

# The Singing Muse: Poetry--Process & Practice



**The Evergreen State College**

**Summer 2007**

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**Meeting Times:**      Second Session, W, 6-10 p.m.  
(4 to 8 credits meet August 15, 16, 9a-5p)

**Location:** Seminar 2, B 2109

**Required Fees:** \$10 for guest speakers and workshops

**Credits:** 2 to 8 credits, upper division

*Poetry is just the evidence of life. If your life is burning well, poetry is just the ash.*  
--Leonard Cohen

*Poetry is thoughts that breathe, and words that burn.*  
--Thomas Gray

## **I. Course Description:**

From Beowulf and Blake, to the "Beats" and the Beatles, poets are skilled word artists that shape culture and society. This intensive course will ground both beginning and experienced writers in the study of major poets, poetic forms, and traditions. Working from a variety of forms and traditions, both traditional and modern, we will ask, "How are poems brought to life?" "How are they shaped?" "What is the art of word magic?" We will tap into word play— images, sounds, shapes, and rhythms— as we write and study poems. Our explorations will include narrative, lyric, and contemporary poetic forms.

This fast paced, upper division class will include workshops and a number of poetry ideas and activities for those that want to write or teach poetry. Students enrolled for 4 to 8 credits will have extra reading and writing assignments in addition to the added meeting times.

## **Some things to consider:**

What are "words of power," and "what are the power of words?" What makes a poem or song memorable? How do poets use words used to encode memory and meaning? What are their methods for invoking the senses, emotions, and imagination? How do they use images, sounds, rhythms, patterns, and the voice? How is poetry expressed in many cultures and historical time-periods through both the spoken and written word? How does this understanding connect us to the origins of language and myth? How are traditional poems tied into the landscape, language, and culture of their origin? How does this knowledge enrich our language today? How do manuscripts and printed texts inform the patterns of different poetic forms, from highly structured verses, to concrete poems, and free verse? How does technology and the media shape the spoken and written word today? How do advertisers' jingles borrow poetic devices from mystical poems or sacred chants? How is the current renaissance in the poetic arts (poetry readings, poetry slams and hip-hop, therapeutic writing, etc.) shaping and influencing culture, society, education, psychology, public policy, and the arts? What can we do to become better writers and poets?

Activities will be designed for both beginning and advanced students, and will encourage both collaborative and self-motivated learning. Participants will be involved in a number of workshops and improvisational activities to develop and revise poems and writings. They will be encouraged to be well-rounded learners--using the strengths they bring, and developing new strengths in creative artistic expression as well as critical and theoretical understanding. We will develop a basic understanding of both theory and practice as we survey the historic, cultural, and artistic context of the poetic tradition. This class is ideal for writers, poets, educators, and those seeking experience for the MIT Program, psychology, or other communications fields.

*Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance.* --Carl Sandburg

## **II. Course Objectives:**

- 1) to enjoy reading and discussing poetry, and to create a positive environment in which to develop skills and proficiencies as poets and writers;
- 2) to perfect close reading skills, and to develop critical reading and thinking skills that allow a better understanding of process and practice of poetry;
- 3) to learn about the different forms of poetry, both oral and written, and their historical development;
- 4) to develop a community of writers who discuss poetry, edit manuscripts, and explore the poetic tradition together,
- 5) to explore how word-play develops pattern, form, memory, and meaning in a variety of spoken and written poetic forms
- 6) explore classic and contemporary poetic forms and traditions to learn how poets, bards, and songwriters work with the senses, image, emotion, words, sound, rhythm, and voice, and invoke the poetic imagination.

*If I am a poet who is charged with speaking the truth (and I believe that the word poet is synonymous with truth-teller), what do I have to say about all of this?*

--Joy Harjo, "A Postcolonial Tale," *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky*

*The Bard replied: I am Inspired! I know it is Truth, for I Sing  
According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius  
Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity*

*... cast aside from Poetry all that is not Inspiration*

--William Blake, Milton

*Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history.* --Plato, *Ion*

## **III. Required Texts:**

### **Available In the Bookstore:**

John Fredrick Nims. *Western Wind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2005. (9780072819595)\_  
J. R. R. Tolkien. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. New York: Ballantine, 1975. (0-345-27760-0)  
Blake, William. *Songs of Innocence*. Maryland: Dover, 1971. (9780486227641)  
Blake, William. *Songs of Experience* Maryland: Dover, 1984. (0486246361)  
Blake, William. *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Maryland: Dover, 1994. (0486281221)

(2-4 Credits--Select one text or the other. 8 Credits—get both).

Oliver, Mary. *New and Selected Poems, Volume 2*. Maryland: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. (9780807068861)  
Van Doren, Mark (ed.) and Malcolm Crowley. *The Portable Walt Whitman*, Penguin Books: 1997.  
(ISBN: 0140150781)

### **On reserve in the library:**

Chamberlain, Rebecca. *Singing Muse: Poetry—Process and Practice Reader*.

This anthology of poems and supplementary materials will be available in the library, and will likely be expanded throughout the class.

### Suggested Readings and Resources:

Abrams M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Thomson Wadsworth.  
Addonizio, Kim, and Dorianne Laux. *The Poets Companion*  
Behn, Robn and Chase Twichell, *The Practice of Poetry*  
Collom, Jack and Sheryl Noethl. *Poetry Everywhere* (For teachers or those in education.)  
Cuddon, J. A. *A Dictionary of Literary terms and Literary Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell Reference, 1991.  
Ferguson, Margaret, and Mary Jo Salter, John Stallworthy, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*,  
Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess*  
Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*  
Paschen, Elise, and Rebecca Presson Mosby. *Poetry Speaks*.  
Turco, Lewis. *The Book of Forms*  
Rothenberg, Jerome. *Shaking The Pumpkin*.  
\_\_\_\_\_. *Technicians Of The Sacred*.

*To be a poet is a condition, not a profession.* --Robert Frost

*Poetry is when an emotion has found its thought and the thought has found words.* --Robert Frost

### IV. Expectations:

- Faithful attendance and full participation at all class meetings, workshops, editorial groups, and seminars.
- Complete all reading and writing assignments, and give all assigned presentations.
- Participate in class workshops and writing groups.
- Maintain a portfolio and journal of class handouts, notes, workshops, papers, writing, assignments, and cumulative work.
- Successful completion of all written and oral projects, presentations, workshops, and assignments on time.

*Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted.*

--Percy Shelley, A Defence of Poetry, 1821

*Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty in words.*

--Edgar Allan Poe

### V. Assignments:

#### **For 2-8 Credits**

1. Maintain a portfolio of all class handouts, assignments, writings, poems, and other materials that you develop for the class. You will turn this in during week 3 and 5 of the program. (See "Portfolio" section for more details.)
2. Weekly papers (five in all) on some aspect of the readings. These should be turned in promptly at the beginning of seminar (1-2 pages, typed). These papers will allow you to: A.) Comment upon the readings, lectures, workshops, and poems; B.) Summarize, reflect upon, and integrate program topics, themes, and issues; C.) Analyze and reflect on various aspects of poetry. Some weeks an alternative or creative assignment will be given. See weekly reading schedule for details on the readings for 2-8 credits.
3. A portfolio or journal of poems that you begin in class and/or on your own, along with any drafts that you develop as you edit, and revise your poems, or work with peers in writing workshops.
4. A final poetry project, performance, or presentation: You can read or perform a passage from your own writings ( i.e. an original poem, song, poetic narrative, or manuscript that you develop as part of the class). You can give a presentation on a visual art piece, manuscript, or book that you create in response to the ideas inspired by the class. You might perform or recite a memorized poem or passage by a particular poet that you admire, or you might put their work to music. You might come as a "Dead Poet" that you admire,

and read their work. See handout for additional suggestions and ideas. You will present your work in 5-10 min. presentation on the last night of class. (See handout for details.)

**For 4-8 Credits:** complete all the above assignments plus

1. Work on the class 20/h per week
2. Complete additional assigned readings from Western Wind and other texts.
3. Complete an illuminated manuscript of a poem, or a manuscript of some kind that explores the relationship between word and image.
4. Memorize and recite a poem of your choice during week three.
5. Multiple drafts of a poem that you write and revise during in-class poetry editing workshop with peers, Keep track of handouts and feedback. First draft of your poem is due week 3, final draft is due week 5.
5. A short research project or special project: complete a one page handout (with copies for each member of the class) that explores a particular poet, or poetic topic, theme, or issue that intrigues you. This is an opportunity to develop your research skills along with a deeper understanding of the influence of a particular poet, poetic form, or poetic theme. You will present your research findings in a short oral presentation during week three.

