

Intermediate Poetry Workshop

Hartwick College
ENGL 312-67 (4 Credits)
Fall 2019

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MW 1:25 – 3:25 pm, Clark Hall 248
Office Hours: MW 3:30 – 4:30 pm
and by appointment

“If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way.”

—Emily Dickinson, quoted in a letter by Thomas Wentworth Higginson

Required Texts

Diaz, Natalie. *When My Brother Was an Aztec*. Copper Canyon, 2012.
Glück, Louise. *The Wild Iris*. Ecco, 1992.
Lerner, Ben. *The Lichtenberg Figures*. Copper Canyon, 2004.
Nelson, Maggie. *Bluets*. Wave, 2009.
Russel, Lauren. *What’s Hanging on the Hush*. Ahsahta, 2017.
Siken, Richard. *War of the Foxes*. Copper Canyon, 2015.
Vuong, Ocean. *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*. Copper Canyon, 2016.
Zapruder, Matthew. *Why Poetry*. Ecco, 2017.

Recommended Materials

I recommend acquiring a folder dedicated exclusively to this course. Students may also want to set aside roughly ten dollars for printing costs if they go beyond their allotted quota.

Prerequisites

The successful completion of ENGL 213 (Introduction to Creative Writing) is a prerequisite.

Catalog Description

Practice in the writing of poetry; exercises in form. Readings in prosody, poetics, and contemporary poetry. Does not count as a literature course. (EL)

Course Description and Purpose

Welcome to Hartwick’s Intermediate Poetry Workshop. In this course, you will read the work of published poets, compose poems of your own, and study critical writing about poetry. Building upon work you have already done in Introduction to Creative Writing, the primary focus of this class will be honing your *craft* in a workshop setting by engaging with the “nuts and bolts” of writing, the techniques, choices, and strategies that will allow you to continue to explore your poetic voice. We will cover a wide range of contemporary poetry in order to learn about and explore the formal elements necessary for successful poetic composition. Along with paying careful attention to the effective use of image, metaphor, line-breaks, sound, shape, and voice in poems, we will also be particularly interested in working within both established and invented

forms. This focus on *form* will give us a better understanding of the various writers we will be reading and help workshop participants to explore the power and necessity of *limitation* in their own work.

Further, we will be reading and discussing a wide range of poets. It is essential for a writer to develop ways of thinking and talking critically about the work of others and to be aware of the literary, cultural, economic, social, and political milieu in which they reside, so you should be prepared to read a substantial amount of poetry concerned with contemporary issues. We will carefully engage with the work of such renowned poets as Natalie Diaz, Louise Glück, Ben Lerner, Maggie Nelson, Lauren Russell, Richard Siken, Ocean Vuong, and Matthew Zapruder. Encountering the work of these poets will prepare you to think about broad issues within twenty-first century poetics, analyze and assess other students' writing, and evaluate your own compositions. These writers will also invite us to think about the role and function of poetry at the present time. It will probably come as no surprise if I suggest to you that to be alive in 2019 is to exist in a time of crisis. Given the political, economic, and social realities of our era, many are questioning the relevance and value of the arts and humanities (to say nothing of poetry!). Against much of the doom and gloom that dominates so much of today's discourse, one of the contentions of this class is that poetry remains an essential human activity for not only *responding* to the various crises of contemporaneity, but for *thinking, imagining, building, and creating* a different, better world. So I am eager to see what we can imagine and create together.

How This Course Works

The main concern of this class is *your* writing, and because of that, though we will be reading and critically writing about the work of established poets, you will be asked to bring in a substantial amount of your own work: roughly a poem every week. Sometimes students will compose poems in response to specific assignments and sometimes they will have the freedom to write whatever they like.

The primary way we will focus on your writing will be during class in a writing workshop. The first half of most classes will be devoted to discussing the assigned reading and the second half to conversations about student writing. It is rare for me to deviate from a course calendar, so come ready to discuss the various texts to be covered or workshopped each day.

