

Intermediate Poetry Writing
Engl 305-003, Tues 18h – 21h, English Annex 102

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Course Description

Welcome to Poetry Part II. You know what a poem is, now it's time to start creating your own throbbing temple of soul spasms. Any measurement as to the success or failure of your poetry from here on out will be judged according to how closely it comes to articulating whatever your poem wants to say without your ego getting in its way. You will start to think of poetry as an experience in and of itself. Ideas about liking poems or thinking they are good will be irrelevant. You don't ask yourself if you like breathing, the same should be said about your poems. Each are necessary to survival regardless of what you, or other people think about them.

Texts

Letters to a Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke
Collected Works of Billy the Kid by Michael Ondaatje
Structure of the Embryonic Rat Brain by Christopher Janke
Poemland by Chelsea Minnis
Scary, No Scary by Zachary Schomburg

The Class

Poems*

Expect to write at least one poem a week as homework, in addition to poems that you will write for workshop. At the end of the semester you will turn in a collection of 12-15 poems centered on a theme of your choosing. Early in the semester you will write a proposal that outlines what you would like to explore either thematically or formally in your final collection. This will require a certain amount of discipline but the structure will allow you to meditate at length on particular areas of your poetry. Along with your final collection of poems you will include a brief essay discussing its contents.

Workshop

As presenter

Throughout the semester you will be turning in poems for workshop. These should be poems that you have spent a significant amount of time crafting. It is your responsibility to post these poems on blackboard a week before they are due and to bring a copy of the poem to class on your workshop day. Failure to attend class the day of your workshop will lower your letter grade. Attendance is required.

As responder

A 100 word, typed response is due for each poem that is workshopped. These responses need to be posted to Blackboard. In class you must bring a copy of your response and the workshop poem. You may also make any necessary notes on the poems themselves. Remember that your comments should be directed to the poems themselves, not the author. You should discuss the experience you have while reading the poem and offer suggestions on how it could be revised.

* Unless you are writing in a particular form that demands a rhyme scheme, please abstain from writing rhyming poems. Besides the 16 weeks of our class, you have the rest of your life to write rhymes so don't think I'm cramping your style. Rhyming poems tend to sacrifice much in the way of content for the sake of a rhyme, ending in sloppy, trite poems. Yuck.

Discussion Leaders

For each reading assignment we will have group discussion leaders. Discussion leaders should provide basic background information on the text and author and provide thoughtful questions to help spur our thinking about the poems. Through our discussions we should somehow answer the questions: What are the poems trying to do? Where are they taking us? How do they relate to other things we have read or learned about in class? What does the experience of reading these poems entail? How do we see the world through this poem?

Textual Responses

For the books we read you will be expected to write a 2 to 3-page response discussing some aspect of the book. You may do a close reading of a poem or two. Discuss the imagery, form, word choice, etc. of one poem in particular or a couple. You may discuss how you can use a certain technique of the author's in your own poetry, or you may do any combination of the above. The response is intended to make you think about poetry and see how you might apply it to your own work. (10 points each)

Public Reading Responses

Throughout the semester there will be readings given by poets in public forums. You are required to attend at least two of these and to write a one-page single-spaced response. You may want to research the poet and read some of their poems online to further your understanding of their poetry. (10 points each)

The Law

Attendance is required. Upon your third absence, you will not receive a grade better than a C. Tardiness is likewise forbidden. You can expect to receive a warning email from me on your third absence. If you are absent after receiving the warning email, you will fail. This is not negotiable.

If you text, you will be counted absent.

You will be open-minded and respectful to others. This course will challenge the way you think. Use this abrasion to strike matches within yourself and see things differently, if only for a semester. Then you can go back to being a jerk or thinking that the rest of us are jerks. (See attitude below.)

Late Work is forbidden. You will have until the Thursday following our Tuesday class to email late assignments and receive partial credit. After Thursday, you will receive a zero.

Plagiarism is the undocumented use of someone else's work. Plagiarism will be cause for your immediate failure of the class and you will be turned in to the authorities. Don't even think about it. Your soul will never forgive you.

Attitude

All discussions will be held in positive, constructive, adult, open and honest manners, which is to say that hostility of any kind towards anyone's work will be considered highly unprofessional and will not be tolerated. You will be kicked out of class. We will be reading poetry in this class that you might find offensive, so be prepared to approach it with an open mind and to form articulate and intelligent responses to it. Be honest. Be fair.

Grades

The assignments and experiments you do over the semester have been scientifically tested and proven to expand your consciousness if done properly. Poetry is its own reward. If you do it with gusto and zeal, it will reward you. Do a half-assed job, and you will get the same thing in the form of a grade.

Final portfolio and poetics – 30%

Participation, Workshop responses, Discussion – 35%

Written work, poems and textual responses – 35%