

English 131
Poetry & Drama

Hodges 248
T-TH 11:30-12:45

Professor Kevin Oderman
Colson 140
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Ramazani et al, *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, Vol. 1
David Lindsay-Abaire, *Rabbit Hole*
August Wilson, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*
David Ives, *Venus in Fur*

Aim: The goal of this course is to increase your knowledge of, and appreciation for, contemporary poetry and drama. In short, I'd like to help you become readers. And I'd like you to be tempted to attend plays here at WVU and elsewhere. While the center of this course will be your private work with the poems and plays, reading and rereading, class discussion will give you the opportunity to test your observations against other interpretations. Additionally, you'll be doing some writing for this class and responding to quizzes. You're not going to "get" every poem or play, nor all there is to get about any one of them, but you are going to get better at reading poetry and drama, and that's going to help you understand movies and stories, even song lyrics; it's all interpretation. Every one of you should be trying to swing open the door of our culture as wide as you can. If not in college, when?

Paper: You will be asked to write one paper for this course, a three or four page explication. You can write on a single poem, compare two poems by different authors, or write about some *aspect* of one of the plays (the function of a minor character, for instance). While I do not mean to dictate the paper you write, please discuss your idea with me before you get too far along. If it interests you and it's workable, then that will be fine. This is not a research paper, but if you insist on reading criticism you must document any borrowings using the MLA format. In any case, your papers should have a clear internal logic. I will expect you to develop your interpretations while writing a graceful essay. Do not fall back on a preview – view – review structure, because in a three to four page paper, this structure is not graceful. This paper is due in class on April 25th. No paper will be accepted after noon on Monday of finals week.

Exams: There will be multiple-choice quizzes as indicated on the calendar. To do well on these quizzes, you will need to have read all the assignments carefully and then reviewed them fully. Each quiz will count equally toward your grade. I will, however, delete your lowest quiz grade. (Should you miss a quiz, you can take it *before class* on the following class day but not thereafter.)

Assignments: Reading assignments are posted on the calendar. For poetry, read the poems starting on the page number. If there is more than one poem starting on a page, #a means read the first poem, #b means the second poem. N.B.: In the unlikely event that a class should be cancelled, we will move to the next day's assignment.

Class: This class will have a discussion format. Generally, the whole class will work together, but we might break into smaller groups on occasion. You are expected to be prepared to participate at all times. You will also be required to read aloud for a grade (poems and characters in table readings of scenes from the plays).

Grades: Everything counts: The quizzes (33 1/3%), class participation/reading aloud (33 1/3%), the paper (33 1/3%).

RE your class participation grade: regular attendance with the assignment always read translates into a B- for class participation. Better than that will get you a better grade, worse a worse grade. I'll shade this grade in light of how well you read aloud.

Attendance: If you miss more than two classes, it's a problem. You're not taking the course if you're not there. I will provide extra credit opportunities for you to make up for one or two absences, but I take attendance seriously. If you're not a person who makes it to class, it will be extremely difficult for you to do well in this course. If you must arrive late for class, it is up to you to sign the roll sheet at the end of the hour; otherwise, you will count as absent. If you should leave class early without prior approval, I will strike your name from the attendance sheet. Deductions for absences: 0-2 absences, no penalty; 3-4 absences, .3 deduction from final grade; 5-6 absences, .6 deduction; 7-8 absences, 1.2 deduction; 9-10 absences, 2.0 deduction; 11-12, 3.0 deduction. More than 12, automatic F. I will consider medical absences *only if* they cause you to miss more than two classes.

Please turn off and stow all electronic devices before class begins: cellphones, MP3 players, laptops. Off means off on cellphones, not vibrate. If you leave class to take a call without prior approval, you will be counted as absent for the day. If you read texts or text yourself in class, you will be asked to leave and counted as absent.

This course fulfills GEC Objectives 5 and 7: Objective 5, Artistic Expression: Apply methods and principles of critical inquiry to the analysis of literary or artistic expression. Objective 7, American Culture: Develop knowledge critical to an understanding of the issues that shape the culture of the United States in all its diversity.

Social Justice. West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans status, religion, sexual orientation, color or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

Special needs. 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 Disability Services (293-6700).