Workshops will be run in a traditional fashion. Each student will have around 20–25 minutes devoted to their work by the class a number of times during the semester. Within the next two weeks, I will hand out a workshop schedule and assign a primary reader for each student. The primary reader will be principally responsible for responding to their assigned writer's work in writing and at the beginning of the workshop. (See "Primary Reader Assignment.") Each student will also be expected to write brief comments on their peers' work.

In workshops, the writer and their primary reader will read the work aloud, followed by a group discussion about the piece. During workshop, the student whose work we are discussing will remain silent until the end, at which time they will be able to ask questions (note: not provide explanations). Though we will be forthright in the criticism of our peers' work, all members of the workshop should strive to make their criticism *generous* and *constructive*. Comments during workshop should aspire not only to improve the work but also to better situate it within a student's larger project as a writer. Rather than nitpicking about small issues, I will always be more interested in the bigger ideas at stake and the specific matters of craft and form in a student's writing, so please be aware of this and always be respectful of your peers.

Learning Outcomes

In addition to the basic skills of literary and poetic analysis, students in this course will: 1) learn to identify conventional creative writing techniques; 2) learn to read as writers and use this knowledge to more successfully write and discuss poetry; and 3) learn to produce poems that demonstrate an understanding of literary and formal conventions while also articulating a personal artistic vision.

Other Course Requirements and Assignments

Texts—As this course is structured around the knowledge that becoming a strong, careful reader of poetry is essential for developing as a poet, students will be required to have read and be prepared to discuss the assigned texts for each class meeting, including the writing of your peers. This also entails that students bring the texts to class, whether the book, *printouts* of the .pdfs from D2L, or copies of your peers' work. Additional readings for the course (see below) can be found under the "Readings" section of D2L. Please do not let the nature of this class fool you, as students sometimes assume that little writing or reading is involved with poetry (because it is short). On the contrary, this course asks students to read quite a bit and *very* carefully. Our meetings and discussions will depend upon the rigorous, intelligent, and frequent involvement of each participant of the class, and this involvement is simply not possible if students do not come to class prepared. All students *must* obtain the edition of the texts specified above. Unless individual a student makes an individual arrangement with me, electronic versions of the texts are not permitted. Students should expect to read between 35 and 75 pages per week.

Portfolio—Submitted during the week of final exams, the portfolio will represent the culmination of your work throughout this semester and will make up the most significant portion of your grade. Your portfolio should include all the original poems you wrote with my comments on them and eight newly revised poems. The writing in the portfolio should consist of what you feel best represents the work you did in this course. The eight revised poems should display an awareness of issues discussed in class, thoughtful revisions based on comments provided during workshop and in written feedback, and the final drafts should be polished, finished writing (ostensibly ready for publication). The writing submitted in your portfolio should also display a firm grasp of the conventions and craft of poetry discussed throughout the semester. More details about the expectations for your portfolio will be provided later in the semester.

Individual Poetry Assignments—Throughout the semester you will be asked to complete individual poetry assignments. These will not be graded, though they will be returned to you with my comments after each of your workshops. For reasons of logistics, poems will not be accepted late. Failure to turn in a poem will cost a student 7% off their final portfolio grade. (So, for example, if a student does not turn in three poems, the highest possible grade they could receive on their portfolio would be a C+ [79%].) The due dates for poems are below. The assignments will follow. All poems *must* be handed in as hard copies in class to me *and* to every member of the class; they *must also* be uploaded to D2L (that way, if you have to miss class, you will still receive credit for turning in your assignment on time and they will be available digitally to your peers). There will be a link under "Discussions" to electronically upload your poems.

D2L Uploads—To make it easier to find someone's writing on D2L, save all files in the following format: Last Name, First Name--Poem ##. For example: Fest, Bradley J--Poem 01.

Weekly Reading Responses—Each week you will have a Reading Response due that discusses a passage from that day’s reading assignment and that demonstrates you have done the assigned reading. Responses will be a minimum of 250 words, will be posted on D2L, will receive full, half, or no credit, and will not be accepted late. I will drop the lowest two grades. More information is available on the “Weekly Reading Responses Assignment” handout.

