

ENGW 1103 Introduction to Poetry Writing

Instructor: Amir Hussain

Class: Wed 5:30-8:00pm, 16 Johnston Hall
3 credits; Section 1

Office Hours: Wed 4-5pm & Thurs 2:30-3:30
Office Location: Lind Hall Room 24-25

Course Description

Interpreting poems—our own and others—without a working knowledge of the various ideas that underpin poetry can impede our ability to help each other develop our own unique voices, styles, and purposes. Consequently, we organize our class with the guiding principle that to write, read, and critique poetry requires us to not only read and write poems but also to discuss the diverse ways in which poets, writers, and intellectuals conceptualize poetry. What is a poem? How should a poem be read? Critiqued? What role does poetry play in the world? We'll organize class discussions around various theoretical essays and poems that evidently believe very strongly in poetry's power and influence to shape, alter, and reflect authentic human experience. Our aim is to create an egalitarian environment where we can write our own poems, experiment freely, and offer constructive feedback to classmates' poems with a sensitivity towards the motivations behind these poems.

Required Texts

Cook, Jon. Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000. Wiley-Blackwell.
Gonzalez, Ray. Faith Run. University of Arizona Press.
Lasky, Dorothea. Black Life. Wave Books.
Merwin, W.S. Present Company. Copper Canyon Press.
Zapruder, Matthew. Come On All You Ghosts. Copper Canyon Press.

Objectives

By the conclusion of this course, students should be able to boldly experiment with poetry writing while situating their work within a long theoretical tradition that argues for various ways of reading, writing, and understanding poetry.

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation in Class, Workshop, and Conference 25%
You are expected to be present, participate in discussion, and offer comments on workshop poems at each class meeting. Please devote your full attention to our in-class discussions and offer your input often. The success of our collective learning experience rests on your willingness to share your ideas and to actively listen to your classmates' thoughts and questions. Always foster a supportive environment by showing respect for your fellow students and for your instructor. Please turn off all cell-phones and laptops. Reserve text messaging, snacking, and private conversations for our midway break. Because we only meet once a week, you are expected to be present at every class meeting. Excused absences will need to be substantiated with a note (if you are ill, please contact me). Excessive tardiness (two times or more) will count as one absence.

Leading Poem Discussion 5%
Prepare and lead an informative class discussion centered on one of the poems from the week's poetry readings. Describe the poem, how it moves, what it evokes, locate images or rhythms or sounds that it creates, etc. Pose thoughtful questions to class for group discussion.

Creative Assignments 20%

On specified due dates, you will be required to turn in a type-written draft of a poem to me. Ideally these drafts will be revisions and re-imaginings of the in-class writing exercises and will form the basis of your portfolio. These assignments will be graded with check, check +, check -.

Portfolio

50%

In a notebook or folder devoted to this class, keep copies of everything you write during in-class exercises. These might become the basis of poems you'll revise and put into your portfolios and *these earlier drafts will need to be included in the portfolio you turn in*. Take these exercises seriously—you might be pleasantly surprised at the kind of work you generate as you and your classmates spend concentrated class time freewriting. Twice in the semester, you will turn in a portfolio of work, which will include revised poems and a short paper that responds to our theoretical readings about poetry.

Course Evaluation

What is the best way to contact me?

The easiest way to reach me is right after Wednesday class and during my office hours. You can also contact me at my email address huss0200@umn.edu, but I do prefer to speak in person about poems and other concerns. I am available and interested in discussing your writing and offering additional feedback, so don't hesitate to speak with me after class or during office hours.

Will I accept late work?

I expect work to be turned into me, typewritten, on due dates indicated. Nonetheless, I will accept late work, but for every day that the assignment is late I will deduct 5% off the total grade.

Can you speak to me about your grade?

Absolutely, but please write up a rationale if you want me to reconsider your grade. Recognize that your grade will improve more if you focus your efforts and attention on future assignments and class preparation rather than if you fixate on the grades of past assignments.

What are the attributes of excellent creative writing work?

Poetry contains concentrated attention, fresh, surprising language, authentic feeling-drive, image and metaphor as applicable to each poem, experimentation as applicable to each poem, substantial and meaningful revision, and an evocative experience for the reader. I am required to report any language that I perceive as threatening to you or to others to university counselors and/or the authorities.

Student Academic Integrity and Scholastic Dishonesty

<http://www1.umn.edu/oscai/>

Any written work that you turn in to me must be your own. A student responsible for scholastic dishonesty will be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course and will be reported to the Office for Student Conduct & Academic Integrity. I will *not* lower my standards in individual cases. Ask me if you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism.

Statement on Accommodating Students with Disabilities

<http://ds.umn.edu/>

The University of Minnesota is committed to providing all students equal access to learning opportunities. Please contact Disability Services to arrange reasonable accommodations.

Class Schedule

(subject to change)

September 7

Introductions

September 14

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, "Poetry in Theory: A User's Guide," pp. 21-25
Poetry in Theory, "Note On Poetry," pp. 91-93 and "On Poetry," pp. 94-96
Present Company, pp. 1-36

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

September 21

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, "A Statement for Poetry," pp. 296-300
Present Company, pp. 37-80

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Large Group Workshop: _____

September 28

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, "The Figure A Poem Makes," pp. 234-236
Present Company, pp. 81-end

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Small Group Workshop

October 5

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, "Preface to American Edition of *New Poems*," pp. 106-110
Black Life, pp. 1-25

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Large Group Workshop: _____

October 12

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, "The Poetic Experience," pp. 152-159
Black Life, pp. 26-50

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Large Group Workshop: _____

October 19

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, "Poetry's Evidence," pp. 182-188 and "The Automatic Message,"
pp. 188-191
Black Life, pp. 51-end

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Large Group Workshop: _____

October 26 - Poetry Portfolio due today

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, "Poetry and Grammar," pp. 208-214
Faith Run, pp. 1-35

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Large Group Workshop: _____

November 2

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, "Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature," pp. 56-60
Faith Run, pp. 36-70 – visit from Poet and Professor Ray Gonzalez

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Small Group Workshop

November 9

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, “Poetry as a Spoken Art,” pp. 69-74 and “Modern Poetry,” pp. 131-134

Faith Run, pp. 71-end

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Large Group Workshop: _____

November 16

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, “From *How Are Verses Made?*” pp. 144-151

Come On All You Ghosts, pp. 1-35

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Large Group Workshop: _____

November 23 – Class Cancelled (meet on alternate date for individual conference)

Thanksgiving Break

November 30

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, “Blood, Bread, and Poetry: The Location of the Poet,” pp. 503-513

Come On All You Ghosts, pp. 36-70

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Large Group Workshop: _____

December 7

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, “Poetry and Knowledge,” pp. 275-287

Come On All You Ghosts, pp. 71-end

Poem Discussion Leaders: _____

Small Group Workshop

December 14 - Poetry Portfolio due today

Discussion: Poetry in Theory, “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” pp. 342-349

Poetry Reading