ENGL 216.02 - Techniques of Poetry
Mon-Wed 4:20 pm – 5:40 pm
Location: DWNY100

Syllabus and Course Overview

Fall 2016 | Wesleyan University
Instructor: Matthew Burnside
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Office: 285 Court Street, 303A
Office Hours: By Appointment, Mondays & Wednesdays 3:00-4:00

"Poets are the emperors of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."
—Percy Bysshe Shelley

"Prose: words in their best order
Poetry: the best words in the best order."
—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Techniques of Poetry

What is a poem? What is its function? Its value? Most importantly, how might we harness it to transform the world?

In this course we'll interrogate these questions and more. In order to understand the form we call "poetry" and its wide spectrum of possibilities, each week we'll tackle a different kind of poem. Coincidentally, we'll be reading a lot of poems. By unraveling their component parts we'll gain a greater understanding of the form's remarkable malleability and elasticity. In the end, my hope is that you emerge with a greater sense of the form as a seemingly limitless genre, the multitudinous tools of the working poet, and the potentialities and pitfalls of your own craft.

This class will be divided into two parts: the first class of the week (let us call it the theoretical portion) will consist of activities and various writing exercises, along with lectures/discussions, and close readings, while the second class of the week (let us call it the practical portion) will be reserved for workshop, in which you'll produce your own writing and discuss the writing of your peers. You'll be exposed to a generous survey of classic as well as contemporary literature in this course. Some of the writers whose work you'll meet: John Olson, Anne Sexton, Saul Williams, Claudia Rankine, Chelsey Minnis, ee cummings, Alice Notley, Mary Oliver, Hiromi Ito, and more.

This course is writing and reading-intensive, so consider your commitment to it before adding it to your roster. In your own writing, I will ask you to be stylistically self-aware, and to develop the voice, language, and form of your poetry in concert with its artistic goals. We will attempt to merge these aspects of creative writing into work that is both self-consistent and interesting on all levels. I expect you to participate actively in every class discussion. You will be evaluating your classmates' work, and vice versa, weekly. Attendance and participation are mandatory.

Required Materials

° GOOD POEMS, selected and introduced by Garrison Keillor | ISBN 0-14-200344-1
° All other poems will be provided by your professor
° A journal (in which you'll complete all of your writing exercises and homework assignments)
° Eventually, you'll need a receptacle for your portfolio but we'll discuss what this should look like later on
° Enthusiasm
° An intellectual curiosity in what makes for arresting poetry
° A willingness to read closely, write/review painstakingly, and offer civil constructive criticism to your peers
° A Wesleyan e-mail account

Grading

The fruit of your work throughout the semester will culminate in a final portfolio, from which 50% of your grade will be derived. This portfolio will include both original and revised drafts of all workshopped pieces, your writing exercises, and an artist's statement (a 2-3 page double-spaced document in which you briefly describe the fundamental underpinnings of your work, which poetic tradition it falls into, and what unique craft issues you wrestled with during its production).

The other half of your grade will be derived from your active participation in class, which entails speaking up during workshop and discussion, writing thoughtful and courteous feedback on your peer letters, being present (not tardy) for the opening writing exercise, and generally maintaining an open attitude to the material with genuine investment in your own intellectual and artistic development.

Participation – 50 pts
- Workshop input/critiques – 50% (25 pts)
- Writing exercises – 50% (25 pts)
Final Portfolio – 50 pts
- Artist's statement, writing exercises, and homework assignments – 50% (25 pts)
- Original and revised drafts of all workshopped pieces – 50% (25 pts)

Total = 100 pts

All grading is done on a standard letter +/- scale. Because this is a creative course, I will not be grading you based on the quality of your work per se, but on the level of care and dedication you have for your work and the class in general. A grade students in participation come to class, actively participate in discussions (the times I call on you don’t count), group and individual projects, and workshops consistently
and frequently. The work in an A-grade portfolio shows me that you are trying hard in your own writing, that you care about what you create, and that you revise as well as you possibly can.

Attendance and Participation
My attendance policy is in bold below—note that this is not a class where it's okay to only show up to turn in your work and take the final. There is no final (your portfolio is your final), rather, and your work and participation are your grade. In the event that you have an unavoidable absence, such as a doctor's appointment or other obligation, let me know (if you know about it beforehand, tell me about it beforehand) and I'll see what I can do to help you.

Attendance and absence policy: Attendance and active participation are absolutely vital in this course; our time is at a premium. Therefore, you are allowed 2 UNEXCUSED absences for the entire semester. After these 2 absences, I will fail your participation grade. After 3 unexcused absences, I will fail you for the entire course.

Lateness: don't be late.

Formatting for Assignments
Formatting for creative work is varied, but in general, the rules are: 12-pt Times New Roman or Garamond font, standard margins, with your name and class information at the top of the 1st page. Multiple pages should be numbered. Single-space your lines unless white space is integral to the integrity of your work.

Turning in Work
I will not accept late work under any circumstance except documented medical emergency or other unavoidable events. Hangovers and printers running out of ink are not considered unavoidable events. In general, work for workshop should be turned in to me in class one week before its workshop.

Classroom Behavior
Because this is a college class, I expect you to act like the mature adults you are, and I will treat you as such. A lot of what we'll be talking about will be sensitive and possibly controversial for some of you. I expect you to talk calmly about sex and sexuality, race, religion, politics, philosophy etc. You won't be able to get the most out of this class if we have to constantly censor our discussions, especially since creative work frequently deals with these sensitive topics. However, this is also not a license to slander, spew profanity, nor incite others with harmful comments. I expect you to be respectful, especially when we talk about hard subjects. In short, be a decent human being.

