

## ENGL 131: Poetry and Drama

It's like a tap-dance  
Or a new pink dress

--Muriel Rukeyser, "Yes"

Katy Ryan, Associate Professor of English

Fall 2013

Office Hours in Colson 221: Wed 11:00-1:00

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### Course Description

In this introductory English course, we will study two literary genres that are rooted in oral expression: poetry and drama. In the first half of the semester, we will concentrate on poems, and as winter arrives, we will turn to plays. We will study poetic forms—the sonnet, villanelle, blank verse, free verse—and theatrical forms—expressionism, contemporary tragedy, and social realism. Each class we will concentrate on strengthening your ability to analyze and interpret difficult literary works.

This is a highly interactive class in which you will be expected to contribute to discussion regularly. You will also have the opportunity to compose original poems and to collaborate on an in-class performance.

### Course Goals

- To create a supportive intellectual community of readers
- To become stronger analytical and creative thinkers

### Course Objectives

By the end of the semester you should be able to

- demonstrate an understanding of the formal elements of poetry and drama
- ask perceptive questions of literary texts
- contribute with confidence to class discussion
- work creatively and productively with others

### Required Texts (at downtown bookstore)

*The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, eds. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland

Sophie Treadwell, *Machinal*

Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), *The Dutchman*

Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul* (revised edition)

### Requirements

A. Five quizzes	20 points
B. Participation and Performance	20 points
C. Midterm and Final Exams	60 points

### A) Quizzes

There will be five unannounced quizzes on our readings. The quizzes will help you to contribute to class discussion, to develop your analytical skills, and to prepare for exams. There will not be any make-up quizzes, but I will drop your lowest grade.

## **B) Participation and Performance**

### **Participation**

This class will strengthen your ability *to think*—to question, analyze, reflect, dispute, and reason. Dialogue is essential to this process. There will be a variety of ways to participate: you can ask questions about our readings, read a poem aloud, share your quiz responses.

If this course were only about reading poems and plays, we could all do that by ourselves. If it were only about listening to what one person has to say about literature, we could all find a great lecture on video or audio. But English courses are about more than the act of reading and the acquisition of information. They are also about learning how to think and express yourself.

I understand the pressure, uncertainty, and boredom that can lead to silence in the classroom. I will do my best to create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue.

You are allowed four absences for whatever reason. **If you miss more than four classes, you will fail the class** (unless there is a documented emergency. See emergency policy below). Please consider carefully whether this is the class for you.

Routine tardiness will count as one absence.

In order to receive all 20 points for participation, you must have a stellar attendance record, contribute to class discussion regularly and substantially—which means at least once a week—and participate in group rehearsals and performances.

At any point, you can visit me in my office to ask about your participation grade.

**Performance.** Everyone will be in a performance group that will create an interpretive response to a play. These ten-minute performances do not have to be professionally acted or memorized. Think of them as a gift to the class and a way to begin our discussion. Performances should convey an understanding of the play rather than simply offering a direct reading. Groups may choose to:

- Act a brief, important scene -- and then re-enact it with a different interpretation
- Adapt a section of the play to highlight its relevance to current events
- Perform an interview with the characters and/or the playwright
- Change the setting, or one of the characters, to make a particular point
- Translate a moment from the play into a visual: a painting, a drawing, a handout
- Incorporate music, props, lighting, costumes
- Break the fourth wall and include audience members in the performance

## **C) Two Exams**

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final exam. The in-class midterm will consist of identification of poems and brief answers to analytical or historical questions. The take-home final exam will give you a chance to respond to essay questions about the plays.

### **Descriptions of Letter Grades**

The following are descriptors for letter grades which correspond with my own sense of what these grades mean.

**A = Excellent/Outstanding.** This evaluation indicates a consistently excellent record in all aspects of the course, including discussion, written assignments, and exams. This grade conveys that the student has engaged thoroughly and skillfully with the course content. The student has not only demonstrated an understanding of the literary material but has also demonstrated a sophisticated ability, in class and in written work, to pose serious, critical, and challenging questions. The student has further evidenced a capacity to situate the course readings in a historical, theoretical, or conceptual framework.

**B = Very good/Good.** This evaluation indicates a strong record in all aspects of the course, including discussion, written assignments, and exams. This grade conveys that the student has grappled reliably and consistently with the course content and has demonstrated a mature understanding of the literary material. The student has made insightful connections between texts, has regularly contributed to class discussion, and has moved toward asking challenging questions.

