

The radio talk this morning
was of obliterating
the world

I notice fruit flies rise
from the rind
of the recommended
melon

-- Lorine Niedecker

THE ART

to write poems, say,
is not a personal achievement
that bewilderment

On the way to work
two white butterflies
& clover along the walks

to ask .
to want that much of it .

-- Paul Blackburn

Life is poetry
and poetry is life – O –
awaken – children!

-- Cid Corman

Dan Featherston
 Medaille College
 WRT 310
 Spring 2002
 section 01-R, TR, 2:00-3:20

Creative Writing: Poetry

Instructor: Dan Featherston

E-mail: saffo31@aol.com

Office Hours: Thursday, 3:30-5:00 p.m., and by appointment.

Required Texts:

Eshleman, Clayton. *Companion Spider*. (Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

Padgett, Ron. *The Teachers & Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms*. 2nd Ed. (Teacher & Writers, 2000).

A college dictionary (suggested-- dictionaries that are recent, universal, unabridged, and list etymologies)

Other Required Materials:

- email account and internet access (home or institutional)
- notebook
- white, lined loose-leaf paper
- copies of your work and sample poems as needed for class and group discussion

Course Description: This course teaches the structures and techniques of poetry. There are four primary components to the course: the workshop, the notebook, reading poetry and poetics, and writing poetry (drafts and final manuscript). I will describe each of these in detail as the course develops.

In-class sessions will focus on workshops, which will give students confidence in reading their work and in the process of constructive criticism. These sessions will also involve readings and discussions of handouts of traditional and innovative poetry and poetics.

Out-of-class work will focus on reading and writing poetry, as well as keeping a journal. Also, I will develop an ad hoc listserv, which will provide information, additional feedback, ideas, etc.

Course Goals: Upon completion of the course, students will be able to

- demonstrate a critical awareness and capacity for judging the written and oral presentation of poetry.
- attempt a variety of poetic styles: traditional, contemporary, and innovative.
- effectively utilize the techniques and tools of poetry.
- participate in the workshop method of listening, critiquing, editing, and revising.
- read poetry aloud.

Outline of Course Content:

- introduction to poetry and the world of the poet.
- poetic tools and techniques.
- forms of poetry.
- the workshop method.
- the poetry reading.

Assignments: I will outline assignments in the syllabus (see below), individual assignment sheets, and in-class announcements.

Course Policies: Regular attendance is critical to the learning process. Most of our classwork will involve discussions, workshop, and in-class writing, all of which are important for an understanding of the writing process and your development as a writer. If you miss more than four class sessions, I may lower your final grade by one letter-grade per absence. Tardiness beyond fifteen minutes counts as an absence. You are responsible for finding out about and making up any missed assignments, including in-class writing.

Grading: To complete this course with a 'C' or higher, you must attend class, complete all assignments on time, prepare for class, and participate in workshop activities and discussions. You cannot receive a passing grade unless you have submitted all major assignments. To receive full credit, all written assignments must be submitted on time. Work handed in late will receive a grade reduction. If you turn in nothing, you will receive a zero (an 'F' is given when an assignment is incomplete). Be sure to keep a copy of your work in the event that I lose it. If you do not have a copy, you will have to rewrite the lost work.

Grades will be determined by the following: attendance, class participation, quality of draft revisions, and the final journal and manuscript.

Late Drafts: Copies of poems are due at the beginning of class (see syllabus below). Late and/or incomplete drafts will not be accepted. If the draft is complete and follows all guidelines, full credit will be given.

The percentage breakdown for final, cumulative grades is as follows:

Assignment	Percent of Final Grade	Tentative Due Date
Attendance & class participation	10%	
Poem 1 (Anagram)	10%	31 January
Poem 2 (Love Poem)	10%	14 February
Poem 3 (Oulipo)	10%	28 February
Poem 4 (Walk Poem)	10%	21 March
Poem 5 (Open/TBA)	10%	16 April
Journal (see below)	20%	7 May
Final Manuscript (see below)	20%	7 May
Extra Credit (Optional)	10%	7 May

The Process: I will assign five different poems to write during the course. Each assignment will be explained with a separate "assignment sheet," which I'll hand out in advance of the due date. You will make copies for myself and your classmates, which you will hand out on the due date for that particular poem. We will take home copies of the poems and critique them. We will then return and conduct in-class workshops of the poems. Then, I will hand back your critiqued poem.

At the end of the semester, you will choose any three (3) of the five (5) poems to rewrite and submit with the five (5) poems in a final portfolio (see below). Although you may choose to revise a poem as often as you like, you are only required to submit one revision of three of the five poems. A few suggestions: revise! revise! revise!; revise those poems that seem most vital to you; submit the three rewrites that seem strongest to you.