Your phone and other electronics should be off during class, and texting is absolutely forbidden. Seriously, it can wait an hour or two. If you are expecting a very important call or message during class, please tell me so I can allow you to take it without problems. Computers are fine for taking notes, but not for Facebook, Twitter etc. This is college; your attention should be on the class.

Grade Complaints and Questions
My contact information is listed on this syllabus. If you receive a grade you are unsatisfied with for any reason, please come talk with me. If you have any questions about the course, email me, or set up an appointment to see me.

Changes
I reserve the right to amend and append this syllabus and schedule of assignments at any time, with notice, and probably at some point depending on how we move through the material. If I make changes, I will announce them in class or by email.

Schedule: All homework assignments are due the next week, unless otherwise noted.

WEEK 1 – Mon. Sept. 5 / Wed. Sept. 7 – Introduction to course and guidelines. Workshop sign-up, protocol, and procedures.
Opening exercise: Visual Prompts Poem
What is a poem? What is its function?
Homework: Read mock workshop pieces; Bring a poem; Read “A Defense of Poetry” by Percy Bysshe Shelley (http://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/essays/detail/60388)

WEEK 2 – Mon. Sept. 12 / Wed. Sept. 14 – Process, Revision, Mock Workshop
Opening exercise: Wikipedia Fragmentation Poem
Homework: Read & critique peer poems; Read selections from Song of Myself by Walt Whitman (https://www.poets.org/poems/poem/song-myself-i-i-i-i-i)

WEEK 3 – Mon. Sept. 19 / Wed. Sept. 21 – Poem as Barbaric Yawp
Opening exercise: Song of Myself Poem
Homework: Read & critique peer poems; Read “Some Notes on Organic Form” by Denise Levertov; Read “Jazz as Communication” by Langston Hughes (http://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/essays/detail/60392) (http://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/essays/detail/60394)

WEEK 4 – Mon. Sept. 26 / Wed. Sept. 28 – Poem as Melody
Opening exercise: Transference Poem
Homework: Read & critique peer poems; Watch selected Poetry performances on YouTube (TBA)

WEEK 5 – Mon. Oct. 3 / Wed. Oct. 5 – Poem as Performance
Opening exercise: Recitative Poem
Sonic Structures. Slam, Spoken Word, & Hip Hop.
Homework: Read & critique peer poems; Selected poem readings (TBA)

**WEEK 6 – Mon. Oct. 10 / Wed. Oct. 12 – Poem as Narrative**
Opening exercise: Prose Poem
*Narrative Elements in Poetry, Prose Poetics, Imagery and Imagism.*
Homework: Read & critique peer poems; Read “The Poetics of Disobedience” by Alice Notley; Read “The Poetry of the Present” by D.H. Lawrence
(http://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/essays/detail/69479)
(http://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/essays/detail/69405)

Opening exercise: Intuitive Protest Poem (without mentioning subject)
*Selected Protest Poems, Kairos & Poetic Activism, Selections from Claudia Rankine’s “Citizen”*
Homework: Read & critique peer poems; Read selected poems by e.e. cummings

**WEEK 8 – Fall Break / NO CLASS**

**WEEK 9 – Mon. Oct. 31 / Wed. Nov. 2 – Poem as Landscape**
Opening exercise: Landscape Poem
*Layout, White Space, Compositional Integrity, Audacious Typography.*
Homework: Read & critique peer poems; Watch selected “YouTube” poems by Steve Roggenbuck

**WEEK 10 – Mon. Nov. 7 / Wed. Nov. 9 – Poem as Experimentation**
Opening exercise: Collaborative Poem
Homework: Read & critique peer poems; Read “Brought to a Boil: An Essay on Experimental Poetry” and other selections by John Olson

**WEEK 11 – Mon. Nov. 14 / Wed. Nov. 16 – Poem as Magic, Alchemy**
Opening exercise: Nonsense Poem
*Surrealism, Juxtaposition, Dream Logic in Language.*
Homework: Write a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure poem using www.Inklewriter.com

**WEEK 12 – Mon. Nov. 21 – Poem as Glitch**
Opening exercise: Share some of your Choose-Your-Own Adventure poems
*New Media Poetics.*
Homework: Read & critique peer poems

**WEEK 13 – Wed. Nov. 30 – Final Workshop**
Homework: Poetic letter to future self through Futureme.org

Opening exercise: The End Poem
*Good Submission Practices. Cover Letters. [This space reserved for optional lessons as voted on by the class collectively]*
Homework: Finalize & complete your portfolios! (Revise, revise, revise…)

**FINAL EXAM WEEK – **Portfolios due**
*Poems due 1 week before your workshop date; you will be responsible for printing out hardcopies for all of your peers to be handed out the week before your workshop.

**All poems should also be emailed as a doc or PDF file to mburnside@wesleyan.edu

***All poems should be formatted as follows: Times New Roman/Arial/Garamond, 12 pt. font, single-spaced; PAGE NUMBERS must be included; include a centered TITLE; stapled, not paper clipped; finally, a left-hand header should include:

YOUR NAME  
BURNSIDE, POETRY  
WORKSHOP DATE (DAY WE'RE DISCUSSING YOUR WORK)  
TURNED-IN BY DATE (DAY YOU EMAILED IT TO ME)

****Everyone will be workshopped NO LESS than 2 times.

*****You will submit 3-5 poems each time, for a total of 6-10 poems for the semester (though more may be included – and indeed, are welcome – in your final portfolio). Remember: QUALITY over QUANTITY is most important.

WED. SEPT. 21:

WED. SEPT 28:

WED. OCT. 5:

WED. OCT. 12:

WED. OCT. 19:

WED. OCT. 26:

WED. NOV. 2:

WED. NOV. 9:

WED. NOV. 16:

WED. NOV. 30: