

# English 305: Intermediate Poetry Writing

**Summer 2015**

**Daily 10:30-12:45**

**Office Location: CH 131-A**

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**Dr. Tom C. Hunley**

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**Course Description:** In this course, you will closely study the techniques used by modern and contemporary poets, and write poems that incorporate these techniques. The bulk of our class time will be devoted to invention, style, and arrangements exercises, some of which you will develop into poems. You will also provide your classmates with constructive criticism of their works in progress. In turn, your classmates will critique your poems, which you will be expected to revise. You will also be required to join your classmates in a public reading and write two prose responses to poetry.

**Texts and Materials:** *Please Excuse This Poem: 100 New Poets for the Next Generation* edited by Brett Fletcher Lauer & Lynn Melnick; *The Poetry Gymnasium: 94 Exercises for Shaping Your Best Verse* by Tom C. Hunley

**Some Quotes About Writing Poetry:** "Why do you want to write poetry?' If the young man answers: 'I have important things to say,' then he is not a poet. If he answers, 'I like hanging around words listening to what they say,' then maybe he is going to be a poet." -- W.H. Auden, "Squares and Oranges"

"[K]eep at it and be as dedicated as other artists. Poetry doesn't reveal its secrets to the occasional poet. Be as committed as, say, a violinist or a ballerina would be. No shortcuts. Young poets may be the only would-be artists I know who actually believe they might be able to pull something off because they have strong feelings about it and who are not embarrassed when they hit false notes. Finally, you must be a little driven, and what you're doing must be crucial to you in order not to be defeated by the likely neglect that awaits you, the lack of rewards, and the fact that, by and large, your culture doesn't take you seriously." -- Stephen Dunn "Interview with Philip Dacey"

"A writer is not so much someone who has something to say as he [sic] is someone who has found a process that will bring about new things he would not have thought of if he had not started to say them." -- William Stafford

**Late Work:** Barring terrorist attacks on Bowling Green or extreme acts of God, I'm not going to accept late work.

**Attendance:** For an absence to be considered excused, you are required to write an outlandish, imaginative, yet somewhat believable excuse (at least 300 words) by the next class session. Failure to do so will result in the loss of two points. Students who miss class more than two times, for any reason, excused or not, risk failure on the grounds that they are not active class participants.

**Plagiarism:** Representing someone else's words as your own is grounds for failure in this course. It will not be tolerated.

**Minimal Course Requirements:** At the least, you are required to:

- Write rough drafts of ten poems according to specified guidelines.
- Thoroughly revise all ten poems after hearing responses from your professor and/or classmates.
- Keep up with assigned reading.
- Write a 3-6 page book review of one book by an author whose work appears in *Please Excuse This Poem*.
- Write a 1-3 letter of appreciation (or “fan letter”) to a poet whose work appears in *Please Excuse This Poem*.
- Submit a packet of poems to a reputable literary journal.
- Contribute two poems to the class booklet and participate in a public reading.

**Guidelines for Book Review:** Review a book of poetry written by one of the contributors to *Please Excuse This Poem*. Select a poet whose last name begins with the same letter of the alphabet as your own last name. Write about what you like, what you don’t like, and why. The point is to refine your own tastes and sensibilities, to figure out what kind of poems you want to write (and what kind you don’t want to write). Consult the reviews in leading publications such as *Pleiades*, *Poetry*, and *Coldfrontmag.com*, and follow the formatting/stylistic conventions that you observe in your reading. You might also pick up books by leading reviewers such as William Logan, Tom Clark, or Thomas Disch and take your cues from them. You will share this in class, give a copy to the professor, and trade away the book in a white elephant gift exchange on Wednesday, May 27.

**Guidelines for Fan Letter:** After sharing your book review with the class, you will get another book from a classmate in a white elephant gift exchange. You will then write a 1-3 letter of appreciation (or “fan letter”) to the poet. You will share this in class, give a copy to the professor, and send it to the poet on Wednesday, June 3.

**Class Book / Public Reading:** To earn full credit for the class book / public reading, you will need to submit two poems for the class book in a timely manner. These poems ought to be your best work from the semester (one from each portfolio), and they must be free from typos or spelling errors. You must also participate in the public reading at Cloud 9 Hookah (802 Broadway Ave. / BG, KY 42101) at 8pm on Tuesday, June 9.

**Submission Packet:** On Friday, June 5, we will cover the nuts and bolts of the submission process. With some guidance, you will select a literary journal, learn their submission policy, prepare a packet of poems to submit, and write a cover letter. On Wednesday, June 10, you will turn the packet in to your professor, who will look it over and then send it to the journal on your

behalf. You will need to provide two postage stamps (one for the outside envelope, another for a SASE).

**Grading:** The course will be graded on the following point system:

Portfolio #1	30 points
Portfolio #2	30 points
Book review	10 points
Fan letter	10 points
Attendance	10 points
Submission packet	5 points
Class book	3 points
Public reading	2 points

I will determine your final grade based on your percentage of the total points possible, using the following table:

92-100	A
83-91.9	B
73-82.9	C
65-72.9	D
Below 65	F

Grading criteria for the poetry portfolios can be found on the last page of this document.

As a matter of course, your book reviews and fan letters will be written well by the standards of a strict composition instructor (good spelling and grammar, lack of wordiness, correctness of MLA citations, etc.). Additionally, successful essays will show a thorough understanding of the practices and intentions of the poetry you are studying, and it will contain original insights.

I will not change your final course grade except in the case of a mathematical error. Please do not take up my time with last-minute requests for extra credit or tales about how you need a better grade so that you can get into law school, get into graduate school, get back into your parents' good graces (or other similar irrelevancies). I will not participate in any conversation or answer any email message whose subject is grade grubbing. If you wish for me to reconsider your grade on a given assignment, re-submit the graded copy of the assignment along with a one page not explaining why you believe the grade should be raised. If I find your argument frivolous, I will lower the original grade. That said, I encourage students to come to me -- early in the semester -- asking for advice on how to raise their performance (and thus their grade) in future assignments.

## **Weekly Planner**

### Week One

Monday, May 18: Go over syllabus; Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Extended Metaphor as Ars Poetica”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “Barbour Street” by Samuel Amadon; “In Defense of Small Towns” by Oliver De La Paz; “At Last the New Arriving” by Gabrielle Calvocoressi; and “There I Was Unrequited” by Kate Litterer; Invention exercises tba (derived inductively from readings)

Tuesday, May 19: Bring receipt of purchase of a full-length poetry collection by a contributor to *Please Excuse This Poem* whose last name begins with the same letter as yours. Memory exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “O Taste and Smell”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “Talk” by Terrance Hayes; “Postcards to the Other Brown Girl in My Weightlifting Class” by Tarfia Fazullah; “Poem Voted Most Likely” by Josh Bell; and “Impenetrable, Porous” by Metta Sama

Wednesday, May 20: Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “Mistakes” by Shane Book; “Rape Joke” by Patricia Lockwood; “Modern Poetry” by Jennifer L. Knox” and “My Uncle in Reverse” by Carley Moore; Style exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Stylistic Collisions”; Workshop

Thursday, May 21: Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Braided Narrative”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “Concerning the Land to the South of Our Neighbors to the North” by Mark Bibbins; “Blunts” by Major Jackson; “Acorn Duly Crushed” by Heather Christle; and “Clair de Lune” by Timothy Donnelly; Invention exercises tba (derived inductively from readings); Workshop

Friday, May 22: Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Encyclopedic Braid”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “Dear Mom and Dad” by Danielle Pafunda; “Imagination” by Robyn Schiff; “U.S.” by Jeffrey Yang; and “Perspective” by Meghan Privitello; Invention exercises tba (derived inductively from readings)

## Week Two

Monday, May 25: Memorial Day (no class)

Tuesday, May 26: Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Revision: Putting In”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “Kingdom Animalia” by Aracelis Grima; “Light Music” by Matthew Rohrer; “Sex Ed” by Erica Meitner; and “Poem for His Ex” by Jillian Weise; Invention exercises tba (derived inductively from readings); Workshop

