitive or short, and others they will be insightful and fully elaborated.

An C journal has many interesting moments and makes a real attempt to grapple with the problems of poetry, but is more often a bit short, fails to try the harder questions about sound and structure, seems often to have been written at the last minute.

A D journal has the requisite number of entries, but they are short, perhaps a page each, sometimes more and sometimes less. Also, they tend to be perfunctory and last minute.

**Paper:** You will get the assignment sheets for these later, but they will be 3-5 pages, and should be elaborations of the one of your journal entries. You will have one opportunity to
rewrite, but because I do give you that opportunity and because I will work with early drafts, I have high expectations regarding these papers.

**Presentation:** You will get the assignment sheets for oral presentations early--since the first presenters will speak within the first several weeks. Other presentations will be scattered over the course of the semester, the order of which will be determined by a drawing on Thursday.

**Portfolio:** Your portfolio will consist of a three-to-five-page paper in which you explore the development of your poetry over the course of the semester--including how your reading affected your work. It will also include poetry that has already gone through several rewrites--or that is the "fruit" of more extensive work with a particular theme, with particular imagery or form, sounds or ideas. Some of this poetry will have been workshopped and some of it will not have been workshopped. I may have read it or I may not have read it. If you want to be sure whether or not I consider it "finished," however, you should check with me. Otherwise, you are taking your chances.

**Problems:** If you have any problems regarding scheduling, grades, papers, etc., please call me, come to office hours, or make an appointment. I'd be happy to talk to you about any of your concerns.

**Students with Disabilities:** Students with documented disabilities may receive help. Contact the coordinator of the Office of Disability Services at 6583.

**Syllabus**

<p>| M A 24 | introduction |
| W A 26 | hand-outs |
| F A 28 | hand-outs |
| M A 31 | hand-outs |
| W S 2  | hand-outs |
| F S 4  | hand-outs |
| W S 9  | Bender 17-20; Carruth 714, 672-675, 689 |
| F S 11 | Bender 179-186; Carruth 635 |
| M S 14 | Bender 319-326 |
| W S 16 | Bender 29-35; Carruth 284, 319-320, 664-665 |
| F S 18 | Bender 213-217 |
| M S 21 | talks #1-4 |
| W S 23 | talks #5-8 |
| F S 25 | talks #9-12 |
|       | journals due |
| M S 28 | talks #13-16 |
| W S 30 | finish talks |
| F O 2 | catch-up |
| M O 5 | writing exercises |
| W O 7 | writing exercises |
| F O 9 | writing exercises |</p>
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Speech Assignment

This assignment is very similar to the written assignment we have already talked about. For this, I’d like you to pick a second poem, something you have discovered in the course of your journal explorations.

In a five- or ten-minute talk, I’d like you to explicate the poem. You should provide us with biographical information and an explanation of where in the history of poetry this poet fits. (If you have trouble with this question, come talk to me.) You should also explain the poem’s meaning and offer a line-by-line explanation of how that meaning is generated. Just like last time, make sure to explain how imagery, sound and line breaks work. Also, explain how the poem fits into the larger body of the poet’s work—in your opinion, based on your reading of the other poems. Are there similar images at work throughout the poetry? Similar structures? Similar uses of sound? Similar themes?

This is not an extremely formal speech. What I want most of all is for you to introduce your classmates to a poet whose work has moved you. I DO want for you to be prepared, however. You should have cards, have plenty of information, and show that you have practiced and thought about your presentation. Bring enough copies of your poems to share with everyone.
I don't think any of us can write poetry without reading lots of it, and without being good, thoughtful, close readers. We'll spend quite a bit of time this semester, especially the first half of the semester, looking closely at a wide variety of English and American poetry, particularly twentieth-century poetry. We'll be talking about the imagery, symbols, figures of speech--and about line breaks and all the various ways poets use sound.

For this assignment, I'd like you to pick one poet you especially like and read as much poetry by that poet as you can get your hands on. You might use your journal to explore the poetry for the first several weeks of class. After you think you have a good feel for the poetry, I'd like you to pick one poem you especially like and pay special attention to it.

In a five-page paper, I would like you to explicate the poem. Your paper should provide a brief biography of the writer and an explanation of where in the history of poetry this poet fits. (If you have trouble with this question, come talk to me.) It should also explain the poem's meaning and offer a line-by-line explanation of how that meaning is generated. Make sure to explain how both imagery and sound works, and pay attention to the line breaks. What do they mean? How do they affect the meaning of the poem? Finally, I would like you to explain how the poem fits into the larger body of the poet's work--in your opinion, based on your reading of the other poems. Are there similar images at work throughout the poetry? Similar structures? Similar uses of sound? Similar themes?

