

# English 313

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Mary Ann Samyn, English 313, Spring 2008

**English 313: Spring 2008**

Wednesdays, 4:00-6:50 p.m.

111 Clark Hall

**Mary Ann Samyn**

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Office hours: W 2-4 p.m. and by appt.

## Course Description

In this workshop, I assume that you have successfully completed English 213 (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 (in order of appearance)

McCallum, Shara. *Song of Thieves*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2003.

Beatty, Jan. *Boneshaker*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2002

McCombs, Davis. *Dismal Rock*. Dorset, VT: Tupelo, 2007.

Kasischke, Laura. *Lilies Without*. Keene, NY: Ausable, 2007.

Hummell, Austin. *Poppy*. Washington, DC: Del Sol Press, 2004.

Olsen, William. *Avenue of Vanishing*. Evanston, IL: TriQuarterly, 2007.

Brock-Broido, Lucie. *Trouble in Mind*. New York: Knopf, 2005.

## Course Requirements

Because critical thinking and creative writing go hand in hand, this class will require you to respond, via critical responses/explications 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.

Since we only meet once a week, our time together and your time working independently need to be as productive as possible and 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 to 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 two absences (remember: we only meet once a week!). Beyond that, your final grade will go down 1/3 for each absence. Once you reach five absences (1/3 of the semester), 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.

### **Grading**

This is a rigorous course. An advanced course. My aim is to give you many chances/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.

An "A" level critical response would be a full-page, single-spaced; would answer the question 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" 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, given approximately 2/3 of the way through the semester, 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, you can talk with me... and I urge you to find professional help as well, especially 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: January 16**

- Course introduction
- Discuss critical responses and imitations
- For next week: read Shara McCallum and write a response (see below for instructions).  
Also, do an imitation of McCallum to be distributed via email by Tuesday, January 22, by noon.

### **Week 2: January 23**

- Shara McCallum response due in class: In her blurb for the book, Carol Frost says "Simplicity isn't easy and honesty is harder..." Using a particular poem (or poems) as examples, discuss how McCallum walks the line between simplicity and simplistic. Also discuss what makes her work feel "honest," remembering, of course, that we cannot assume total (or really any) autobiographical element. One-page, single-spaced, fully proofread, with examples cited with line numbers. Questions? Ask me.
- **This time only: we'll workshop these responses, so bring enough copies for the whole class.**
- For next week: the Shara McCallum imitation

*Thursday, January 24: Lynn Emanuel reading, 7:30, Robinson Reading Room*

### **Week 3: January 30**

- Shara McCallum imitation due via email by noon on Tuesday, Jan. 29
- For Feb. 6: Jan Beatty

#### **Week 4: February 6**

- Jan Beatty response due in class: Beatty's poems take many different shapes on the page, have many different kinds of lines. Choose one poem and discuss how its line and use of the page are central to how it makes meaning.
- Jan Beatty imitation due via email by noon, Feb. 5
- For next week: Davis McCombs

*Monday, February 11: Love & Other Dislocations reading by WVU faculty, 7:30, Blue Moose*

#### **Week 5: February 13**

- Davis McCombs response due in class: In her blurb for the book, poet Aleda Shirley suggests that McCombs' work, in being "very specific" to place, nonetheless manages to "elucidate[s] the universal." Which particular poems/strategies support this statement?
- Davis McCombs imitation due via email by noon, Feb. 12
- For next week: poem #1 due via email by noon, Feb. 19

#### **Week 6: February 20**

- Poem #1 workshop
- For next week: Laura Kasischke

#### **Week 7: February 27**

- Laura Kasischke response due in class: Though books can move among many tonal registers, there are, usually, a few notes struck repeatedly. Describe Kasischke's tone in this book. Mention at least three poems where this particular tone is advanced and discuss how the poet does so.
- Laura Kasischke imitation due via email by noon, Feb. 26
- For next week: Austin Hummell

#### **Week 8: March 5**

- Austin Hummell response due in class: Describe the risks of Hummell's poems.
- Austin Hummell imitation due via email by noon, March 4
- For next week: William Olsen

### **Week 9: March 12**

- William Olsen response due in class: Olsen's work has been described as "thoughtful," "vehement," "gritty," "intellectual," "heartbreaking," "meditative," "humane." These descriptors aren't necessarily mutually exclusive, but they do lend themselves to interesting tensions. Reference a particular poem and lines/moves within that poem as you discuss how three of these adjectives are apt descriptors of it and how the various moods/gestures/etc. of the poem work to create the whole.
- William Olsen imitation due via email by noon, March 11
- Review for exam

*Thursday, March 13: Gail Adams reading, 7:30, Gold Ballroom Friday, March 14: Writing Contest deadline*

### **Week 10: March 19**

- Exam: you'll need a blue book (or two)
- For after the break: Lucie Brock-Broido

### **Spring Break**

### **Week 11: April 2**

- Lucie Brock-Broido response due in class: Brock-Broido is unlike any other poet we've read this semester. Or is she? Discuss both the unfamiliar and familiar aspects of her work.
- Lucie Brock-Broido imitation due via email by noon, April 1
- For next week: poem #2 due by noon, April 8

### **Week 12: April 9**

- Poem #2 workshop
- For next week: poem #3 due by noon, April 15

**Week 13: April 16**

- Poem #3 workshop
- Final project assigned
- Crafting the portfolio preface
- Bring a draft of the preface for next class

**Week 14: April 23**

- Revision/finishing up workshop
- Preface workshop

*Wednesday, April 23: English department awards luncheon, 11:30, Blue Ballroom Thursday, April 24: Calliope reading, 7:30, Shenandoah Room*

**Week 15: April 30**

- Final Portfolio due
- Class reading, etc.

*Thursday, May 1: MFA reading, 7:30, Gold Ballroom*