Wednesday, May 27: Book review due; Read book review to class; White elephant gift exchange; Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Poetry Rhymes (Sometimes)”

Thursday, May 28: Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Revision: Taking Out”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “When at a Certain Party in NYC” by Erin Belieu; “The News” by Arda Collins; “Ghost Story” by Matthew Dickman; and “Abecedarian Requiring Further Examination of Anglikan Seraphym Subjugation of a Wild Indian Reservation”

by Natalie Diaz; Invention exercises tba (derived inductively from readings); Workshop

Friday, May 29: Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Quotidian Ode”; Portfolio 1 due

### Week Three

Monday, June 1: Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Self-Elegy”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “In Colorado My Father Scoured and Stacked Dishes” by Eduardo Corral; “Nervous System” by Michael Dickman; “Almost Intervention” by Adrian Matejka; and “Quinceanera” by Erika L. Sanchez; Invention exercises tba (derived inductively from readings)

Tuesday, June 2: Arrangement exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Scansion”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “Wilberforce” by Amanda Nadelberg; “The Unbearable” by Ada Limon; “Someone Falls in Love with Someone” by Zachary Schomburg; and “The Fountain” by Jennifer Moxley; Invention exercises tba (derived inductively from readings); Workshop

Wednesday, June 3: Fan letter due; Read fan letters to class; Invention exercise: “writing under the influence” (of an author)

Thursday, June 4: Exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: students’ choice; Workshop

Friday, June 5: Discuss poetry submissions; Prepare submission packet; Workshop

### Week Four

Monday, June 8: Invention exercise from *The Poetry Gymnasium*: “Dictionary Entry as Ars Poetica”; Discuss readings from *Please Excuse This Poem*: “The Witch” by Elizabeth Willis” and “In a Beautiful Country” by Kevin Prufer; Invention exercises tba (derived inductively from readings); Workshop

Tuesday, June 9: Produce class book; Rehearse for class reading; 8pm class reading at Cloud 9 Hookah (802 Broadway Ave. / BG, KY 42101)

Wednesday, June 10: Portfolio #2 due; Submission packet due



### Grading Criteria for Poetry Portfolios

The following 100-point scale (ten points each) will be used to judge your poetry portfolios.

93+ points = A

90-92. points = A-

88-89.5 points = B+

83-87 points = B

80-82.5 points = B-

78-79.5 points = C+

73-77 points = C

70-72 points = C-

63-69.5 points = D

Below 63 points = F

1. Something important is at stake in the poems. The poems matter. They pack an emotional punch and evoke a visceral reaction in readers.
2. The poems exhibit evidence of considerable revision.
3. The poems are accompanied by thoughtful, detailed, carefully-composed process memos.
4. The poems are written in complete sentences, using proper grammar and standard punctuation. Any deviation from standard grammar must come in dialogue and/or must be clearly done intentionally and for a specific purpose. Any grammatical errors, whether intentional or not, should not make the poems unreadable or distract from their meaning.
5. Spelling and capitalization must be used appropriately. You are not sending text messages (unless one of your poems is in the form of a text message, which might be kind of cool).
6. The poems use images, concrete language, and figures of speech rather than wallowing in abstractions, generalizations, and various techniques better suited to analytical prose. Show, don't tell.
7. The poet draws on an excellent lexicon and writes as though each word cost \$1,000.
8. The poet's use of language is playful, fresh, and precise.
9. The poems should be clear. If there are allusions and references in the poems, they are either clear in context or readily accessible via the magic of modern technology (Wikipedia, Google, etc.). Private jokes and "you-had-to-be-there" references are absent.
10. The packet includes at least one poem that displays mastery over rhyme (Portfolio #1) or meter (Portfolio #2). Free verse poems in the packet demonstrate the poet's skill with sound effects including, but not limited to, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, internal rhyme, anaphora, and alliteration. Line breaks are carefully considered, not haphazard.