

## ENGLISH 313: POETRY WORKSHOP

Spring 2013

Tuesday/Thursday 1:00-2:15 p.m.

G10 Colson Hall

**Mary Ann Samyn**

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\*email is always best

Office hours: TR 11:15 a.m.-12:45 p.m.

### Course Description

Enrolling in this class means that you have successfully completed English 213 (introductory poetry workshop) and are here now to hone your craft as a poet. To do so, we will learn to read as writers; that is, we will read with an eye toward identifying the inner workings/architecture/music/image patterns/risks of a poem. This class assumes that you've done a fair amount of reading and writing already and that you hunger for more. English 313 should simultaneously satisfy that hunger and fuel it.

### Texts

*American Alphabets: 25 Contemporary Poets*. Ed. David Walker. Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College P, 2006.

Pinsky, Robert. *The Sounds of Poetry*. New York: Farrar, 1998.

### Course Requirements

Because critical thinking and creative writing go hand in hand, this class will require you to respond, via critical responses and via imitations, to a variety of contemporary poets. You will also write other poems, respond to the work of your peers, and take an active role in class discussions and activities. You will also take one exam. The final project will draw on all of this work and reflect your best efforts as a poet.

Your final grade will be reflection of all your work (graded and not), your readiness for class, your participation, and your general attitude. As has often been remarked, the main reason to take a writing workshop is to save some time. That is, if you turn yourself over the demands/structure/community of the class (both your peers and your teacher), you just might learn a thing or two more quickly than if you did things on your own. That'll be our aim here, and to that end, you'll need to be willing to read, write, revise, and give and receive honest/constructive criticism. A bit of kindness and a positive attitude might come in handy too.

### Attendance

I take attendance seriously; so should you. This class is, I assume, something you're choosing to take, so attendance shouldn't really be an issue. In case it is, however, here's the policy: you're allowed (but not entitled!) to three absences. Beyond that, your final grade will go down 1/3 for each absence. Once you reach six absences, you will fail the course no matter how "well" you are doing. Excessive tardiness (as defined by me) and lack of participation (again, as defined by me) will also result in a lowered final grade. If you are

absent for some unavoidable reason, it's your responsibility to contact me and/ or a classmate and keep up with all assignments.

### **Attendance at Department-sponsored Readings**

Although attendance at readings is not required, I certainly encourage you to come whenever possible, and, moreover, I assume you'll want to attend and I look forward to seeing you there.

#### **Spring 2013 Readings**

Monday, January 28: Mark Brazaitis and Amanda Cobb, 7:30 p.m.  
Gold Ballroom

Tuesday, February 12, Appalachian Prison Book Project benefit reading,  
w/ Jim Harms, Katie Fallon, Tony Christini & more, 7:30 p.m., 130 Colson Hall

Tuesday, February 26: Kevin Oderman & Jessie Van Eerden, 7:30 p.m.,  
Robinson Reading Room

Tuesday, March 5: Valerie Boyd, 7:30 p.m., Robinson Reading Room

Wednesday, March 20: Mary Ann Samyn, 7:30 p.m., 130 Colson Hall

Thursday, April 18: Calliope 7:30 p.m., 130 Colson Hall

Thursday, April 18: ENGL 418 Capstone, 11:30 a.m., 130 Colson Hall

Thursday, April 25: Graduating MFAs, 7:30 p.m., Rhododendron Room

### **Grading**

This is a rigorous course. An advanced course. My aim is to give you many ways to learn the craft of poetry: through reading and writing, creative critical thinking and critical creative expression.

It should go without saying that high-level work is always on time, fully proofread, sophisticated in thought and careful in execution. Some "talented writers" can and do produce very sloppy work; conversely, some "less talented writers" can and do excel because they take care with assignments.

I will be grading prose writing using percentages: 93-100% for A; 90-92% for A-; 87-89% for B+; 83-86% for B; 80-82% for B-; 77-79% for C+; 73-76% for C; 70-72% for C-; 67-69% for D+; 60-66% for D; 0-59% for F.

Within each grade, the basic characteristics are as follows:

**An "A" level critical response** would be a full-page, single-spaced; would address the prompt fully and with examples; would quote and cite those examples appropriately; would provide an answer that is clearly the result of sustained interaction with the text and sophisticated reflection upon it. It would also be enjoyable and interesting to read.

**“B” (85-92) level work** would probably demonstrate less insight/sophistication and/or might make errors in poem analysis or citation.

**“C” level work** would merely go through the motions, answering the question in minimal and likely more obvious ways. There would probably be various errors in terms of grammar or citations. There may be few examples and/or the question might not be fully answered.

**“D” level work** would show sub-par effort in several of the mentioned categories.

**Poems** (including the imitations) will be not be graded, but they are considered assignments with definite due dates. Late poems are neither accepted nor workshopped. Imitations need to be just that: imitations. We’ll discuss what this means during the first week of class. In order to be successful in this class, your work does need to show improvement. That means listening to the suggestions from workshop and resisting the impulse to stay with what’s comfortable.

The **exam** will require you to use terminology correctly and analyze poems that we have not discussed extensively in class. You may also be asked to do some quick creative writing.

The **final project**, to be announced at a later date, will require that you show increasing sophistication as a writer and reader.

