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WRTG 307-000: Poetry Writing

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WRTG 307: POETRY WRITING  
FALL 2016  
3 CREDIT HOURS

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Office Hours: 3-4 on Mon. and Thurs. in MR

Course Information:  
Room: MR  
Section: E01

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- *Poems: A Concise Anthology* edited by Elizabeth Renker (Bring to every class.) BE SURE TO BUY THIS TEXT BEFORE COMING TO HARLAXTON.  
- Course Packet with additional readings (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.  
- School organized field trip to the Lake District (optional)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Poet Richard Wilbur once remarked that “whatever margins the page might offer have nothing to do with the form of a poem.” In this course centered on the writing of poetry, we will accept Wilbur’s challenge and learn the variety of ways we can give shape to our lyrical expressions. We will practice writing poems in different modes and forms, from the intellectual slinkiness of Shakespeare’s sonnets to the cosmic embrace of Whitman’s freeverse. Our focus will not be so much on the rules regulating each form, but on the deep
history, artistry, and context behind those rules so that we can begin to choose the right form for our poem's content. Some modes and forms will include syllabics, spoken word, the persona poem, and nature poetry (in the form of the Greater Romantic Lyric, for example). How one varies these forms and tailors them to a personal aesthetic will be both the challenge and the pleasure of the class.

We will also keep writing notebooks where we begin poems and hone our craft. 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 the semester's end.

In addition to improving our writing skills, this course will provide opportunities to visit the landscape where some of our assigned poems have been written, such as the Lake District. The majority of our assigned readings, though, will focus on contemporary poets, both from the U.S. and England, thus exposing us to the vitality of today's literary community.

**Course Objectives**

A. Students will develop skills of craft analysis by discussing, reading and writing poetry.  
B. Students will produce and revise original creative writing in the poetry genre.  
C. Students will learn to read, discuss, and identify their work in the context of a poetic tradition.  
D. Students will hone their ability to critique poetry in a creative writing workshop.  
E. Students will participate effectively in a reading of their poetry produced for this course.

**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 on Mondays (with one or two exceptions designated in the syllabus). 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 needs and interests. Many of these poems will begin in our writer's notebook.

A writer's notebook is key to the writing process and a requirement for this course. Most weeks, I will provide writing exercises. 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 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

“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

development. Another example might be to look at the line unit. If the lines are short, how did the short lines alter your reading of the poem? Did it speed up your reading or slow it down? Did it make you pay more attention to each word? 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 a common practice among writers. To gain the most from this assignment, it is key that you do the analysis before coming to class. (Craft analysis models are provided in the back of your course packet.)

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 sometimes alter our assignments or add to them. So, check in with your email regularly and be aware that it is your responsibility to keep up with the assignments not only listed in the syllabus but additional ones as well. I will also quiz over our readings to ensure careful attention to detail.

Workshops will encompass half of the in-class work that we will do. If you are being workshopped, you will need to bring copies for every person in the class. No emailed workshop poems will be allowed. Since our class is a small one, assume you are being workshopped every time there is a poem due. Two times during the semester you may choose to sit out of the workshop. Your poem, however, will still be due along with everyone else’s and must be submitted at the beginning of class. It would be helpful if you marked on the poem that you are not workshopping it. You do not, however, have to provide copies to the class on those times you choose to sit out of the workshop.

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 workshop should have undergone at least two to three revisions 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 paper folder (no three-ring binders). Within this manuscript, include—in this order—a title page, an epigraph, a table of contents, six poems that you have heavily revised followed by the initial draft submitted to workshop. For the six revised poems, I would like the original submitted 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.

“Beauty plus pity—that is the closest we can get to a definition of art.”

—Vladimir Nabokov

**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. 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 10% 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 active 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 lower your final grade by fifteen points. Seven absences 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 the reason for the absence. The only exception will be school-sanctioned events for which I receive prior notice, in writing, from a university administrator. Finally, if you arrive without the day’s reading in front of you, you will receive a ½ absence.

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. If you fail to turn in your work that the class plans to workshop by your assigned deadline, you will lose your turn in the workshop rotation plus receive a zero for that poem. Journal checks, quizzes, final portfolios, etc., must be turned in on time to receive any credit for them. Also,
if you miss a day that you are workshopped, you will simply miss your workshop. The reason for this strict policy on 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 poem is an event, not the record of an event.”
—Robert Lowell

Grading

Assignments are proportioned as follows:

**Ten weekly poems**
Ten poems

**Writer’s Notebook Pre-Midterm**
25 poems

**Writer’s Notebook Post-Midterm**
25 poems

**Reading Quizzes**
20 poems

**Class Participation**
20 poems

**Final Manuscript/Final Exam**
20 poems

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

Drop/Add Policy

There is normally about a 10 day period at the beginning of semester what a student may drop and class and/or add a class. The deadline date is published in the Semester Guidance handbook. Drop/Add forms are available from the library and completed forms should be returned to the same place. Faculty signatures are required for all classes being added.

Students may withdraw from a class, with the exception of British Studies, for a longer period of time.
Again the deadline date is published in the Semester Guidance handbook. Forms are available from the College Secretary, to whom completed forms should be returned. Forms must be signed by the faculty member of the class being withdrawn from and the Principal.

**All students must register for, and be continuously enrolled in, 12 credit hours of study to be eligible to study at Harlaxton and remain in the United Kingdom.**

**Academic integrity**

All students at the University of Evansville (Harlaxton College) agree to and are bound by the principles and practice of the honor code:

*I understand that any work I submit for course credit will imply that I have adhered to this Academic Honor Code: I will neither give nor receive unauthorized aid, nor will I tolerate an environment that condones the use of unauthorized aid.*

The full Honor Code is available online:

https://www.evansville.edu/offices/deanstudents/downloads/honorcode.pdf

**Students with disabilities**

It is the policy of the University of Evansville (Harlaxton College) to make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. University of Evansville students should contact the Office of Counselling and Health Education to seek help with this. Students from Partner Universities/Colleges should contact their own relevant student support office. For assistance whilst at Harlaxton students should contact the College Secretary whose office is located adjacent to the Principal’s office.

Written notification to faculty from the College Secretary is required for academic accommodations to be implemented.

> “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
- *The Late Hour* by Mark Strand
- *Otherwise* by Jane Kenyon
- *Hum* by Jamaal May
- *Given Sugar, Given Salt* by Jane Hirshfield
- *Above the River* by James Wright
- *Neon Vernacular* by Yusef Komunyakaa
- *Embryo* by Dean Young
- *What the Living Do* by Marie Howe
- *Life on Mars* by Tracy K. Smith
- *Rare Earth* by Bradford Tice
- *The Smallest Muscle in the Human Body* by Alberto Rios
- *Beowulf* translated by Seamus Heaney
- *Region of Unlikeness* 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*, *Rhine*, *Southern Review*, and *Tin House*.
- Online journals such as *Best New Poems Online*, *Blackbird*, *Diagram*, and *Typo*.

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**Course Syllabus**

Please note that the following syllabus may be altered and that additional assignments may appear so that I can adjust with the class's needs. Be sure to check both the syllabus and your Blackboard email for each class.

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

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**Focus: Introduction to Poetry**

**Week One**

Mon, August 29: Introduction to class.
Tues, August 30: Reading due: Neutral Milk Hotel’s song p. 709, Oliver’s “Black Snake,” James Wright’s “A Blessing,” Sandy Longhorn’s “1976” (coursepack), plus read this syllabus.
In-class writing and discussion on concrete language.

Thurs, Sept. 1: Continuation of Wednesday’s discussions. Reading due: Heaney, p. 549 plus Limón and Allnutt (coursepack).

FOCUS: CONCRETE LANGUAGE AND DISCOVERY
WEEK TWO

Mon, Sept. 5: 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.
Other writing due: Complete the poem begun last week in your notebook. Be sure to label this so that I can find it during the mid-term check.

Tues, Sept. 6: Reading due: Yusef Komunyakaa p. 608; Hughes p. 522; and Terrance Hayes p. 651.

Thurs, Sept. 8: Writing due: Prose paragraph. Assignment on Blackboard. In-class critique of prose paragraphs. Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately?