Some of the issues you might want to explore are: A favorite poet, poetic genre, historic time period; Issues in Orality and Literacy; Various kinds of oral or literary poems (Chants, Invocations, Proverbs, Riddles, Blessings, Rituals, Lyrics, Mytho-Poetic Narratives, blues, rap and hip-hop, rhymes, songs, romances, ballads, epics, metrical romance, traditional or literary Ballads); verse forms (sonnets, odes, villanelles renga, pantoum, ghazal, etc.); Free verse, Dramatic Poems; Native American mythopoetic narratives or chants, or contemporary Women writers, Celtic bards, African Griots, Sufi, Christian, or Jewish mystical poetry, Hindu mantras, The Romantic Poets, the metaphysical poets, Milton, Greek love poetry, the poetry of wartime, animal poems, etc. (See handout for details.)

Or you might want to do some original thinking and research. For example, look at a traditional ballad, and a literary ballad. What's the difference between them? Then, compare them to a modern-day Dylan Ballad. You might want to look at the way heroic couplets are composed and compare them to the traditional epics, or blues, hip-hop, or slam poetry. Seek your interests, and explore a topic that intrigues you.

**For 8 Credits:** complete all the above assignments plus

1. Work on the class 40/h per week
2. Complete additional assigned readings from Western Wind and other texts.
3. Complete a special poetry project or research paper of your choice. You can write and develop original poems in the form or style of your choice (5-7 pages of work). You can expand your "one page" research project—or choose a new topic-- and write the findings up into a (5-7 page) research paper. Or you can create your own special creative project in lieu of writing poems or a research paper. See the instructor about finalizing your ideas. Final project is due week five, You will present a summary of your work on the last day of class.

*There's no money in poetry, but then there's no poetry in money, either.*

--Robert Graves, 1962 interview on BBC-TV,  
based on a very similar statement he overheard around 1955

## VI. Class Portfolio

Each student is required to maintain and organize a portfolio throughout the class. This will be reviewed in week three, and turned in at the end of the class for evaluation. It will be returned after your evaluation is written, so you must pick it up after the end of the class.

- Include your name, the class name, and a table of contents.
- Record the topic and date of each item in your portfolio.
- Arrange each section chronologically.
- Keep your portfolio in a loose-leaf three ring binder with dividers.
- It should contain the following: (Date and chronologically order each entry.)

- 1) Table of contents, course syllabus, and all class handouts
- 2) Class notes: lectures, speakers, seminars, and film notes.
- 3) Weekly reading response papers, along with copies of the reading assignment for required texts. Follow format on reading response handout. (A section of reading notes is strongly recommended.)
- 4) Poetry Portfolio/Journal: Copies of any poems or drafts that you begin during in-class writing workshops, as well as poems that you are inspired to write on your own. Make note of the date of each entry, revisions, final drafts, notes from editing workshops, or personal notes.
- 5) Planning notes for your final poetry project, performance, or presentation:
- 6) Self and Faculty evaluations (Three signed copies on official forms turned in at the end of class.)

### **For 4-8 Credits add:**

- 7) Original and one copy of an illuminated manuscript
- 8) Copy of the poem that you memorized.
- 9) Notes and drafts from in-class poetry editing workshop with peers,
- 10) One page handout and notes from your research or special project.

### **For 8 Credits add:**

11. Copy of a special poetry project, research paper, or creative project of your choice.

*Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary.*  
--Kahlil Gibran

*The true poet is all the time a visionary and whether with friends or not,  
as much alone as a man on his death bed.*  
--W.B. Yeats

*A poet's work is to name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides,  
start arguments, shape the world, and stop it going to sleep.*  
-Salman Rushdie

*You don't have to suffer to be a poet. Adolescence is enough suffering for anyone.*  
--John Ciardi, Simmons Review, Fall 1962

**A poet can survive everything but a misprint.**  
--Oscar Wilde

**Ink runs from the corners of my mouth  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.**  
--Mark Strand, "Eating Poetry," Reasons for Moving, 1968