

English 313
Poetry Writing
M/W, 2:20- 3:30
Spring 2009

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Office Hours: Mon., 1-2; Tues., 10-11:30; Wed.,
12:30-2; Thurs., 12:30-1:30, and by appointment.

Course Goals and Structure

Our primary goals in this course will be (a) an enhanced understanding of, and appreciation for, the art of poetry and (b) a focused attentiveness to the richness of language (its history, sounds, textures, and enormous flexibility). The world of contemporary poetry is rich and varied, with works ranging from meticulous “new formalist” poems to the more overtly political works of, for instance, various performance poets. In this course we will read and respond to a range of poems, both historical and contemporary; we will also examine various poetic forms and work to enhance our awareness of a poet’s vocabulary and range of options. Students in this course will also write and revise a series of their own poetic works, presenting their poems in multiple workshop sessions, and responding to one another’s poems with critical care.

Required Texts

Lucille Clifton, *Voices*. BOA Editions, 2008.
George Elliott Clarke, *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues*. Pottersfield Press, 1983.
Electronic edition, 2002. http://www.dal.ca/etc/clarke/index_std.html.
Marjorie Maddox and Jerry Wemple, eds. *Common Wealth: Contemporary Poets on Pennsylvania*. Penn State UP, 2005.
Mark Strand and Eavan Boland, eds. *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. W.W. Norton & Co., 2000.
Handouts provided by instructor
Multiple copies of students’ poems for distribution to class

Recommended Text

Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook*. Harcourt, 1994.

Attendance Policy, and a Note on Plagiarism

We will meet twice a week (sometimes only once a week) for fourteen weeks; that isn’t much time when you consider all we have to do. If you are serious about writing, you will show up on time, every time. More than two absences (excused or unexcused) will automatically lower your final grade by one-third.

I would hope that it goes without saying that any work you submit for this course must be your own; to plagiarize in an upper-level writing course is to convey a shocking

disrespect for writers and their work. Refer to the College's policy on academic honesty (available in the Student Handbook) for any needed clarification.

Evaluation*

*Remember that English Track 3 (Writing) majors must submit formal portfolios of their work for various courses, generally during the Spring semester of their junior year. If you are a Writing track major, then, you should get in the habit of retaining various drafts of assignments from all your writing classes.

Portfolio I 30%

Minimum of four poems, two revised as fully as possible within first 6 weeks*

Editor's responses to two students' work

Self-assessment/explanation of revision choices (min. 2 typed pages)

Portfolio II 40%

Min. of four new poems, two revised as fully as possible within last 8 weeks*

Editor's responses to two students' work

Self-assessment/explanation of revision choices (min. 2 typed pages)

*Note that at least one of the minimum of eight draft poems written this semester must be an attempt at one of the forms (villanelle, sestina, pantoum, sonnet) or structured lines (blank verse, heroic couplets) explored in Strand and Boland's *The Making of a Poem*.

Journal entries 25%

Responses to assigned reading, including summary of pertinent technical information, relevant terms and definitions, and responses to a predetermined number of assigned poems; further details of journal requirements to be determined during first week of classes.

Participation 5%

Class discussions

Workshop contributions

Notes in response to student work submitted for workshop sessions

**Also included as part of Participation: Required attendance at one (or both!) of two "poets in the world" events: (1) Feb. 18, 2009 performance of *Quebecite* (a jazz opera), 7:30 PM, Foy Hall; (2) MCTC performance of Seneca's *Oedipus*, translated by poet Ted Hughes, April 2-5, 2009, Arena Theatre.

Schedule

Week 1

Mon. 1/19 Course introduction; in-class exercises.

Wed. 1/21 Yusef Komunyakaa, "Kit & Caboodle" (handout), from David Citino's *The Eye of the Poet*; in-class exercises; negotiation of journal requirements.

Week 2

Mon. 1/26 Reading/review of Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook*; Journal 1 due;

guidelines for responding to each other's work; reading and discussion of first poem drafts.

Wed. 1/28 Strand & Boland (S&B), pages xiii-xxix and 3-4, *The Stanza* (pp.136-155), and Part II: Meter (pp.159-161); Journal 2 due.

Week 3

Mon. 2/2 Workshop 1

Wed. 2/4 Workshop 1 cont'd.; S&B, Blank Verse (pp. 101-120) and The Heroic Couplet (pp. 121-135).

Week 4

Mon. 2/9 Workshop 1 cont'd.; Clarke, *Saltwater Spirituals and Deeper Blues* (online); Journal 3 due.

Wed. 2/11 Workshop 1 re-cap; discussion of Clarke and S&B reading; Editor's responses (to Workshop 1 poems) due: one copy to writer, one to instructor.

Week 5**

Mon. 2/16 Workshop 2

Wed. 2/18 Workshop 2 cont'd.; S&B, The Villanelle (pp. 5-20) and The Sestina (pp. 21-42).

** Feb. 18 performance of *Quebecite* (see note under Participation).

Week 6

Mon. 2/23 Workshop 2 cont'd.; S&B: The Pantoum (pp. 43-54) and The Sonnet (pp. 55-72); Journal 4 due. *Quebecite* journal due (if chosen).

Wed. 2/25 Workshop 2 re-cap; discussion of S&B reading; Editor's responses (to Workshop 2 poems) due: one copy to writer, one to instructor.

SPRING BREAK

Week 7

Mon. 3/9 **Portfolio I due.** Handout on Persona; Clifton, *Voices*; in-class writing/exercises.

Wed. 3/11 Journal 5 due; reading and discussion of draft poems.

Week 8

Mon. 3/16 S&B, Part IV: Open Forms (pp. 259-288).

Wed. 3/18 Workshop 3

Week 9

Mon. 3/23 Workshop 3, cont'd.

Wed. 3/25 Workshop 3, cont'd. Journal 6 due.

Week 10**

- Mon. 3/30 Workshop 3 re-cap; discussion of S&B reading; Editor's responses (to Workshop 3 poems) due: one copy to writer, one to instructor.
- Wed. 4/1 S&B, *The Pastoral* (pp. 207-239) and *Common Wealth*, Preface and Part I (pp. 3-10); Journal 7 due.

**April 2-5 MCTC performances of *Oedipus* (see note under Participation).

Week 11

- Mon. 4/6 *Common Wealth*, Part II (pp. 13-50).
- Wed. 4/8 Workshop 4; *Oedipus* journal due (if chosen).

Week 12

- Mon. 4/13 No class.
- Wed. 4/15 Workshop 4, cont,'d.; *Common Wealth*, Part III (pp. 54-77).

Week 13

- Mon. 4/20 Workshop 4, cont,'d.; *Common Wealth*, Part III (pp. 78-102); Journal 8 due.
- Wed. 4/22 Workshop 4 re-cap; discussion of *Common Wealth* poems; Editor's responses (to Workshop 4 poems) due: one copy to writer, one to instructor.

Week 14

- Mon. 4/27 Guest speaker(s)?; catch-up.
- Wed. 4/29 **Portfolio II due**; course evaluations; plan for final reading.

Finals Week

End-of-class reading (in lieu of an exam) during scheduled final exam time.