Friday, Sept. 9: MAKE-UP CLASS DAY for Thursday 9/1 class
Reading and writing assignment to be announced in class on Thursday.

FOCUS: MORE ON CONCRETE LANGUAGE AND DISCOVERY
WEEK THREE

Mon, Sept. 12: Reading due: Selections from The Great Fires by Jack Gilbert. (Course Pack) Continued discussion in-class on specificity and unexpectedness.

Writing due: Choose two exercises from “The Shadow” chapter and do them in your writer’s notebook.

Thurs, Sept. 15: NO CLASS due to British Studies Fieldtrip

Fri, Sept 16: MAKE-UP CLASS DAY for Thursday 9/15 class
Continue discussions on readings from the week.

FOCUS: FREEVERSE
WEEK FOUR
Mon, Sept. 19: Reading due: Doty on Whitman (coursepack), and from your anthology Whitman pp. 172-177; Lucille Clifton “Miss Rosie” and “Homage to My Hips” pp. 546-547, Cummings p. 367-368 plus “Robertson in coursepack.

Writing due: Do exercise 2 on page 53 of P.C. in your notebook.


Thurs, Sept. 22: In-class work on freeverse poem. Discuss workshop etiquette and procedure.

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FOCUS: IMAGE AND THE OBJECT POEM
WEEK FIVE

Mon, Sept. 26: Poem due: Freeverse (Assignment on Blackboard). Workshop in class.

Tues, Sept. 27: Reading due: Read remaining workshop poems (if any) and write comments on them for workshop in class. Additional 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? Plus, duffy farm poem in the coursepack proper.

Thurs, Sept. 29: No Class: Long Weekend Trips

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FOCUS: UNDERSTANDING THE LINE WITH ACCENTUAL AND SYLLABIC FORMS
WEEK SIX


Tues, Oct. 4: Reading due: Read remaining workshop poems (if any) and write comments on them for workshop in class. Additional reading and writing due: Read “Music of the Line” in P.C. and do one exercise of your choice from the end of the chapter. Plus, selected poems by Terrance Hayes, Robert Morgan, N. Scott Momaday (optional), and May Swenson. (All Course Pack) and “This Be the Verse” on p. 470.

Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately?

Thurs, Oct. 6: Continue discussion from Tuesday. In-class writing on your accentual or syllabic poem.

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FOCUS: THE GREATER ROMANTIC LYRIC/WEEKEND TRIP TO THE LAKE DISTRICT
WEEK SEVEN

Mon, Oct. 10: Poem due: Accentual, syllabic poem, or your lineation choice (Assignment on Blackboard). Workshop in class.
**Tues, Oct. 11: Reading due:** Read remaining workshop poems (if any) and write comments on them for workshop in class. **Additional reading due:** “The Poetry of Place” chapter from P.C. pp. 74-81 plus handout on the Greater Romantic Lyric (coursepack). Read that handout titled “Some Notes about the Romantic Lyric” first and then from our anthology: “Lines Written a Few Miles...” p. 63; “Frost at Midnight” p. 77; “To Autumn” p. 104; Frost’s “Birches” p. 309; plus the following from our coursepack: examples from Hazen and “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.”

**Thurs, Oct. 13:** No class this day. Lake District Trip Begins 13-16. Evening Departure. **Additional reading for the trip:** All of our text’s selections from William Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Coleridge (pp. 62-81) and Collins p. 589; excerpts from their diaries (coursepack); “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections in Early Childhood” (coursepack). **Writing due:** Choose one exercise from P.C.’s “Poetry of Place” chapter. This exercise may be done in your notebook anytime before Monday’s class.

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**FOCUS: REPETITION AS FORM (PANTOUMS, SESTINAS, VILLANELLES, & BLUES POEMS) WEEK EIGHT**

**Mon, Oct. 17:** Poem due: Greater Romantic Lyrics (Assignment on Blackboard). Workshop in class.

**Tues, Oct. 18:** No Class (due to British Studied fieldtrip to Southwell)

**Wed, Oct. 19:** Tuesday classes held on this day. **Reading due:** Read remaining workshop poems (if any) and write comments on them for workshop in class. **Additional reading due:** “Repetition, Rhythm, and Blues” and “More Repetition” in P.C.; Bishop’s “One Art” p. 430; Dylan Thomas’s “Do Not Go Gentle...” p. 448; Hughes’s “The Weary Blues” p. 380.

