

Prof. Powell / O'Dowd Hall 320  
6:00 pm - 9:20 pm W  
South Foundation Hall 371

Office: O'Dowd Hall 320  
Office hours: 10 - 12 MW

PEER EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_  
PEER EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

## CREATIVE WRITING 3300 WORKSHOP IN POETRY

In a letter to his two brothers, John Keats described an element which he believed to be crucial to writing great poetry: "I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason — ... of remaining content with half- knowledge.... with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21 December 1817)

Two centuries later the poet Louise Gluck paraphrased this idea, saying great poetry involves an "absence of bias that convinces, that encourages confidence." It comes when we feel "a sense that the poet was not wed to any one outcome. The poems themselves are like experiments, which the reader is freely invited to recreate in his own mind" (Proofs and Theories 45).

To write in a "negatively capable" way is to face that abyss of the unknown: that we do not know what our father thought when he took that trip, why we chose to do what we did that winter, what our mute character would say if he could speak, the purpose of that bird's song. To embrace that uneasy absence is to invite the creative spirit. In this course, I will ask you to push yourself to write in ways that surprise you, and to resist being "wed to any one outcome" — to allow for that which is mysterious but true to come forth. I also ask you to write poetry which craves a listener, and to always be receptive to the thoughts of your peers on your work.

You will participate in freewriting exercises and discussion, comment on your peers' poems, read and discuss contemporary poems which I have selected, and present on one. Finally, you will revise the majority of these poems and hand this in to me as your midterm and final.

For my part, I aim to serve as a guide for each of you as you develop your own creative voice. I am committed to working with each new writer based on his / her strengths and style, to assist you in successfully communicating what you hope to convey in the way you hope to convey it, whatever your aesthetic

### COURSE TEXTS

*The Making of a Poem: the Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*  
Other texts will be available on Moodle.

## GRADES

### **Quizzes: 30%**

Three times throughout the semester you will complete a quiz, which may be multiple choice or a timed essay assignment which asks you to respond in a substantial way to a recent class reading. This is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your mastery of the material we have covered in class, and express your own thoughts in writing about the work we've been reading. The prompts may cover any recent text we have read or several of them. Multiple choice quizzes will simply cover the content of the reading and basic class concepts.

### **Comments on other student work: 10%**

The length and quality of your comments on your peers' poems figure into your final grade, because the overall quality of our workshop is largely dependent upon the amount of energy you devote to the work of your peers. Twice I will randomly collect all the comments from a poem, to evaluate the quality and quantity of your commenting on your peers' work. All students must bring the texts we are discussing to class daily; those who do not will receive a 0, without exception. To receive a "5" (or an "A") on your comments, for any poem under a single page, you should include: roughly 6 - 8 comments on specific word choices or lines and a substantive paragraph summarizing your overall response to the poem and suggestions for revision. In both individual edits and the summary paragraph, focus on offering suggestions or asking questions. Praise is important in the workshop discussion but should not be the focus of your comments. If you aren't sure what to say, see the end of this syllabus.

### **Final portfolio: 25%**

Your final portfolio is due the last day of class. In it you will include **nine of your ten poems**, substantially revised. I will provide some guidelines for what substantial revision should look like, but you should expect to go through at least five drafts of a poem before you come to your "final" draft (and really, each poem should go through many more). It may look very different from the original piece, and should show evidence that you have incorporated class and professor suggestions for your work. It should be proofread and free of errors. Finally, revisions may abandon the assignment requirements.

### **Participation: 15%**

All students must bring the texts we are discussing to class daily. Students should prepare and contribute to discussion actively. Those who do not contribute to discussion will receive a C (average) or lower for participation. All students must acquire the assigned texts and bring them to class daily, as you will often be asked to refer to them during in-class group activities. Group work may require students to answer questions and present their findings back to the

class; the written document you create, and your participation in the presentation of that work will be factored into this grade as well.