Responses to Your Peers’ Work—All members of the course will be responsible for writing marginal comments on their peers’ work, and must write a brief paragraph about what they thought the poems workshopped were doing well, along with their thoughts on how to improve them. Make sure to read and comment on your peers’ work prior to coming to class. Though I will not be formally checking on the comments that you provide to your peers, if it is clear that students are failing to provide comments on everyone’s work, every class, their participation grade will be negatively affected. If necessary, I will begin to collect these comments.

In addition to comments on your peers’ work, each member of this class will be a primary reader for another member of the class. Primary readers should write notes and comments on each piece of writing from this student, along with writing a 1–2-page reflection on that student’s writing each time they are workshopped. These responses will be collected for credit. Please consult the handout, “Primary Reader Assignment,” for further details.

Attend Two Readings and Respond—During the course of the semester, students will be required to attend *two* professional literary readings in the Oneonta area—at Hartwick, SUNY Oneonta, or elsewhere—and to write a 1–2 page response about the reading for credit. Responses to the readings will be due in the class immediately following the reading (variable), and will receive a completion grade. Students who attend at least two readings and turn in responses will receive full credit for this portion of their grade. Please see the accompanying handout for more information, including a(n) inexhaustive) schedule of upcoming readings in the Oneonta area.

Participation—As we will critically read texts and discuss each other’s work in this class, a crucial part of this course is student participation. Though I will occasionally lecture, the class is a collective inquiry into the subject matter and class time will primarily consist of discussions that privilege students’ thinking and writing. As such, the course requires the input of all its participants. I know that some students may be more vocal than others are, but if I see a student consistently attempting to add to the discussion, I will take this into consideration. I have a habit of a rambling a bit, so please help me with this by asking questions of me if you are unclear. Asking questions can be an excellent way of participating. Since this class will rely heavily on student participation, your attendance is a necessity *More than three absences will negatively affect your overall grade and can be grounds for failure, in which case you may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances.*

Grading

Participation: 20%

Weekly Reading Responses: 20%

Primary Reader Responses: 5%

Attend Two Readings and Respond: 5%

Portfolio: 50%

Classroom Etiquette

To ensure a positive learning environment for all participants, students should adhere to the following guidelines for classroom etiquette. Failure to do so may result in being marked absent or in penalties applied to a student's participation grade.

Texts—Students who do not have their text in class, including their peers' writing for workshop, will be marked absent (whether I draw attention to it or not).

Lateness—As I often give crucial information and reminders about the course at the beginning of class, being late is not only disruptive but means that students may miss information that is important to their success in this course. Any student who is frequently more than five minutes late will be marked absent.

Notes—Students should take notes during class meetings and should have the materials to do so every day. Over a dozen years of teaching, I have found that, unsurprisingly, students who take notes in class perform better than students who do not. A student who fails to have a pen or pencil and notebook out for each class meeting will result in an absence.

Laptops, Phones, Tablets—Anyone observed using their mobile phone or another digital device during class, whether I draw attention to it or not, will be marked absent for the day.¹ Phones will not be tolerated in this class, and the use of laptops or tablets in this course will not be permitted unless special arrangements are made with the instructor.

Leaving Class—Ideally, students will not have to leave class, as we will have a 5–7 minute break each day. But as a variety of things may necessitate leaving class, students should feel free to get up without my permission as long as they do so quietly and unobtrusively. If individual students make a habit of leaving and returning during class time, however (especially if they do so close to a break), I will have a conversation with that student about disrupting class. If a student continues leaving frequently after this conversation, they will be marked absent each time they leave regardless of circumstance (whether I call attention to it or not). If a student has any issue that would cause them to need to get up frequently, please talk with me in the first weeks of class or at any time during the semester.

Preparation—A key part of this class will involve reading the work of your peers. If it is clear that you are not prepared, have not done the assigned reading, or have not read your peers' work, you will be marked absent.

Respect—Sharing your work with others can be often be a bit intimidating, so I urge all class members to be generous, respectful, constructive, and kind to your peers, even when critiquing their work.

