

ENG 131: Poetry and Drama (Fall 2012)

Katy Ryan, Associate Professor of English

kohearnr@mail.wvu.edu; 293.9729

Colson 221

Office Hours: Tues & Thurs 1:00-2:00 and by appointment

Course Description

In this introductory English course, we will study two literary genres that share roots in public 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. In the poetry section, we will focus on villanelles, sonnets, elegies, and open forms. In the drama section, we will study 20-century American examples of workers' theatre, tragedy, and comedy. We will concentrate on formal elements as well as meaning and historical context. Students will have the opportunity to compose original poems and to collaborate on an in-class performance.

Course Goals

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
- compose logical and well-supported analytical responses to literature
- contribute with confidence to class discussion
- work creatively and productively with others

Required Texts

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

Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty*

August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

Josephina López, *Real Women Have Curves*

Requirements (explained in full below)

- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| A. Four Reader Responses | 20 points |
| B. Two Exams | 60 points |
| C. Participation | 20 points |

A) Four Reader Responses

Students will write four 500-word, single-spaced responses to the poems and plays. The due dates for these responses are on the syllabus. Each time you turn in a response, please turn in your previous **graded** responses. This enables me to track your progress and to identify areas to work on in your writing. **Please staple your responses.**

I will return to you ungraded any responses that do not meet these requirements. Late responses will not be accepted unless there is a documented emergency.

This mini-essay should begin with an interpretive question that you have about the material. That is, it should NOT be a summary of a poem or a play. Given the brevity of these responses, you should choose one scene, one character, one image, or one idea to analyze closely, rather than attempting to explicate an entire poem or play. **Be sure to ground your interpretation in the language of the literary text by quoting directly from the play or poem.** Put the page number in parenthesis at the end of your sentence. (See handout on how to quote literary texts.)

These responses will help you to contribute to class discussion, to develop your writing skills, and to prepare for exams.

B) Two Exams

There will be two exams: an in-class midterm and a take-home exam due during finals week. The midterm exam will consist of identification, brief answers to technical, conceptual, and/or historical materials covered in class, and paragraph responses to analytical and comparative questions. The take-home exam will give you a chance to respond to essay questions about the plays.

C) Attendance, Participation, and Performance

My attendance policy is simple: If you miss more than three classes, you will fail the class (unless there is a documented emergency. See policies below.)

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 written 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.

In order to receive an A for participation, you must have a stellar attendance record, contribute to class discussion regularly and substantially—which means at least once a week—and be available for your group performance rehearsals.

Performance will not be supplemental to your learning in this class but integral to it. Everyone will be in a performance group that will create an interpretive “take” on 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

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 (61-70) ; 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 and respect. Let me know if there is any way to create a more inclusive environment that is free of discrimination based on race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin.

Disabilities. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation, please let me know. You may also want to make arrangements with Disability Services (293-6700).

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 21 Introductions
The Anthology: glossary (289-292) and biographies (293-333)
"We Real Cool," Gwendolyn Brooks (94)
Close-Up on "We Real Cool" (99)

Thurs. Aug 23 Introductory Statement to *The Making of a Poem* (xiii-xvi) and "Poetic Form" by Eaven Boland (xxv-xxix); Adrienne Rich, "Diving into the Wreck" (276); Close-Up on "Diving into the Wreck" (287)
"Yes," Muriel Rukeyser (150)

Sonnets

Tues. Aug 28 Handout on writing responses
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 30 William Wordsworth, "Composed upon Westminster's Bridge" (61);
William Wordsworth, "The World Is Too Much With Us" (handout)

Tues. Sept 4 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); e.e. cummings, from "*Tulips and Chimneys*" (66)

Villanelles

Thurs. Sept 6 The Villanelle at a Glance, History, and Contemporary Context (5-8); Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art"; Close-Up of a Villanelle: "One Art" (11)
First Reader Response: One-page analysis of one sonnet due

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

Thurs. Sept 13 Hayden Carruth, "Saturday at the Border" (15); Marilyn Hacker, "Villanelle" (16)

Elegies

Tues. Sept 18 Overview of Shaping Forms (165-66); Elegy Overview (167-169)
Claude McKay, "Tropics in New York" (148)
Handout for midterm and Open Mic days

Thurs. Sept 20 Garrett Hongo, "The Legend" (197); Mark Doty, "Tiara" (199)

Open Forms

Tues Sept. 25 Langston Hughes, "I, Too" (266); Lucille Clifton, "move" (279); Yusef Komunyakaa, "Starlight Scope Myopia" (282)
Second Reader Response: One-page analysis of one villanelle or elegy due

Thurs. Sept. 27 Allen Ginsberg, "America" (269)

Tues. Oct 2 Sharon Olds, "The Language of the Brag" (280)

Thurs. Oct 4 **Midterm Exam**

Tues. Oct 9 **Open Mic—original poems or memorized poems (or both!)**

Thurs. Oct 11 **Open Mic**

Drama

Tues. Oct 16 Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (entire play)

Thurs. Oct 18 *Waiting for Lefty*

Tues. Oct 23 Rehearsal: Performance Group #1

Thurs. Oct 25 *Waiting for Lefty*
Performance Group #1

Oct 26—last day to drop classes

Tues. Oct. 30 August Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* Act One

Thurs. Nov 1 *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* Act Two
Third Reader Response due to *Ma Rainey* or *Lefty*

Tues. Nov 6 NO CLASS

Thurs. Nov 8 Rehearsal: Performance Group #2

Tues. Nov. 13 *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*
Performance Group #2

Thurs. Nov. 15 *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

THANKSGIVING

Tues. Nov 27 Josefina López, *Real Women Have Curves* (entire play)

Thurs. Nov 29 *Real Women Have Curves*
Fourth Reader Response due to *Real Women*

Tues. Dec. 4 *Real Women Have Curves*
Rehearsal: Performance Group #3

Thurs. Dec. 6 *Real Women Have Curves*
Performance Group #3

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

WVU Creative Arts – Fall Theatre Schedule

[The Shape of Things](#) by Neil LaBute in [Gladys G. Davis Theatre](#), WVU Creative Arts Center
September 28 – October 7, 2012

[Lend Me a Tenor](#) by Ken Ludwig in [Metropolitan Theatre](#), 369 High Street
October 25-28, 2012

[Blood Wedding](#) by Federico Garcia Lorca in [Gladys G. Davis Theatre](#), WVU Creative Arts Center
November 15 – December 2, 2012

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

Waiting for Lefty Performance Group 1A
Rehearsal Oct 23
Performance Oct 25

2nd *Waiting for Lefty* Group Performance Group 1B

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom Performance Group 2A
Rehearsal Nov 8
Performance Nov 13

Ma Rainey Group Performance Group 2B

Real Women Have Curves Performance Group #3

Rehearsal Nov. 29

Performance Dec. 4
