

English 302: Poetry Workshop  
MW 2-3:15  
Rachel Trousdale  
rtrousdale@agnesscott.edu  
Buttrick 307, x6209  
Office Hours T 11-12, TTh 1-2, and by appointment

Required books:

R. S. Gwynn and April Lindner, *Contemporary American Poetry*  
John Hollander, *Rhyme's Reason*  
Joy Harjo, *How We Became Human*  
Monica Youn, *Barter*  
Stephen Burt, *Why I am Not a Toddler*  
Terrance Hayes, *Lighthouse*

Additional readings in photocopy packets and on Moodle

W, January 18: Introduction

F 20: Pick a short poem (sonnet-length or thereabouts), preferably one written before 1900, and “translate” it into a new poem. Your poem does not have to duplicate the original poem’s form and language, but it should reflect the original poem’s ideas and thematic structure. Please hand in a copy of the poem you’ve chosen along with your own poem.

M 23: Hollander: pp. 1-21

Gwynn and Lindner: Nemerov, “A Primer of the Daily Round” (6); Wilbur, “A Simile for Her Smile” (19); Wilbur, “Hamlen Brook” (24); Bowers, “Mary” (66); Merrill, “Charles on Fire” (103); Disch, “Zewhyexary” (254); Ruark, “Lecturing My Daughters” (275); Morgan, “Sigodlin” (319); Nelson, “The Ballad of Aunt Geneva” (334) Peacock, “Why I am Not a Buddhist” (345); Alvarez, “How I learned to Sweep” (382); Tufariello, “Useful Advice” (468); Campo, “Oysters” (472)

W 25: Disch, “The Rapist’s Villanelle” (253); Hacker, “Wagers” (300); Alvarez, “Bilingual Sestina” (384), Villanelles and sestinas packet on Moodle

F 27: Write a metrical poem, using one of the forms modeled in Hollander.

M 30: Hollander: pp. 22-26:

Gwynn and Lindner: Simpson, “To the Western World” (47); Bowers, “The Astronomers of Mont Blanc” (65); Kumin, “Morning Swim” (80); Kumin, “Woodchucks” (81); Justice, “Counting the Mad” (84); Sexton, “Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward” (154); Rich, “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” (163); Rich, “Living in Sin” (163); Gunn, “From the Wave” (175); Espaillat, “Visiting Day” (192)

W Feb 1: Gwynn and Lindner: Chappell, "Narcissus and Echo" (222); Disch, "Ballade of the New God" (255); Pinsky, "ABC" (261); Martin, "E.S.L." (278); Hacker, "Ghazal on Half a Line by Adrienne Rich" (301); Lim, "Pantoun for Chinese Women" (321); Ryan, "Turtle" (327); Ryan, "Mockingbird" (329); Steele, "Sapphics Against Anger" (355); McHugh, "A Physics" (367) Bogan, "The Pleasures of Formal Poetry" (Moodle)

F 3: Write a poem in a form of your choice from Hollander, whether from the assigned reading or beyond it.

M 6: Gwynn and Lindner: Bukowski, "the great escape" (16); Simpson, "Physical Universe" (51); Merrill, "Casual Wear" (107); Bly, "The Scandal" (127); Kinnell, "St. Francis and the Sow" (130); Sexton, "Cinderella" (159); Gunn, "In the Tank" (174); Williams, "The Curator" (183); Barrax, "Pittsburgh, 1948: The Music Teacher" (206); Edson, "An Old Man in Love" (213); Edson, "Ape" (214)

W 8: Gwynn and Lindner: Oliver, "The Black Snake" (215); Chappell, "My Grandmother Washes Her Feet" (218); Clifton, "lee" (224); Williams, "Hooks" (226); Howe, "Closed Fist Withholding an Open Palm" (228); Harper, "Black Study" (234); Simic, "I was stolen..." (239) Kooser, "Abandoned Farmhouse" (248); Haas, "A Story About the Body" (265); Nelson, "Lonely Eagles" (335); Goldbarth, "Dog, Fish, Shoes (or Beans)" (357)

F 10: Write a poem in which you make up a story about a real object or creature. This may be an imaginative exercise, an allegorical interpretation, etc.