¹ On how students more fully retain information if notes are taken by hand rather than on a computer, see Meyer, Robinson. "To Remember a Lecture Better, Take Notes by Hand." *Atlantic*, 1 May 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/>.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. It will result in an immediate zero for the assignment and I will file a formal charge with the Office of Academic Affairs. Plagiarism could also result in more serious action, including a student failing the class completely and being suspended from the College. *Plagiarism includes: lack of proper citations when quoting from someone else's work, representing someone else's work as your own, and knowingly allowing one's work to be submitted by someone else.* Violations of Hartwick's Academic Honesty policy are not limited to plagiarism, so students should familiarize themselves with Hartwick's policy on academic honesty at:

<https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/>.

Academic Adjustments and/or Modifications

Students must present me with an updated Academic Plan Letter for the Spring 2019 semester in order to be eligible for academic adjustments. Hartwick College is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic adjustments, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of AccessAbility Services, at sanfordl@hartwick.edu or AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu. AccessAbility Services is located on the fifth floor of Yager Library in the Center for Student Success. Any information regarding a student's disability will remain confidential. Requests for academic adjustments should be made as early as possible.

The Writing Center

Located in Clark Hall 230, the Writing Center offers events, courses, and one-on-one tutorials for students. Tutors can help you with your writing for classes or any writing project, and can teach you strategies for organizing, editing, and revising your writing. You can meet with a tutor once or regularly over the course of the semester; the Writing Center will also respond to queries via email. In some cases, I may send you to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can seek assistance on your own. Their services are free. You can browse the services at <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/writing-center/>, or make an appointment by emailing wcenter@hartwick.edu or calling (607) 431-4910.

E-mail Communication Policy

Each student is issued a college email address (username@hartwick.edu) upon admittance. This email address may be used by the college for official communication with students. I will also communicate with students via their hartwick.edu address. Students are expected to regularly read email sent to this account. Failure to read and react to communications from either the College or from me in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. If email is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to communications sent to their Hartwick email address.

Special Assistance

Hartwick offers free counseling for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties. The Counseling Center is located in the Perrella Health Center and offers psychological services and sexual assault services. Appointments can be made Monday to Friday, 9 am – 5 pm, by calling (607) 431-4420 or emailing counselingcenter@hartwick.edu.

Mandatory Reporting

Faculty at Hartwick College are considered *responsible employees* and are legally required to report to Hartwick's Title IX Coordinator, Traci Perrin ([607] 431-4293; perrint@hartwick.edu), incidents of sexual harassment or violence that they witness or are advised have occurred. Exceptions to this requirement include when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a university-approved research project. For more information, visit: <https://www.hartwick.edu/about-us/employment/human-resources/title-ix/>.

Statement on Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion, or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Calendar²

- 8.26 Syllabus
Introductions
Lynn Emanuel, “The Politics of Narrative: Why I Am a Poet”¹
Ezra Pound, “In a Station of the Metro”²
- 8.28 **Poem 1 Due**
Matthew Zapruder, *Why Poetry* (pp. xi–74)
- 9.2 No Class, Labor Day
- 9.4 **Reading Response 1 Due**
Matthew Zapruder, *Why Poetry* (pp. 75–150)
William Carlos Williams, “This Is Just to Say”³
Kenneth Koch, “Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams”⁴
- 9.9 **Poem 2 Due**
Matthew Zapruder, *Why Poetry* (pp. 151–226)
Louise Glück, *The Wild Iris* (pp. 1–21)
- 9.11 **Reading Response 2 Due**
Louise Glück, *The Wild Iris* (pp. 22–44)
Workshop
- 9.16 **Poem 3 Due**
Workshop Reading Responses
Workshop
- 9.18 **Reading Response 3 Due**
Louise Glück, *The Wild Iris* (pp. 45–63)
Workshop
- 9.23 **Poem 4 Due**
Natalie Diaz, *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (pp. 1–39)
Workshop
- 9.25 **Reading Response 4 Due**
Natalie Diaz, *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (pp.43–70)
Workshop
- 9.30 **Poem 5 Due**
Natalie Diaz, *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (pp. 73–102)
Workshop
- 10.2 **Reading Response 5 Due**
Ben Lerner, *The Lichtenberg Figures* (pp. 1–17)
Workshop

² Please note that additional readings may be assigned when appropriate and that the schedule is subject to change. For ease with citation, bibliographic endnotes to the readings available on D2L (anything with an endnote rather than page numbers) have been provided below in MLA style.