### **Presentation: 10%**

Each student will give a presentation on a poem written in the form that we are discussing that class period. The poem must not be a poem that is assigned; please let me know ahead of time which one you have chosen. You must offer an in-depth explication of the poem, explaining how it is working in terms of image, line break, metaphor, tone, point of view, etc. You will lead the class discussion on that poem, helping students to analyze its dramatic situation and technique, and how the poem is working compared to our other poems. Your response can include personal response—what the poem makes you think of, and why—but must include some analysis of its tools as well. Please do not include the poet's biography.

The student should come with 2-3 targeted questions to inspire discussion, and may choose to offer an in-class writing exercise inspired by the poem. An outline should be given to me with the student's name, poem title, and key points; it should also include the questions for discussion and the writing exercise. Bonus points for creativity, energy, and multi-media use.

### **First drafts: 10%**

Poems are graded holistically according to the rubric included in this syllabus. Poems which appear to have been written hastily - with multiple errors, flat or careless language, or which clearly don't fulfill the assignment - will result in a lower score. This score will be calculated when you hand in your portfolio; therefore you must save the copy of the poem with my comments to include.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

I do not allow computers or phones in my classroom. You will be asked to turn off and put away all cellular phones, laptop computers, headphones, Blackberries, and other electronic devices before class begins.

Regular attendance and promptness are required and expected. You may be absent twice without penalty to your attendance/promptness grade. If you miss more than four classes for any reason, you will be unable to derive sufficient benefit from the course and thus receive a zero - no exceptions. If you miss a class, please post your assigned poem on Moodle the day of the class; you will also be expected to have printed out the other poems available on Moodle and workshopped them for the next class.

Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses within the university community. Plagiarism is the submission of material authored by another person but represented as your own work, whether that material is paraphrased, or copied verbatim from another source. When using

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words or ideas from outside sources in your work, you must document those sources. Any student work containing plagiarized materials will receive an automatic zero; the full penalty may also include a zero for the course and suspension or expulsion from the university. If you are suspected of cheating or of plagiarizing someone else's work, you will be referred immediately to the Dean of Students and to the Academic Conduct Committee of the University Senate. Refer to the Oakland University Undergraduate Catalogue for a full review of the university's Academic Conduct Policy.

Students with disabilities or special learning needs should make arrangements through the Office of Disability Support Services (106 North Foundation Hall) and inform me early in the semester so that I can accommodate your needs properly.

**Preferred Name & Preferred Gender Pronouns:** Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records.

Course Percent	Letter Grade	Honor Points Equivalent
0-59	F	0.0
60-66	D	1.0
67-69	D+	1.3
70-72	C-	1.7
73-76	C	2.0
77-79	C+	2.3
80-82	B-	2.7
83-86	B	3.0
87-89	B+	3.3
90-92	A-	3.7
93-100	A	4.0

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### **Week 1: Introduction**

W 9/5 Introductions, writing exercises

### **Week 2**

W 9/12 **Poem 1 due: Free poem, focus on image**

Anthology of Poetic Forms: Introduction, the Ode; Charles Simic, "Miracle Glass Co."; John Keats, "To Autumn," Joy Harjo, "Perhaps the World Ends Here," Robert Creeley, "America"

Introduction to "Why Poetry" and "Three Beginnings and the Machine of Poetry" by Matthew Zapruder, p. xi - 14 (Moodle / handout)

### **Week 3**

W 9/19 **Poem 2 due: Ode**

Readings: Introduction, Shaping Forms, the Elegy (p. 165- 168); Ben Jonson, "On My First Son," W.H. Auden, "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," John Berryman, "Dream Song 324," Mark Doty, "Tiara," Douglas Crane, "The Elegy for New York"; Mary Oliver, "The Black Walnut Tree," p. 235

**Presentation 1 (Elegy):** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Week 4**

W 9/26 **Poem 3 due: Elegy**  
**Quiz 1**

Readings: "The Stanza at a Glance," "The History of the Form," "Contemporary Context," 137 - 140, Thomas Wyatt, "They Flee From Me," p. 142, George Herbert, "Easter Wings," Emily Dickinson, "I died for Beauty," p. 145, Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays," p. 150, "Close-Up of a Stanza," p. 154-155; Galway Kinnell, "The Bear," p. 220