M 13: Gwynn and Lindner: Wilbur, "Year's End" (19); Carruth, "Woodsmoke at 70" (29); Dugan, "Surviving the Hurricane" (46); Levertov, "What Were They Like?" (59); Merwin, "The Drunk in the Furnace" (137); Levine, "What Work Is" (152); Plath, "Edge" (200); Barrax, "Strangers Like Us: Pittsburgh, Raleigh, 1945-1985" (205); Strand, "Keeping Things Whole" (208); Strand, "The Tunnel" (209); Clifton, "wishes for sons" (224)

W 15: Gwynn and Lindner: Adcock, "To a Young Feminist Who Wants to Be Free" (241); Dunn, "A Secret Life" (251); Derricotte, "Black Boys Play the Classics" (272); Cardiff, "Combing" (293); Olds, "Topography" (299); Lea, "Hunter's Sabbath: Hippocratic" (305); Palmer, "A word is coming up on the screen" (313); Lim, "Riding into California" (322); Komunyakaa, "Facing It" (341); Nye, "The Traveling Onion" (418); Dove, "Adolescence—III" (424)

F 17: Write a poem about a process, transition, or transformation.

M 20: Hayes, *Lighthouse*, parts 1 and 2

W 22: Hayes, *Lighthouse*, parts 3 and 4

F 24: Write a poem which is a portrait of someone. (If it's not clear from the poem whom you are describing, please add an explanatory note.)

M 27: Arnold, "Dover Beach" (on Moodle); Hecht, "The Dover Bitch" (33); Wright, "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota" (146); Makuck, "Leaning Against the Bar at Wrong-way Corrigan's in Greenville, North Carolina" (263)] Dove, "After Reading *Mickey In The Night Kitchen* For The Third Time Before Bed" (425); Burt, *Why I am Not a Toddler* plus packet on Moodle.

W 29: Wilbur, "The Writer" (23); Simpson, "American Poetry" (48); Hoffman, "Violence" (57); Kumin, "Noted in the *New York Times*" (82); Ginsberg, "A Supermarket in California" (121); Rich, "Diving into the Wreck" (164); Mezey, "Hardy" (211); Mezey, "My Mother" (211); Stokesbury, "To His Book" (330); Salter, "Dead Letters" (452); Roethke, "How to Write Like Somebody Else" (on Moodle); Nelson, "Owning the Masters" (on Moodle)

F March 2: Write a poem in which you respond to a text — a poem, a novel, a clip from a newspaper, etc. You may parody, continue, imitate, argue with, answer, agree, contradict, or any other response. But whatever you do, you should experiment with ways of *sounding like* the text you are responding to. (If it's not clear from the poem what text you are responding to, please add an explanatory note.)

M 5: Youn, *Barter*, parts 1 and 2

W 7: Youn, *Barter*, parts 3 and 4

F 9: Write a poem in which you somehow depart from the style you have been using lately.

M 12: SPRING BREAK

W 14: SPRING BREAK

M 19: Joy Harjo, from *What Moon Drove Me to This?* and *She Had Some Horses*

W 21: Joy Harjo, from *A Map to the Next World*

F 23: Poem due (free topic)

During second half of the semester, readings will be determined based on students' choices of poets: presenters will pick a selection of poems to be discussed on the day of their presentations.

M 26: Student Presentations: Reading to be determined

W 28: Student Presentations: Reading to be determined

**Th 29: Reading by Benjamin Percy, 4:00; Reading by Joy Harjo, 8:00**

**F 30: Reading by Jaqueline Pardue Goldfinger, 1:00**

M April 2: Student Presentation: Reading to be determined

W 4: Student Presentation: Reading to be determined

F April 6: Easter Break

M 9: Student Presentation: Reading to be determined. Poem due (free topic).

W 11: Student Presentation: Reading to be determined

F 13: Poem due (free topic)

M 16: Student Presentation: Reading to be determined

W 18: Student Presentation: Reading to be determined

F 20: Poem due (free topic)

M 23: Student Presentation: Reading to be determined

W 25: SpARC: Class cancelled. (Consider submitting a proposal to read your poetry!)

M 30: Student Presentation: Reading to be determined (and class conclusion)

W May 2: Final portfolio due by 3:00

This syllabus is subject to change.

Each class period will consist of two major components: the discussion of the day's readings and workshopping student poems. We will also be doing some in-class writing exercises. The relative quantity of each will vary.