- 10.7 **Poem 6 Due**
Ben Lerner, *The Lichtenberg Figures* (pp. 18–35)
Workshop
- 10.9 **Reading Response 6 Due**
Ben Lerner, *The Lichtenberg Figures* (pp. 36–52)
Workshop
- 10.14 **Poem 7 Due**
Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (pp. 3–28)
Workshop
- 10.16 **Reading Response 7 Due**
Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (pp. 31–51)
Workshop
- 10.21 **Poem 8 Due**
Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (pp. 55–85)
Workshop
- 10.23 **Reading Response 8 Due**
Lauren Russell, *What's Hanging on the Hush* (pp. 1–20)
Workshop
- 10.28 **Poem 9 Due**
Lauren Russell, *What's Hanging on the Hush* (pp. 23–45)
Workshop
- 10.30 **Reading Response 9 Due**
Lauren Russell, *What's Hanging on the Hush* (pp. 49–68)
Workshop
- 11.4 **Poem 10 Due**
Richard Siken, *War of the Foxes* (pp. 1–15)
Workshop
- 11.6 **Reading Response 10 Due**
Richard Siken, *War of the Foxes* (pp. 16–30)
Workshop
- 11.11 **Poem 11 Due**
Richard Siken, *War of the Foxes* (pp. 31–47)
Workshop
- 11.13 **Reading Response 11 Due**
Maggie Nelson, *Bluets* (pp. 1–32)
Workshop
- 11.18 **Poem 12 Due**
Maggie Nelson, *Bluets* (pp. 33–65)
Workshop
- 11.20 Maggie Nelson, *Bluets* (pp. 66–95)

Workshop

11.25 No Class, Thanksgiving Break

11.27 No Class, Thanksgiving Break

12.2 Elizabeth Bishop, “One Art”⁵

bluedragonfly, “One Art: The Writing of Loss in Elizabeth Bishop’s Poetry”⁶
Workshop

12.4 **Reading Response 12 Due**

Mark Edmundson, “Poetry Slam”⁷

Ben Lerner, “The Hatred of Poetry”⁸

Workshop (if necessary)

12.9 **12:00 – 3:00 pm**

Final Portfolios Due

Class Wrap-Up: Group Reading

Endnotes

Epigraph: Dickson, Emily. Qtd. in Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. “342a.” Letter to Mary Potter Higginson, 16 Aug. 1870. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 3 vols., edited by Thomas H. Johnson, Belknap P of Harvard UP, 1958, vol. 2, p. 474.

¹ Emanuel, Lynn. “The Politics of Narrative: Why I Am a Poet.” *Then, Suddenly*, U of Pittsburgh P, 1999, pp. 16–19.

² Pound, Ezra. “In a Station of the Metro.” 1913. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed., edited by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy, W. W. Norton, 2005, p. 1297.

³ Williams, William Carlos. “This is Just to Say.” 1934. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed., edited by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy, W. W. Norton, 2005, p. 1274.

⁴ Koch, Kenneth. “Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams.” 1962. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 5th ed., edited by Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy, W. W. Norton, 2005, p. 1693.

⁵ Bishop, Elizabeth. “One Art.” 1976. *The Complete Poems, 1927–1979*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983.

⁶ bluedragonfly. “One Art: The Writing of Loss in Elizabeth Bishop’s Poetry.” *Buledragonfly10*, 12 June 2009, <https://bluedragonfly10.wordpress.com/2009/06/12/one-art-the-writing-of-loss-in-elizabeth-bishop%E2%80%99s-poetry/>.

⁷ Edmundson, Mark. “Poetry Slam: Or, The Decline of American Verse.” *Harper’s*, vol. 327, no. 1958, July 2013, pp. 61–68.

⁸ Lerner, Ben. “The Hatred of Poetry.” Manuscript. Originally published as: Lerner, Ben. *The Hatred of Poetry*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Jake Wolff for the language used in the “Learning Outcomes” section of this syllabus.