Extra Credit: Optional. 10%. You may choose to do this assignment for extra credit, or instead of one of the five poem assignments. Due in class Tuesday, 7 May. Write a 300-500 word essay-review of Clayton Eshleman's *Companion Spider* from the perspective of a creative writing student and addressed to a general reading audience. Your objective is not to "sell" the book; instead, you should be informative about the work and evaluate its usefulness both to a creative writing student and a general audience interested in poetry and poetics. Briefly introduce the book in a sentence or two, then address as many of the below questions/points as possible (i.e., do not list the questions in your review, but address them beyond "yes" or "no" responses). Feel free to cite passages from the book to illustrate your points.

- How is the book valuable for a young poet? Explain.
- How is the book not valuable for a young poet? Explain.
- What did you learn from the book about the imagination, writing-living, revision, reading, etc.
- Arguably, Eshleman's sense of the poet and the imagination are deeply informed by his attempts to "de-" or "reconstruct" his personal and cultural self (i.e., white, middle-class, Protestant man growing up in 1950's mid-west America). Given this fact, how relevant/irrelevant is Eshleman's sense of the poet and the imagination to a poet with a dissimilar background (i.e., woman, minority, agnostic, New Yorker, generation Y, etc.)
- Was the book useful in the course? Explain.
- What, if any, myths did the book dispel for you about notions of "creativity" and the imagination?

Type, title, double-space, and staple essay-review. Number pages. Name, course, date, and instructor's name on top of first page. For examples of essay-reviews, see poetry journals in the library, or go on-line to read reviews. Suggested site: www.raintaxi.com

Journal

There are a variety of styles of journals, and we will discuss some of them in class. For the journal you will be handing in, please follow the below guidelines. In order for your journal to receive an 'A,' you must follow the proper format and content requirements, and exhibit not only the ability to "reflect" on reading materials and observations, but present a creative and engaged dialogue with the source materials.

Required Format:

- handwritten or typed fine; if handwritten, it must be in ballpen or ink and clearly legible.
- must be in bound format.
- write your name somewhere on the cover (inside or outside) of the journal.

Required Content:

- at least 30 pages (quality versus quantity).
- reflections on weekly reading assignments, class lectures, and discussion; all assigned readings should at least be briefly noted.
- "field" notes (to be discussed in class) written on a weekly basis.
- optional but highly suggested: definitions of unfamiliar words you read, see on the street, overhear, etc.; poems, sketches, stories. Suggestion: find a format that's easily pocketed, and carry the journal with you wherever you go.

Final Manuscript

Required Format:

- manuscript must be in a portfolio (i.e., folder).
- see below for formatting of individual poems ("Poem format" & "Revised Poem Format").

Required Content:

- my critique of all five (5) of the assigned poems.
- your revision(s) of any three (3) of the five (5) assigned poems.

Poem Format (poems 1-5)

Poems sent as emails or email attachments are not acceptable. All poems must be typed, stapled, and 1.5- or double spaced. Type your first and last name in the upper-right corner of page 1. Under your name, indicate the type of poem (i.e., "Anagram") in parentheses. On subsequent pages, type your last name in the upper-right corner, followed by a slash and the page number (i.e., "Smith /2"); below, in parentheses, indicate a stanza break with the following: "Stanzabreak".

Staple together all pages belonging to the same draft.

Revised Poem Format (revisions of 3 of 5 poems)

Poems sent as emails or email attachments are not acceptable. All revised poems must be typed, stapled, and 1.5- or double spaced. Type your first and last name in the upper-right corner of page 1. Under your name, indicate the type of poem and "revision" in parentheses: (Anagram Revision). On subsequent pages, type your last name in the upper-right corner, followed by a slash and the page number (i.e., "Smith /2"); below, in parentheses, indicate a stanza break with the following: "Stanzabreak". **Staple together all pages belonging to the same draft.**

Schedule

Assignments may change, so pay attention to updates given in class.

Make sure to bring course book to class.

Make sure to bring copies of your poems and your peers' poems to class.

C = Companion Spider

T = Teachers & Writers Handbook of Poetic Forms

Week 1:

Tues, 1.15 Introductions, course overview.

Thurs, 1.17 **Bring to Class:** One poem/lyrics you like.
Discussion: What is a poem? Where do poems come from? What makes a "good" poem?

Week 2:

Tues, 1.22 **READ:** T Chant, Insult Poem, Performance Poetry, Rap, Skeltonic Verse.
Discussion: Poetry & music, populist poetry, etc.
In-class listening: Rap.

Thurs, 1.24 **READ:** T Acrostic, Word Play.
In-class Dada "hat poem" collaboration
Discussion: Poem 1: Anagram.
Handout: Poem 1 Assignment Sheet.
Handout: Example anagrams.

Week 3:

Tues, 1.29 **SKIM:** T *Preface, Appendix A, Appendix B, Bibliography, Other Resources.*
READ: T Alliteration, Assonance, Foot, Free Verse, Line, Lyric, Metaphor, Prose Poem, Rhyme, Rhythm, Stanza, Syllabic Verse.
Handout: Snyder's "What You Need to Know to Be a Poet."