**Presentation 2 (Stanza and line breaks):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 5**

W 10/3      **Poem 4 due: Free poem, focus on stanza and line break**

"The Ballad at a Glance," "The History of the Form," "The Contemporary Context," (p. 73 - 78); "The Cherry-tree Carol," Anon., p. 78 - 79; Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," p. 86 - 88; MacNeice, "Bagpipe Music," p. 90 - 91; Gwendolyn Brooks, "We Real Cool," p. 94; "Close-Up of a Ballad," 99 - 100

**Presentation 3 (ballad):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 6**

W 10/10      **Poem 5 due: Ballad**

Readings: "Blank Verse at a Glance," "The History of the Form," "The Contemporary Context," p. 101 - 105; William Wordsworth, "The Prelude," p. 109 - 110, Robert Frost, "Directive," p. 113 - 114, Richard Wilbur, "Lying," p. 114 - 117, "Close-Up on Blank Verse," p. 119 - 120

**Presentation 4 (blank verse):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 7**

W 10/17      **Poem 6: Blank verse**  
**Quiz 2**

Readings: James Wright, "Lying in a Hammock," p. 219; Robert Hass, "Meditation at Lagunitas," p. 226; Philip Levine, "Smoke," p. 224; Jane Kenyon, "Let Evening Come," p. 224; C.K. Williams, "Loss," p. 232

**Presentation 5 (pastoral):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 8**

W 10/24      **Poem 7: Pastoral**

*Norton:* The Sonnet at a Glance, and History of the Form, p. 55 - 57  
e.e. cummings, "from 'Tulips and Chimneys,'" p. 66; Mary Jo Salter, "Half a double sonnet," p. 69

**Presentation 6 (sonnet):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Week 9**

W 10/31      \* **Class Canceled - Conferences held this week** \*

**Week 10**

W 11/7      **Poem 8 due: Sonnet**

Readings: "The Villanelle at a Glance, History of the Form," pp. 5- 6; Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art," p. 11; Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night," pp. 12; "Close Up of a Villanelle: 'One Art' by Elizabeth Bishop," p. 19 Wendy Cope, "Reading Scheme," p. 17; Ernest Dowson, "Villanelle of His Lady's Treasures," p. 9; James Merrill, "The World and Child," p.13

**Presentation 7 (villanelle):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 11**

W 11/14      **Poem 9 due: Villanelle**  
**Quiz 3**

Readings: TBA

**Readings: a theme chosen by the class / TBA**

**Presentation 8 (class choice):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 12**

W 11/21      **Poem 10 due: Class choice**  
**Readings: on revision (Moodle)**

**Presentation 9 (on revision):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Week 13**

W 11/28      On Revision  
**2 revised poems due**

**Week 14**

12/5      Portfolios due: class celebration

## **RUBRIC FOR FIRST DRAFTS**

What follows is a general rubric I use for evaluating first drafts. Additionally, a grade is affected by the assignment guidelines and the extent to which the student followed instructions. Finally, students are expected to hand in poems on time and bring the appropriate number of copies; if a student fails to do so their grade will be affected.

### **I. DRAMATIC SITUATION / CONTENT**

A: Purpose of poem is clear. Situation or subject described in poem is creative and unique. Poem's message is clear to reader. Well developed poetic arc (beginning, middle, end) with a high level of dramatic tension.

B: Purpose of poem is mostly clear. Subject described in poem and poem's message are mostly unique. Contains a poetic arc and some dramatic tension.

C: Purpose of poem and message is somewhat unclear. Subject of poem is not unique or not handled in an unusual way. Poetic arc is undeveloped.

D: Purpose of poem is mostly unclear. Subject is somewhat cliché. Weak poetic arc.

F: Purpose of poem is entirely unclear. Subject of poem is unoriginal. No poetic arc.

### **II. VOICE / SPEAKER / TONE**

*5 / 10*: Voice is unique and clear. Writer is aware of audience and effectively engages reader. Tone is appropriate and consistent, or deviates with reason and purpose.

*4 / 8*: Voice is mostly unique and clear. Writer is aware of audience and makes some effort to engage reader. Tone is mostly appropriate and consistent.

*3 / 6*: Voice is somewhat genuine and clear. Writer has some awareness of audience. Tone is somewhat appropriate and consistent.

*2 / 4*: Voice feels inauthentic, somewhat unclear and unidentifiable. Writer has little awareness of audience.

*1 / 2*: Voice is entirely unclear and unidentifiable. Voice does not feel realistic, genuine, or compelling. Writing has no awareness of audience.

### **III. FORM / LINE BREAKS**

*5 / 10*: Form is clear, well-structured, and has intent. Lines are appropriate lengths for the subject matter and variation on line length relates in a meaningful and apparent way to the subject matter. Line and stanza breaks are sensible and well thought out.



*4/8:* Form is mostly clear and well-structured. Organization of lines and stanzas is logical.  
*3/6:* Form somewhat structured and clear. Organization of lines, stanzas somewhat logical.

*2/4:* Poem contains little consistency or logical form. Lines, stanzas occur at random.  
Transitions are somewhat weak.

*1/2:* Poem contains no consistent or logical form. Line and stanza lengths vary without reason. Weak transitions between lines and stanzas. Poem length is under the requirement.

#### **IV. DICTION / LANGUAGE**

*5/10:* Excellent word choice (diction) and use of poetic devices (i.e., symbols, similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, alliteration, etc.). Word choice is specific and consistent; where it is broad or varies, those choices clearly relate to the poem's subject matter. Diction is clear, appropriate for the speaker, creative, and descriptive.

*4/8:* Good use of language, poetic devices, and diction. Word choice is fairly clear, creative, consistent, and descriptive.

*3/6:* Acceptable use of language, poetic devices, diction. Some bland or awkward word choice.

*2/4:* Poor use of language. Few poetic devices. Diction is unclear; word choice bland or awkward.

*1/2:* Very poor use of language. No use of poetic devices. Diction is very unclear; word choice is bland and awkward generally.

#### **V. GRAMMAR / MECHANICS**

*5/10:* Correct punctuation, spelling, capitalization; smooth and sensible use of sentence structure, syntax, and punctuation.

*4/8:* Almost entirely free of errors in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization; sentence structure, syntax generally smooth and make sense with content of the poem.

*3/6:* Several errors in punctuation, spelling, capitalization.

*2/4:* Many errors in punctuation, spelling, capitalization

*1/2:* Many repeated serious errors in punctuation, spelling, capitalization; appears to have been written hastily.

### Commenting on Another Student's Poem: What to Say

Not sure what to write on your fellow students' poems? Consider this a guide. In addition to margin comments on the poem ("Not sure about this word choice," "YES," "confusing," "diction shifts here," etc.) you must *include an end comment of at least one substantial paragraph* in which you address how you think the poem is working as a whole. If you're not sure how to approach that, consider these questions:

- What do you know about the speaker of this poem? Is who the speaker is apparent early on? Where are you confused by who he or she is? Does the diction (word choice) match what you would expect from this type of speaker?
- What is the occasion of the poem? What seems to have prompted it? What's at stake - do you care?
- What is the poem's location? What is its time frame? Does either location or time change?
- What is going on in the poem? Can you follow a narrative or story line on a literal level? Are there places where you get confused about the narrative?
- What can you see, smell, hear, taste, and see in the poem? List the images and concrete details you like. Explain why you like them. Are there any that don't work for you? Why?
- Where do you like/not like so much the language of the poem? Which lines or phrases stand out? Why? How would you characterize the language (conversational, formal, etc.)?
- Are there any examples of abstract language or cliché used in the poem? At any point does the language start to feel boring, flat, or slack?
- Are there any moments of sentimentality or melodrama? "Poetic" words? Wordiness? Give examples.
- How does the poem look on the page? Does it have a shape? Does it follow standard form? How long are the lines? Are line and stanza breaks used to maximal effect? Does the poet use end-stops or enjambment?
- How does the poem sound? Consider assonance, alliteration, or other kinds of sound repetition. Discuss through example why and how effectively these elements are used.