**C = Average/Competent.** This evaluation indicates a competent record in most aspects of the course. This grade conveys that the student has fairly consistently and seriously engaged with the material and has demonstrated basic comprehension of the texts. That performance has been inconsistent, perhaps strong in one area and weak in another, or uneven within a certain area. This grade may indicate that the student is doing basic literary analysis but is not asking particularly vigorous or difficult questions. It may also signal that the student is intellectually capable of stronger work but has not rigorously fulfilled the course requirements, e.g., work was late, incomplete, or unpolished.

**D=Poor/Consistent Difficulties.** This evaluation indicates a poor record in most aspects of the course. The student has minimally met the requirements but has not been consistently or seriously involved with the course. Usually the student has performed below average in discussion, written assignments, and exams. This may be because the student is not interested in the course material or is unfamiliar with the protocols of English studies and has not made the necessary efforts to find out. The student has not demonstrated mature critical writing and thinking skills, and has not posed sufficiently complex questions.

**F=Failure.** This evaluation indicates a failing record overall in the course. The student has not met the minimum requirements of the course and has not demonstrated competency in the subject matter. (A grade of "F" does not mean that a *student* is a failure, but simply that the work in this area did not meet minimum standards.)

#### **GRADING SCALE**

A+ (98-100) ; A (97-94) ; A- (93-91) ; B+ (90-88) ; B (87-84) ; B- (83-81) ; C+ (80-78) ; C (77-74); C- (73-71); D+ (70-68); D (67-64) ; D- (63-61); F (60 or below)

#### **CLASSROOM EXPECTATIONS**

**Plagiarism/Cheating.** The following definitions are from the *West Virginia University Undergraduate Catalog*. Please see the section on Academic Integrity and Dishonesty for the full definition and discussion of procedures.

**Plagiarism:** material that has been knowingly obtained or copied in whole or in part, from the work of others . . . including (but not limited to) another individual's academic composition.

**Cheating:** doing academic work for another student, or providing one's own work for another student to copy and submit as his / her own.

**Scholastic dishonesty:** involves misrepresenting as your own work any part of work done by another; submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without the written approval and consent

of all instructors concerned; depriving another student of necessary course materials; interfering with another's work.

Clear cases of plagiarism or cheating may result in an F for the course. If you have any question about how to document sources, please talk to me.

**Cell Phone Courtesy.** Please turn off cell phones and all other electronic gadgets.

**Social Justice.** I share the University's commitment to social justice and try to create a learning environment based on communication, respect, and nondiscrimination. Let me know if there is any way to create a more inclusive environment.

**Disabilities.** If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services. Also, Accessibility Services has moved to Suite 250 at 1085 Van Voorhis Rd (beside Applebee's and across from the Mountaineer Station transportation center). The phone number is 304-293-6700, and email is [access2@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:access2@mail.wvu.edu). Access the website at <http://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>.

**Emergencies or Health Crises.** If you have an emergency or serious health problem in the course of the semester, once you have the opportunity, you should contact the Office of Student Life in E. Moore Hall (293-5611). The Dean of Student Life will communicate with me. Please reserve the Dean's services for serious circumstances.

## Schedule

**\*\*\*Note: At the back of *The Making of a Poem*, you will find a glossary of poetic terms and short biographies. Take advantage of these resources throughout the semester.**

- Tues. Aug 20    Introductions  
Introduction to the anthology: glossary (289-292) and biographies (293-333)  
**A poem has a hidden meaning. T/F**  
**A poem can mean anything. T/F**  
Two volunteers to read "Yes"
- Thurs. Aug 22    Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck" (276); Close-Up on "Diving into the Wreck" (287)  
"Yes," Muriel Rukeyser (150)  
Volunteers to put Petrarchan and Shakespearean rhyme scheme on board

## **Sonnets (and one example of Blank Verse)**

- Tues. Aug 27    Verse Forms Overview (3-4); The Sonnet at a Glance, History, and Contemporary Context (55-59)  
William Shakespeare, "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day" (59)  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning, from *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (63)
- Thurs. Aug 29    William Wordsworth, "Composed upon Westminster's Bridge" (61);  
William Wordsworth, "The World Is Too Much With Us" (handout)  
Robert Frost, "Directive" and Close-Up on "Directive" (113, 119)