Thurs, 1.31 **DUE:** Poem 1 (bring copies for all class members, instructor, yourself).

Week 4:

Tues, 2.5 **Workshop:** Poem 1.

Thurs, 2.7 **Workshop:** Poem 1.

Week 5:

- Tues, 2.12 **READ:** T Apostrophe, Epithalamium, Epistle, Ghazal, Sonnet.
Discussion: Poem 2: Love Poem.
Handout: Poem 2 Assignment Sheet.
Handout: Example Love Poems (Pound, Rexroth, Sappho, Stein, etc.).
- Thurs, 2.14 **DUE:** Poem 2 (bring copies for all class members, instructors, yourself).

Week 6:

- Tues, 2.19 **Workshop:** Poem 2.
- Thurs, 2.21 **Workshop:** Poem 2.

Week 7:

- Tues, 2.26 **READ:** T Collaboration, Imitation, Nonsense Verse, Parody, Satire, Spoonerism.
Discussion: Poem 3: Oulipo (x+5,7, etc.).
Handout: Poem 3 Assignment Sheet.
Handout: Example Oulipo Poems (Coolidge/Fagin, etc.).
- Thurs, 2.28 **DUE:** Poem 3 (bring copies for all class members, instructor, yourself; also, bring copies of original poem being imitated).

Week 8:

- Tues, 3.5 **Workshop:** Poem 3.
- Thurs, 3.7 **Workshop:** Poem 3.
Handout: Poem 4 Assignment Sheet.

Week 9:

- Tues, 3.12 **No Class: Break.**
- Thurs, 3.14 **No Class: Break.**

Week 10:

- Tues, 3.19 **READ:** T Projective Verse, Walk Poem.
Discussion: Poem 4: Walk Poem, variations.
Handout: Example Walk Poems (Neruda, Snyder, Basho, Blackburn, etc.),
Olson's "Projective Verse" essay.
- Thurs, 3.21 **DUE:** Poem 4 (bring copies for all class members, instructor, yourself).

Week 11:

- Tues, 3.26 Continued discussion.
- Thurs, 3.28 **No Class: Holiday**

Week 12:

Tues, 4.2 **Workshop:** Poem 4.

Thurs, 4.4 **Workshop:** Poem 4.
Handouts: Poetics.

Week 13:

Tues, 4.9 **Discussion:** Poetics (bring handouts to class).

Thurs, 4.11 **Discussion: Poem 5: Open/TBA**
Handout: Poem 5 Assignment Sheet.

Week 14:

Tues, 4.16 **DUE:** Poem 5 (bring copies for all class members, instructor, yourself).

Thurs, 4.18 **Workshop:** Poem 5.

Week 15:

Tues, 4.23 **Workshop:** Poem 5.

Thurs, 4.25 **Discussion:** Eshleman's *Companion Spider*.

Week 16:

Tues, 4.30 **Discussion:** Eshleman's *Companion Spider*.

Thurs, 5.2 **Discussion:** Eshleman's *Companion Spider*.

Week 17:

Tues, 5.7 **Due Beginning of Class: Final Journal & Manuscript**

Recommended Anthologies: Anthologies (anthos-logos, "a book of flowers") are useful as introductions to a wide range of writers. Here are a few:

Kenneth Koch, Kate Farrell. *Sleeping on the Wing*.

Norton Anthology of Poetry; Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry.

Douglas Messerli. *From the Other Side of the Century*.

Bruce Andrews, Charles Bernstein. *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*.

Eliot Weinberger. *Innovators & Outsiders*.

Ron Silliman. *In the American Tree*.

Mary Margaret Sloan. *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women*.

Carolyn Forché. *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*.

Pierre Joris, Jerome Rothenberg. *Poems for the Millennium, vol. I & II*.

Jerome Rothenberg. *Technicians of the Sacred; Symposium of the Whole; Shaking the Pumpkin*.

STATEMENT ON DISABILITIES

Any student with a disability who believes he/she needs accommodation(s) in order to complete this course should contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible. The staff in the Office of Disability Services will determine what accommodations are appropriate and reasonable under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Office of Disability Services is located in the Main Building, Room M021, and can be reached by phone at (716) 884.3281, ext. 280.

Addition to Syllabus:

When I contacted the publisher of *Companion Spider* last month, they said that they weren't sure when the book would be published, but that they were "hoping it'd be available by January." Given this fact, I scheduled our readings from the book for later in the semester. Since the book is now available, we will begin reading from it sooner than later. I will periodically assign readings from the book in class, and we will occasionally read passages together when there is time. For now, please read the following from *Companion Spider*:

Reading	Date
<i>Novices</i> , chptrs. 1-3	1.24
<i>Novices</i> , chptrs. 4-6	1.29
<i>Novices</i> , chptrs. 7-9	1.31
<i>Novices</i> , chptrs. 10-end	2.5