

Instructor: Silverman
ENGL 2840.401/ COML 2840
FBH 138

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T Th 3:30-5pm
spring 2024
office hours by appointment, FBH 235

Groundbreaking Poets and Traditional Forms

Overview: This class will explore ancient traditional forms of poetry through what might be their most vibrant era: now. As we study and write in these forms, you will become fluent in metrical patterns (from iambs to amphibrachs) alongside the provenance and practice of traditions from the sestina to the sonnet, the ghazal to the pantoum. Through close reading of some fantastic contemporary poetry, we'll explore how the confines of prosody have produced some of the most liberated—and liberating—poems in print today.

In reading poems, we will read about history: Patricia Smith's sestina about Hurricane Katrina, Shirley Geok-Lin Lim's pantoum on China's One Child policy, and Agha Shahid Ali's ghazal about Kashmir's floating post office. . . these and other examples by poets who are reinventing canonical forms.

Structure: The class will be split between critical discussion and creative writing workshop. On discussion days, we'll talk about poems we've read. On workshop days, you'll bring in your own poems in the forms we've studied, and we'll talk as a group about how they work. For the poems you write, you'll be graded only by effort.

REQUIRED READING:

Almost all required readings will be available on Canvas. You won't need to purchase any books for the course, but I ask that you print out the assigned poems and bring them to class. Please don't bring your computer and don't plan to work from the screen. You are welcome to use the English Department's printer, but plan to do so in advance and not minutes before class begins.

You will never have more than five poems to read for a class, and we won't usually have time to discuss all five in a class period. Nonetheless, they'll inform our understanding of a form. If you feel overwhelmed by reading assignments, let me know and I will adjust them.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. At least three drafts of each poem

Every 2-3 weeks, you will be asked to write a poem in the form we are studying. We'll discuss these in class, following a structure outlined on a "workshop etiquette" I'll share on canvas.

Work on your poems in the days and weeks leading up to workshop—play with ideas, images, sound, etc. Email copies of the poem to everyone in class, students and professor, before 5pm on the night prior to workshop. Each of us will print the poem and read it carefully before class, writing comments in the margin.

You will revise each of the poems you write—first in the days after we discuss it, while the conversation is fresh in your mind, and again in the weeks before you turn in your final portfolio at the end of the semester. Your final portfolio should include at least two previous drafts of each poem, but I welcome others, if you have more. I am always available to discuss revisions.

2. Participation

Please come to class prepared to discuss the reading. If there's an unfamiliar reference, or a word you don't know, look it up.

Grade breakdown:

Poems (effort) 15%

Revision (effort) 15%

Participation (reading preparation, attendance, discussion): 20%

Reading response 1: 10%

Reading response 2: 10%

Quiz 15%

Final project 15%

Academic Integrity

You are part of the larger scholarly community and you are responsible for upholding its standards in your work. A discussion of the Code of Academic Integrity can be found at:

<http://www.vpul.upenn.edu/osl/acadint.html>

You will all be assumed to have read and understood this Code. Violations will be treated seriously. Please contact me before turning in work if you are in doubt about any issue related to academic integrity.

Syllabus

Everything listed under a date is due for that date. Give yourself time with the assigned poems. Reread them, quietly and aloud. Make notes in margins.

Deadlines, Attendance, Flexibility

If you miss a class period, please contact a classmate to learn what you missed. If you are still confused *after* getting their notes, please email me.

If you miss more than one consecutive class, you should write a paragraph on the rules of the form we are currently studying, and how they manifest in a few poems from a missed reading assignment.

Lateness and absences that are not excused will be marked and count toward your class participation grade.

If you are confused about material (such as meter!), please contact me.

Weekly Schedule

Thu 1/18

Introduction, syllabus

(poems: Larkin; FW Harper; prose: *blank verse at a glance*)

Tue 1/23 meter

(poems: Cullen; Bishop; Brooks; Dubrow; prose: Hall, optional: Fussell)

Thu 1/25 meter

(poems: Wheatley Peters; Jordan; prose: Jordan)

Tue 1/30 meter

(poems: Van Clief-Stefanon; Nelson)

Tue 2/6 **workshop**

Thu 2/8 sonnets

(poems: 2 by Trethewey; 3 by Jericho Brown; prose: Youn, *sonnet at a glance*)

Tue 2/13 sonnets

(poems: 2 by Brooks, Betts; Hayden; prose: Betts)

Thu 2/15 sonnets

(poems: 2 by Hayes, Ewing, Marshall)

Tue 2/20 **workshop**

Thu 2/22 villanelles

(poems: Roethke; LeGuin; Ali; Merrill; prose: *villanelle at a glance*; Kumin)

Tue 2/27 villanelles

(Bishop (all drafts); Alexander; Plath; Nelson; prose: Bishop drafts)

Thu 2/29 villanelles

(poems: Hayes; Fort; 2 by Van Clief-Stefanon; Seibles)

Tue 3/5 *spring break*

Thu 3/7 *spring break*

Tue 3/12 workshop

Thu 3/14: sestina

(poems: 2 by Bishop; Murillo; Ali; prose: *sestina at a glance*)

Tue 3/19 sestina

(poems: Hecht; Alexie; Doshi; May)

Thu 3/21 sestina

(Mullen; 2 by Hayes; Smith)

Tue 3/26 reading replacement

Thu 3/28 reading replacement

Mon 4/1 HARRYETTE MULLEN READING AT KWH, 6:30 PM

rsvp required: whfellow@writing.upenn.edu

Tue 4/2 workshop

HARRYETTE MULLEN CONVERSATION AT KWH, 10AM

rsvp required: whfellow@writing.upenn.edu

Thu 4/4 ghazal

(Betts; Brown; Trethewey; Ali; prose: Ali)

Tue 4/9 ghazal

(Smith; Lamar Charleston; Kapur; Komenyakaa; Diaz)

REQUIRED: Mon 4/1 REGINALD DWAYNE BETTS READING AT KWH, 5:30 PM

rsvp required: whfellow@writing.upenn.edu

Thu 4/11 workshop

Tue 4/16 pantoums

(poems: Geok Lin-Lim; Diaz; 2 poems by Trethewey, prose: *pantoum at a glance*, Gotera)

Thu 4/18 pantoums

(poems: Gambito; Shockley; 2 by Hummel, Wong)

Tue 4/23 workshop

Thu 4/25 golden shovel

(poems: Brooks; Smith, Beasley; Hayes; prose: Hayes, Smith)

Mon 4/29 MAGGIE NELSON READING AT KWH, 10AM

rsvp required: whfellow@writing.upenn.edu

Tue 4/30 bop and duplex

(Jericho Brown; Afaa Weaver; Van Clief-Stefanon)

MAGGIE NELSON CONVERSATION AT KWH, 10AM

rsvp required: whfellow@writing.upenn.edu

Thu 5/2 **workshop**

final portfolios due on Thursday 5/9

final paper due on Tuesday 5/14: 4 pages