You should stay as close to the poem as possible and use quotes when appropriate. You'll be graded on your detail and thoroughness first. I'll also be looking for focus, organization, and polish.
To His
Coy Mistress

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
Should'st rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber\(^1\) would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.

My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze:
Two hundred to adore each breast:
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near:
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found;
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honor turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now, therefore, while the youthful glew\(^2\)
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our Time devour,
Than languish in his slow-devouring power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

---

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked,\(^1\) red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes there is more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.\(^5\)
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go:
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet by heaven I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

---

\(^{1}\) arranged in ornamental patterns.
\(^{2}\) exhaled.

Andrew Marvell
GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON  [1788-1824]

She Walks in Beauty

She walks in Beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that’s best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which Heaven to gaudy day denies.

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o’er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express,
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.

And on that cheek, and o’er that brow,
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,
But tell of days in goodness spent,
A mind at peace with all below,
A heart whose love is innocent!

Galway Kinnell

After Making Love
We Hear Footsteps

For I can snore like a bullhorn
or play loud music
or sit up talking with any reasonably sober Irishman
and Fergus will only sink deeper
into his dreamless sleep, which goes by all in one flash,
but let there be that heavy breathing
or a stifled come-cry anywhere in the house
and he will wrench himself awake
and make for it on the run—as now, we lie together,
after making love, quiet, touching along the length of our bodies,
familiar touch of the long-married,
and he appears—in his baseball pajamas, it happens,
the neck opening so small
he has to screw them on, which one day may make him wonder
about the mental capacity of baseball players—
and flops down between us and hugs us and snuggles himself to sleep,
his face gleaming with satisfaction at being this very child.

In the half darkness we look at each other
and smile
and touch arms across his little, startlingly muscled body—
this one whom habit of memory propels to the ground of his making,
sleeper only the mortal sounds can sing awake,
this blessing love gives again into our arms.
Love Calls Us
to the Things
of This World

The eyes open to a cry of pulleys,
And spirited from sleep, the astounded soul
Hangs for a moment bodiless and simple
As false dawn.

Outside the open window
The morning air is all awash with angels.

Some are in bed-sheets, some are in blouses,
Some are in smocks: but truly there they are.
Now they are rising together in calm swells
Of halcyon feeling, filling whatever they wear
With the deep joy of their impersonal breathing;

Now they are flying in place, conveying
The terrible speed of their omnipresence, moving
And staying like white water; and now of a sudden
They swoon down into so rapt a quiet
That nobody seems to be there.

The soul shrinks
From all that it is about to remember,
From the punctual rape of every blessed day,
And cries,

"Oh, let there be nothing on earth but laundry,
Nothing but rosy hands in the rising steam
And clear dances done in the sight of heaven."

Yet, as the sun acknowledges
With a warm look the world’s hunks and colors,
The soul descends once more in bitter love
To accept the waking body, saying now
In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,

"Bring them down from their ruddy gallows;
Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves;
Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone,
And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating
Of dark habits,
keeping their difficult balance."
Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, though certain half-deserted streets,
The musing retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes

Do Not
Go Gentle into
That Good Night

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learned, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead, 4
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while,
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old... I grow old...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled, 5
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

---

4 the brother of Mary and Martha, who was raised from death by Christ (John, 11: 1-44).
5 trousers with cuffs, a new fashion then.
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
[They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"]
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
[They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!"]
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
Arms that are braceletled and white and bare
[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

Shall I, Have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,3
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,

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Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,3
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
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And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: “I am Lazarus, come from the dead, 4
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all”—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: “That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all.”

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while,
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
“That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all.”

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers ruffled. 5

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

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1 archaic form of brindled.
2 painted in small touches of color.
3 chestnuts without their husks.
4 opposite, contrary.
5 rare.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Emily Dickinson

After Great Pain,
a Formal Feeling Comes

After great pain, a formal feeling comes—
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs—
The stiff Heart questions was it He, that bore,
And Yesterday, or Centuries before?

The Feet, mechanical, go round—
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought—
A Wooden way
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone—

This is the Hour of Lead—
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow—
First—Chill—then Stupor—then the letting go—

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Pied Beauty

Glory be to God for dappled things—
For skies of couple-color as a brindled 1 cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple2 upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls;3 finches’ wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, 4 original, spare, 5 strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.