Tues. Sept 3 Edna St. Vincent Millay, "What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why" (64); Close-up of a Sonnet: "What my lips have kissed . . ." (71); Countee Cullen, "From the Dark Tower" (65); Claude McKay, "If We Must Die" (handout)

### **Villanelles**

Thurs. Sept 5 The Villanelle at a Glance, History, and Contemporary Context (5-8); Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art"; Close-Up of a Villanelle: "One Art" (11)

Tues. Sept 10 Dylan Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" (12); Theodore Roethke, "The Waking" (11)

Thurs. Sept 12 Hayden Carruth, "Saturday at the Border" (15); Marilyn Hacker, "Villanelle" (16)  
Volunteer to explain reference to "we aver girl"

### **Open Forms**

Tues. Sept 17 Overview of Open Forms (259-260)  
Langston Hughes, "I, Too" (266)  
Elegy Overview (167-169)  
Garrett Hongo, "The Legend" (197)

Thurs. Sept 19 No class

#### *Announcement:*

Thursday, September 19 Gary Fincke Reading 130 Colson Hall, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

Tues Sept. 24 Mark Doty, "Tiara" (199)  
Handout for midterm and Open Mic days. Review of poems  
Volunteers to explain MOVE and starlight scope

Thurs. Sept. 26 Yusef Komunyakaa, "Starlight Scope Myopia" (282)  
Lucille Clifton, "move" (279)

#### *Announcement:*

Monday, September 30 Janisse Ray Reading Gold Ballroom, WVU Mountainlair 7:30-9:00 p.m.

Tues. Oct 1 Allen Ginsberg, "America" (269)  
Sharon Olds, "The Language of the Brag" (280)

#### *Announcement:*

Wednesday, October 2 Semi-Annual Pizza Party, 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Colson 130

Thurs. Oct 3 **Midterm Exam**

Tues. Oct 8 **Open Mic—original poems or memorized poems (or both!)**  
Sign Up for Performance Days

Thurs. Oct 10 **Open Mic**

Tues. Oct 15 Fall break – no class

## **DRAMA**

Thurs. Oct 17 *Machinal* Scenes 1-4

*Announcement:*

Thursday, October 17 Beverly Donofrio Reading Robinson Reading Room, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

Tues. Oct 22 *Machinal* entire play

Thurs. Oct 24 Rehearsal: Performance Groups for *Machinal*

NOTE: Oct 25 Last day to drop classes

Tues. Oct. 29 *Machinal* Performances

*Announcement:*

Tuesday, October 29 Hugh Blumenfeld Reading 130 Colson Hall, 10:00 a.m.

Thurs. Oct. 31 Leroi Jones, *The Dutchman* Act 1

Tues. Nov 5 Leroi Jones, *The Dutchman* Act 2

Thurs. Nov 7 Rehearsal: Performance Groups for *Dutchman*

Tues. Nov. 12 *Dutchman* Performances

*Announcement:* Wednesday, November 13 "Extending a Hand: Personal, Literary, Historical, and Political Perspectives on U.S. Efforts to Aid the Developing World." Rhododendron Room, 7:30

Thurs. Nov. 14 Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul* Act One

Tues. Nov 19 Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul* Act Two

Thurs. Nov 21 Tony Kushner, *Homebody/Kabul* entire play

## **Thanksgiving Break**

Tues. Dec. 4 Rehearsal: Performance Groups for *Homebody*

Thurs. Dec. 6 *Homebody* Performances

Tues Dec 9 Preparation for final exam and final thoughts

**Final take-home exam due by Monday at noon in Colson 221**

WVU Creative Arts – Theatre Schedule [http://theatre.wvu.edu/our\\_season/2013-2014-season](http://theatre.wvu.edu/our_season/2013-2014-season)

**PERFORMANCE SIGN UP** – Please sign up for ONE performance group and make note of the dates for your rehearsal and performance.

***Machinal* Performance Groups**

Rehearsal Oct 24

Performance Oct 29

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**2nd *Machinal* Performance Group**

Rehearsal Oct 24

Performance Oct 29

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***The Dutchman* Performance Groups**

Rehearsal Nov 7

Performance Nov 12

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**2<sup>nd</sup> *The Dutchman* Performance Group**

Rehearsal Nov 7

Performance Nov 12

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***Homebody/Kabul* Performance Groups**

Rehearsal Dec 4

Performance Dec. 6

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**2<sup>nd</sup> *Homebody* Performance Group**

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