

Professor Ann Emmons

Office hours: Tuesday 11 - 12:20 or by appointment, Corbin Hall room 353

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# Introduction to Poetry (Fall 2016)

“I try to laugh / At whatever life brings / ‘Cause when I look down / I just miss all the good stuff / When I look up / I just trip over things.” Ani DiFranco, “As Is”

“Wonder is defined as a constriction and suspension of the heart caused by amazement at the appearance of something so portentous, and unusual that the heart suffers a systole. Hence wonder is something like fear in its effect on the heart. This effect of wonder, then, this constriction and systole of the heart, springs from an unfulfilled but felt desire to know... Now the man who is puzzled and wonders apparently does not know. ... Hence wonder is the movement of the man who does not know on his way to finding out.”

Albertus Magnus, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*

“These poems have come from a great distance to find you.” Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem*

## Overview:

Poet Edward Hirsch describes a poem as a message in a bottle, as a linguistic event, as a group of words “packed in salt,” as a last will and testament to be deciphered: “*what is it saying?*” The description encompasses our course focus on the technical details of groups of rhythmic words, on individual interpretation and meaning, and on linguistics as an event to be studied in historical context and in the concentrated smallness of an individual reading at a precise moment in (your) time. We will always ask “*what is it saying?*” and our answers will almost certainly differ.

By the end of this semester you will be able to analyze diction and persona; style and form; the poetic devices of rhyme, meter, and metaphor; the synergy between poetry and prose: poetics. You will also be able to defend *your* assessment of a poem’s artistic and cultural merits and demerits: “*is it any good?*” Finally, our goal is not only a better understanding of poetry and poetic traditions but also a better understanding of poetry’s contribution to what cultural critic Susan Sontag calls “the wisdom project” -- our “sense of human possibility, of what human nature is, of what happens in the world.” If we do this right, the diversity of talent and experience in this classroom will not be a weakness but a great strength. Please, do the reading, SPEAK UP, share what you know about other ways of knowing and their similarity to and difference from the poet’s way.

Your grade will depend in large part on that speaking up. You will earn an A in participation if you attend class regularly, read the assigned chapters and poems carefully and diligently, and demonstrate that careful diligent reading in your free writes and in classroom discussion.

It will also depend on careful formal analysis of three poems -- you will write three 2 - 3 page essays -- and on your understanding of key terms of art, as tested in a midterm and final exam.

Finally, I assume/expect that laptops are being used in the service of our class activities and that they will not distract you, me, or the other students in the class; distractions include noise and your wayward attention. You may take notes on a laptop **only** if you sit within the first row of the classroom.

## Required Texts:

- Mary Oliver, *The Poetry Handbook*
- Adam Bradley, *The Poetics of Hip Hop*

## Your Grade

- Participation 30%
- Writing Portfolio 40%
- Midterm exam 10%
- Final exam (cumulative) 20%

### Attendance:

I don't like taking attendance - it wastes my time, it lets me off the hook (there should be nowhere you'd rather be on a Thursday afternoon...), and it insults your commitment to your own learning. However: this is a discussion course and your attendance affects your classmates' experience. You may miss three class sessions without penalty. After a fourth absence, your grade will drop by one grade point. If you miss six sessions, you will fail the course/be asked to drop the course.

After our first week, Tuesdays will be devoted to lecture, loosely based on that week's reading in the course texts, and Thursdays to close readings of poems and other works of art. (We will choose those works together, so if there's a poem you want to discuss, let me know.) Approximately every 3 weeks I will assign a 20-minute "free write" on a poem that we have read that week. These free writes will be announced in advance and will form the foundation of your essays.

Your essays must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due, typed and double-spaced, with 1" margins, using in-text citations (MLA format). You may revise your essays for up to a grade-point increase (C → B, for example). Additional instructions will be provided when the papers are assigned. I encourage you to see me during office hours to discuss the papers and your writing in more detail. The Writing Center (LA 144) also provides valuable assistance.

Both the midterm and the final exam will feature a combination of multiple choice and vocabulary questions; more details to follow later in the semester.

There are lots of extra-credit opportunities: provide music, poems, or illustrations to accompany the course or a study unit (with a very brief discussion of how the work applies to the course or unit); attend one of the many university or community lectures or readings (I will announce the coming week's roster every Thursday. You will write a brief synopsis of the lecture or reading).

### Academic Honesty

All work that you submit for this class must be your own, and it must be written exclusively for this course. The unacknowledged borrowing of others' words or ideas—whether from books, the internet, or other sources—constitutes the serious academic crime of plagiarism. If you fail to document properly those sources consulted for your writing, you risk an automatic failure for the entire course. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code: ([http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student\\_conduct.php](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php)). If you have any doubts or questions about plagiarism or the University's policy on it, please see me.

### Special Needs

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic

performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or 406.243.2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification.

# Tentative Schedule

NB: this schedule is truly tentative and will be adjusted according to the needs of the class. Specific reading assignments will be determined at least one week in advance. All reading must be completed by Tuesday's class. The poems to be discussed on Thursday will be announced on Tuesday, and posted to Moodle. Please note that you are not prepared for class unless you have that reading in front of you as we discuss it.

## Wk 1 (August 30)

- t Student Introductions
- o assignment for Thursday: Toni Morrison, "Strangers" (pdf on Moodle);
- r Course Introduction

### **Unit 1: "What's it Like?" Figures of Speech**

## Wk 2 (Sept 6)

- o Reading: Oliver, pp. 1-12; Oliver, 92-108, The Writing Center's "Writing about Literature" (on Moodle)

## Wk 3 (Sept 13)

Reading: Bradley, 85-117

### **Unit 2: Paradox, Irony, and Anti Poetry**

## Wk 4 (Sept 20)

Reading: Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox" (on Moodle)

## Wk 5 (Sept 27)

Reading: Robert Graves, "A Satire of Circumstance," from *The Great War and Modern Memory* (on Moodle)

### **Unit 3: Is it any Good? Authenticity, Sentimentality, and Cliche**

## Wk 6 (Oct 4)

Aristotle, *Poetics* (on Moodle); Oliver, 13-19

## **Wk 7 (Oct 11)**

t      **Midterm Exam**  
r      exam review; writing workshop

## **Wk 8 (Oct 18)**

no class: writing conferences (spread out over the course of the week, M-R)  
f      **Essay 1 due to my English Dept mailbox by 4:30 pm Friday**

### **Unit 4: Sound**

## **Wk 9 (Oct. 25)**

Reading: Oliver, 19-34; Bradley, 3-48

## **Wk 10 (Nov 1)**

t      writing workshop  
r      writing workshop; essay 2 prompt development

## **Wk 11 (Nov 8):**

**NO CLASS**

t      election day; campus closed. VOTE!  
r      my son's Madison, Wisconsin wedding :-)

### **Unit 5: Rhythm and Rhyme**

## **Wk 12 (Nov 15)**

Reading: Oliver, 35-57; Bradley 3-48;  
**Essay 2 due**

### **Unit 6: Diction and Voice**

## **Wk 13 (Nov 22)**

Reading: Oliver, 76-91; Bradley, 121-155  
r      No Class. Happy Thanksgiving

### **Unit 7: Form and Free Form**

## **Wk 14 (Nov 29)**

Reading: Oliver, 58-66; Bradley 175-203

## **Wk 15 (Dec 6)**

Catch up and Course Review

## **Wk 16 (Dec 13):**

Finals Week; No Class

t      **Essay 3 due to my English Department Mailbox, by 4:30 pm**

r      **Final Exam: 10:10 - 12:10, Thursday Dec. 15, our usual classroom**