**Thurs, Oct. 20:** Continuation of Wednesday’s discussion. In-class writing on next poem. **Writing due:** Exercise TBA.

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**FOCUS: SONNETS WEEK NINE**

**Mon, Oct. 24:** Poem due: Your Choice! Workshop in class.

**Tues, Oct. 25:** **Reading due:** Read remaining workshop poems (if any) and write comments on them for workshop in class. **Additional reading due:** Charlotte Smith p.52; Shakespeare #73 p. 16; plus examples from Cummings, Rathburn, Jericho Brown, and Simon Armitage (coursepack).

**Thurs, Oct. 27:** Continuation of previous class discussions. **Writing due:** Exercise TBA.

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**FOCUS: PERSONA POEMS WEEK TEN**

Tues, Nov. 1: Reading due: Read remaining workshop poems (if any) and write comments on them for workshop in class. **Additional reading due:** All selections by British writer Carol Ann Duffy (course pack) and “Ulysses” p. 142.

Thurs, Nov. 3: Reading due: Excerpts from *Imaginary Poets Project* (course pack). Arrive prepared to recite one favorite line from one of these poems.

Fri, Nov. 4: MAKE-UP Class for 11/10 class. Continued discussion on persona poem from the course pack. Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately? **Writing due:** Exercise TBA.

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**FOCUS: PERSONA PROJECTS CONTINUED**  
**WEEK ELEVEN**

Mon, Nov. 7: **Work due:** New Poet’s Bio and Persona Questionnaire (Assignment on Blackboard).

Tues, Nov. 8: **Work and Poem due:** Revised bio and one persona poem. Bring 4 copies. Also bring computers or phone for research purposes. Small Group Workshop in class. Reminder: as you workshop, pay attention to the surface relations of the poem; the conflict of the protagonist; and the transformative moment.

Thurs, Nov. 10: **No Class:** Long Weekend Trips

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**FOCUS: Finish Persona Projects. Begin Spoken Word**  
**WEEK TWELVE**

Mon, Nov. 14: **Poems due:** Two to three Persona Poems of Your Choice for Workshop

Tues, Nov. 15: **Reading due:** Read remaining workshop poems (if any) and write comments on them for workshop in class. **Writing due:** Do the writing exercise on page 249 of P.C. titled “Talking to God.”

Thurs, Nov. 17: Reading and viewing due:
- Amiri Baraka: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ziRjhoAgTO8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ziRjhoAgTO8)
- Patricia Smith: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91L4JwEBxOE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91L4JwEBxOE)
- Hedwig Gorski: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYhTEMnSroI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYhTEMnSroI)
- Sam Sax: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTRdBWcRIJg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sTRdBWcRIJg)
- Harry Baker: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exGWGoh1Xiw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exGWGoh1Xiw)

Reminder: Have you done a craft analysis in your notebook lately?

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**FOCUS: Spoken Word continued**  
**WEEK THIRTEEN**

Mon, Nov. 21: In-class work on your spoken word poems. **Writing due:** Exercise TBA.
Tues, Nov. 22: Poem due for Group __: Poem Performed and Workshopped

Thurs, Nov. 24: Poem due for Group __: Poem Performed and Workshopped

**FOCUS: REVISION
WEEK THIRTEEN**

**Mon, Nov. 28:** Revised Poem Due (bring 5 copies)—see instructions on Blackboard under “Revision Assignment.” In-class small group workshop of revised poems. **Writer's Notebook due**

**Tues, Nov. 29:** Course Synthesis: reflect on how this class relates to the others that you are taking. Be prepared to share your thoughts.

**Thurs, Dec. 1:** Class Reading | Location: TBA

**Final Exam: Your Final Portfolio is due at this time:** ____________________________

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

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.