Your **final grade** will, of course, be the composite of all these assignments along with your participation, general readiness for class, and attitude.

If you have any questions about the grading policies or any other aspect of this course, I encourage you to speak with me.

*I consider this course to be a joy—as should you. If it sounds otherwise, you may need to ask yourself what you were expecting.*

### **Social Justice**

WVU is committed to social justice, as am I. That means you can expect a learning environment that is constructive, based on mutual respect and non-discrimination. If you have any questions, please let me know.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism, as you no doubt know, is passing off someone else’s work as your own. Please don’t do this; it will only complicate my life and quite possibly change the trajectory of yours in very serious ways.

### **Carruth Center**

If you ever find yourself overwhelmed with work or emotions or are just in general need of assistance, I urge you to get help at WVU’s Carruth Center: 293-4431. Figuring out how to write is good; figuring out how to live is better, and crucial.

**Schedule** (Please note: changes can and will occur. It is your responsibility to keep in touch with me if you are absent and to complete all assignments on time.)

**Week 1**

- Tues/Jan 15** Course intro.  
For Thursday: read in *American Alphabets* and come to class with a few favorites to discuss with the rest of the class
- Thurs/Jan 17** Discuss first reading of *American Alphabets*  
How do poems make meaning?  
For Tuesday: **Essay #1: choose one poem and discuss in one carefully written single-spaced page how that poem makes meaning: what are its major craft strategies?**

**Week 2**

- Tues/Jan 22** **Essay #1 due.** Discuss.  
Discuss imitation.  
For Thursday: **Poem #1**
- Thurs/Jan 24** **Poem #1 due with copies**  
Begin workshop  
For next Tuesday: finish commenting on all poems.

**Week 3**

- Tues/Jan 29** Workshop  
For Thursday: read *AA*, concentrating on poems that are more narrative in nature.
- Thurs/Jan 31** Finish workshop  
How does narrative work in poetry?  
For Tuesday: **Essay #2: discuss one poem whose means and aims are primarily narrative. One page, single-spaced.**

**Week 4**

- Tues/Feb 5** **Essay #2 due**  
Preparing to write a narrative poem  
For Thursday: **Poem #2**
- Thurs/Feb 7** **Poem #2 due with copies**  
Begin workshop  
For next Tuesday: finish commenting on all poems.

**Week 5**

- Tues/Feb 12** Workshop  
For Thursday: read *AA*, concentrating on poems that are more lyric in nature
- Thurs/Feb 14** Finish workshop  
What do we mean by lyricism in poetry?  
For Tuesday: **Essay #3: discuss one poem whose means and aims are more at the lyric end of the spectrum. One page, single-spaced.**

**Week 6**

- Tues/Feb 19** **Essay #3 due**  
Preparing to write a lyric poem  
For Thursday: **Poem #3**
- Thurs/Feb 21** **Poem #3 due with copies**  
Begin workshop  
For next Tuesday: finish commenting on all poems.

**Week 7**

- Tues/Feb 26** Workshop  
For Thursday: begin reading Pinsky's *The Sounds of Poetry*
- Thurs/Feb 28** Finish workshop  
Discuss *The Sounds of Poetry*  
For next Tuesday: finish reading  
For next Tuesday: find a few poems in *AA* that interest you in terms of sound and line

**Week 8**

- Tues/Mar 5** Further discussion of *The Sounds of Poetry*  
How to write a sound and line analysis  
For next Tuesday: **draft of sound and line analysis for small group workshop**
- Thurs/Mar 7** No class: I'll be at AWP

**Week 9**

- Tues/Mar 12** **Sound & Line analysis DRAFT due with copies**  
For Thursday: **Sound & Line due**
- Thurs/Mar 14** **Sound & Line analysis FINAL VERSION due**

For next Tuesday: poem #4: a poem that pays particularly astute attention to sound and line

**Week 10**

**Tues/Mar 19**      **Poem #4 due**  
Begin workshop  
For Thursday: finish commenting on all poems

**Thurs/Mar 21**      Workshop

**Spring Break**

**Week 11**

**Tues/Apr 2**      Finish workshop  
Exam prep  
For Thursday: **Exam**

**Thurs/Apr 4**      **Exam**  
For Tuesday: read AA, concentrating on “difficult” poems

**Week 12**

**Tues/Apr 9**      What makes poems “difficult”?  
For Thursday: **Essay #5: discuss a difficult-for-you poem. One page, single-spaced.**

**Thurs/Apr 11**      **Essay #5 due**  
Exploring “difficulty” in your own work  
For Thursday: **Poem #5, private assignment**

**Week 13**

**Tues/Apr 16**      **Poem #5 due with copies**  
Begin workshop  
For Tuesday: finish commenting on all poems

**Thurs/Apr 18**      Workshop  
For next Tuesday: **Poem #6**

**Week 14**

**Tues/Apr 23** Workshop continued for Poem #5, if needed  
**Poem #6 due**  
Begin workshop  
For Thursday: finish commenting on all poems

**Thurs/Apr 25** Workshop  
Discuss Final Project

**Week 15**

**Tues/Apr 30** Finish workshop  
Work on Final Project

**Thurs/May 2** **Final Project Due**

**Questions? Email me at any time: [maryann.samyn@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:maryann.samyn@mail.wvu.edu)**