### **Workshops:**

Each student must submit no fewer than two poems to the class for workshopping. There is no maximum beyond the constraints of time. Workshops will last for about twenty minutes. To make the best use of time, students workshopping their poems should come in with questions they would like the workshop group to address.

### **Workshop format:**

The student submitting her work reads her poem out loud, and then asks the questions she has brought. In the ensuing discussion, the following rules apply:

- 1) The poet may not interrupt to explain or clarify her poem, although towards the end she may ask more questions. It is useful to hear what effects your poems produce.
- 2) The workshop group is on the side of the poem: our job is to take the poem seriously, and to help think through how to strengthen it.
- 3) The poet is bound to listen to the group, but not necessarily to follow its advice.

### **Assignments:**

Students will write one poem each week. These poems should be original work written specifically for the course. If you have older work on which you would like comments, I will be happy to look at it, but you should not submit it for course credit. For the first half of the semester, the weekly poems will be in response to assignments; for the second half, students will choose what and how to write. (I'll distribute a list of prompts which you may use if you wish). Weekly poems are due in my wallbox by 3:00 PM on Fridays, although of course I am happy to accept them earlier. Please do not submit poems by e-mail unless absolutely necessary.

The final project will consist of a collection of at least five poems on a subject of the student's choice, an essay on a specific aspect of the craft of writing poetry, and a portfolio of the semester's work, including the original copies of the weekly assignments and revisions to those assignments.

In addition to the written assignments, each student will give a 10-minute presentation on the work of a contemporary poet. At least three days prior to her presentation, the student should distribute a representative sample of the poet's work (in a quantity commensurate with a normal reading assignment) for that day's reading. Presenters must meet with me well ahead of time to discuss their intentions.

**Grading:**

Participation: 10%

Weekly poems and portfolio: 40%

Presentation: 10%

Collection: 20%

Craft essay: 20%

Participation grades reflect your contribution in class discussions. You have three roles in discussions: critic of published poetry and essays; colleague and editor, commenting on your peers' work; and poet, submitting your own work for commentary.

Grades for the portfolio and the collection will be based on the following criteria: sophistication of ideas, language, and form; experimentation and originality; technical skill; precision, both of thought and of description; ambition, interest, and cohesion; and, in general, the poem's success as a work of art. Please note that grades are *not* assigned on the basis of whether I personally like the poem; instead, I will hold them to a broader standard of current poetic practice.

Individual poems will not receive letter grades. I will submit a midterm grade for each student, based on her poetry and participation for the first half of the course. If you are concerned about your grade, please see me and I will be happy to give you further information.

**Attendance policy:**

This class centers around discussion. If you don't participate in discussions, whether by contributing or listening to your peers, you haven't really taken the class. You will be allowed one free absence over the course of the semester, but after that, you must present a compelling reason why your grade should not be reduced. Even with a good reason, each absence beyond the third will result in a reduction of the final grade. Please note that the attendance requirement is separate from the participation grade; participation credit is based on how you behave once you show up.

**Late and missing work policy:**

You may turn in one poem on a Monday instead of a Friday. Additional late poems, or any missing poems, will result in a lowered final grade. Failure to hand in more than three of the poems will result in failure of the class.

**Honor Code:**

Students are expected to abide by Agnes Scott College's Honor Code. Plagiarism in a creative writing class is particularly absurd.

Many students who choose to plagiarize seem to do so because they are afraid to turn in work late; please remember that a late penalty is by far the lesser of two evils in this situation. If you discover that you're in over your head, contact me and we'll figure something out.

**Office hours and how to reach me:**

I will hold walk-in office hours MW 2:30-3:45, TTh 1-2, and will be glad to schedule extra appointments. Come to discuss your poems, revisions, or drafts; to ask questions about the class; to argue about a text; to get help with a confusing text; etc. I strongly encourage everyone to come meet with me at least once over the course of the semester! To make an appointment, or for any other contact, it's best to e-mail me at [rtrousdale@agnesscott.edu](mailto:rtrousdale@agnesscott.edu).

**Course evaluations:**

At the end of the semester, you will receive an e-mail asking you to submit online course evaluations. Please fill them out! I pay very careful attention to them. I want to know what you thought so that I can improve this course in the future. Course evaluations are also used by the college during faculty performance reviews.