Introduction to Poetry (Spring 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”

“... I look upon everything / as a brotherhood and a sisterhood, / and I look upon time as no more than an idea, / and I consider eternity as another possibility, / and I think of each life as a flower, as common / as a field daisy, and as singular, / and each name a comfortable music in the mouth, / tending, as all music does, toward silence.” Mary Oliver, “When Death Comes”

“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

Overview: This is a course about craft - the construction and material of a poem - and yet I am not a poet and neither are most of you. We are students of prose and the novel; science majors; history majors; lawyers, doctors and social workers in training; the undecided; if we’re lucky, there are musicians and dancers in the room. We will focus not on construction of a poem but on close reading. By the end of the semester you will be able to analyze diction and persona; style and form; the poetic devices of rhyme, meter, and metaphor; the dividing line between poetry and prose; the difference between ‘good’ poetry and ‘bad.’ Our goal with this focus 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. It will also depend on careful formal analysis of three poems -- you will write three 2 - 3 page) essays on a prompt that we will develop as a group -- 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:
- John Frederick Nims and David Mason, Western Wind; An Introduction to Poetry (4th Edition)
  - I chose the 4th edition because it’s much less expensive than the 5th. You are free to use the 5th if you choose, but know that the pagination will be different.

Requirements
- Participation 30%
- Writing Portfolio 40%
- Midterm exam 10%
- Final exam (cumulative) 20%
Though there will be lecture segments, this is a discussion course. 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. I will update participation grades every three weeks.

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 come 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 Monday. You will write a brief synopsis of the lecture or reading); or, bring in a grammatical error from a reputable source (one that should know better).

**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). 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 class time on the date listed; please note that you are not prepared for class unless you have that reading in front of you as we discuss it.

Introduction

Wk 1 (Jan. 25)
- m  Course and Student Introductions
  - assignment for Wednesday: Adele “Hello” and Robert Frost “The Road Not Taken” (on Moodle)
- w  Close-Reading Techniques
  - Discussion: Adele, “Hello” and Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken”
- f  Close-Reading Techniques, continued
  - reading for Monday: The Writing Center’s “Writing about Literature” (on Moodle); Begin Nims and Mason, pp. 3 - 46

Unit 1: The Senses

Wk 2 (Feb 1): Nims and Mason, pp. 3 - 46

Wk 3 (Feb 8): Nims and Mason, pp. 47 - 90

Unit 2: The Emotions

Wk 4 (Feb 15): Nims and Mason, pp. 91 - 118
- m  NO CLASS; Presidents’-Day Holiday

Unit 3: The Words

Wk 5 (Feb. 22): Nims and Mason, pp. 121 - 148
  - Friday Feb. 26, Essay 1 Due

Unit 4: The Sounds

Wk 6 (Feb 29): Nims and Mason, pp. 151 - 172

Wk 7 (March 7): Nims and Mason, pp. 173 - 199
  - Friday March 11, Midterm Exam

Unit 5: The Rhythms

Wk 8 (March 14): Nims and Mason, pp. 203 - 234

Wk 9  (March 21): Nims and Mason, pp. 235 - 265
**Essay-writing Workshops**

Wk 10 (March 28): no reading assigned

Friday April 1, Essay 2 Due

Wk 11 (April 4): No Class; Spring Break

reading assignment: begin Nims and Mason, pp. 269-322

**Unit 6: The Mind**

Wk 12 (April 11): Nims and Mason, pp. 269 - 322

Wk 13 (April 18): Nims and Mason, pp. 323 - 343

Wk 14 (April 25): Nims and Mason, pp. 344 - 364

Friday April 29, Essay 3 Due

**Essay-writing Workshops; Catch-up; Course Review**

Wk 15 (May 2): no reading assigned

**Final Exam: Wednesday May 11, 10:10 - 12:10**