

ENGLISH 131-1 “WRITING POETRY” COURSE SYLLABUS (FALL 2018)

(Syllabus online at: www.sjsu.edu/english/currentstudents/syllabi/2018_fall/index.html)

*Be subtle, various, ornamental, clever,
And do not listen to those critics ever
Whose crude provincial gullets crave in books
Plain cooking made still plainer by plain cooks ...*

W. H. Auden, “The Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning”

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Required Texts:

Lewis Turco, *The Book of Forms*, Revised and Expanded Edition, 2012
Samuel Maio, *Dramatic Monologues: A Contemporary Anthology*

Course Description and Objectives: The principal objective of this course is to develop your poetic talent by learning and practicing aesthetics drawn from the English metrical tradition, including *vers libre*, by a close examination of select poems from various time periods, concentrating on brief Italian and French lyric forms before moving to the longer dramatic and narrative modes. A good portion of the class is conducted in workshop format – that is, critiquing constructively students’ poems.

Course Student Learning Objectives (SLO): The Department of English and Comparative Literature has established the following Student Learning Objectives (SLO) for its baccalaureate courses: Students will demonstrate the ability to 1) read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric; 2) show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature; 3) write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject; 4) develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively; 5) articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

University's Credit Hour Requirement:

“Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation / studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.”

Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of 12 hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments. This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:

Increased course content and/or collateral readings—specifically, the writing of a Dramatic Monologue as described below and which will be graded.

Assignments and Correspondence to SLO, Grading, and Due Dates:

- I. 4 poems: Italian sonnet, English sonnet, sestet stanzas, and blank verse; worth 40% of course grade (SLO 1, 2, 3, 4)
- II. 3 poems: worth 30% of course grade (SLO 1, 2, 3, 4)
- III. Lead Discussant written critique: worth 15% of course grade (SLO 1, 3)
- IV. Participation in workshop when not a Lead Discussant is worth 15% of course grade.

The three written assignments and participation comprise 100% of the course grade.

Grading:

The Department of English and Comparative Literature reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (“Grades—Letter Grading”). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. Within any of the letter grade ranges (*exempli gratia*, B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + (plus) or - (minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment. In English and Comparative Literature courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of the ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

Department Policy on Grading Written Assignments:

Grades issued will adhere to the following SJSU academic standards of assessment:

The “ ‘A’ Range ” essay will be well organized and well developed, demonstrating a clear understanding and fulfillment of the assignment. It will show the student’s ability to use language effectively and construct sentences distinguished by syntactic complexity and variety. Such essays will be essentially free of grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors.

The “ ‘B’ Range ” essay will demonstrate competence in the same categories as the “ ‘A’ Range ” essay. The chief difference is that the “ ‘B’ Range ” essay will show some slight weaknesses in one of those categories. It may slight one of the assigned tasks, show less facility of expression, or contain some minor grammatical, mechanical, or usage flaws.

The “ ‘C’ Range ” essay will complete all tasks set by the assignment, but show weakness in fundamentals (usually development), with barely enough specific information to illustrate the experience or support generalizations. The sentence construction may be less mature, and the use of language less effective and correct than the “ ‘B’ Range ” essay.

The “ ‘D’ Range ” essay will neglect one of the assigned tasks and be noticeably superficial in its treatment of the assignment—that is, too simplistic or short. The essay may reveal some problems in development, with insufficient specific information to illustrate the experience or support generalizations. It will contain grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors that render some sentences incomprehensible.

The “ ‘F’ ” essay will demonstrate a striking underdevelopment of ideas and insufficient or unfocused organization. It will contain serious grammatical, mechanical, and usage errors that render some sentences incomprehensible.

Due Dates:

- Sept. 10th: Draft of Italian Sonnet due for small group workshop.
- Sept. 24th: Draft of English Sonnet due for small group workshop.
- Oct. 08th: Draft of Sestet Stanze poem due for small group workshop.
- Oct. 22nd: Assignment I Due (4 poems)
- Dec. 10th: Assignment II Due (3 poems)
- *Lead Discussant critique (10 points) due at appropriate workshop.

All due dates are absolute. Failure to hand in an assignment on its due date will result in a lowered grade for that assignment.

Poems: Of the 7 required poems, **at least 6 must be formal** (that is, metrical and adhering to a particular lyric or narrative poetic form). The remaining poem may be in any form you choose, including free verse (nonmetrical poetry). Your workshop poem may be any of the required 7.

The 6 required formal poems must consist of the following 4 forms:

1 Italian sonnet

1 English sonnet

1 metrical poem of three stanzas minimum, each stanza a rhymed sestet

1 blank verse poem, a minimum of 20 lines

and any 2 of the following forms:

- ~ metrical sonnet variation
- ~ villanelle
- ~ ballade
- ~ metrical couplets, a minimum of 20 lines
- ~ terza rima, a minimum of 21 lines

Note: At least one of the required poems must be a dramatic monologue, and at least one must be composed in a meter other than iambic.

Free verse poems (nonmetrical) must be a minimum of 20 lines, each line at least of medium length: 35 or so characters.

Procedures:

~ For the Small Group Workshops, you must bring to class two (2) hard copies of your poem. For the Main Workshop, you must distribute your poem to the class **at least one meeting prior the date of your workshop turn.** If you fail to do so, you will lose your turn. **You must distribute hard copies to me and to your Lead Discussant; distribution via email to the rest of the class is acceptable. Hard copies are required of ALL assignments turned in to me—no email attachments!** During the main workshop segment of the course, we will discuss four or five students' poems (one by each student) every week. **Please do not ask for special treatment of any kind. In particular, do not ask to change the workshop schedule once it has been set or ask for an extension of an assignment's due date.** Workshop provides you an audience of your peers and critique aimed at improving your poetry. Please consider thoughtfully the comments, questions, and suggestions raised during the workshop sessions—and treat your classmates' poems with the same manner of care and respect that you want your poems treated.

~ In addition to workshop, we will discuss selections of poetry from the required texts. My lectures and presentations will focus on a poet's aesthetic practice (that is, a poet's particular craft or poetic technique), the how a poem was made rather than interpretation. To facilitate these discussions, please bring Lewis Turco's *The Book of Forms* with you to every class.

~ All work must be typed. Poems must be single-spaced, double-spaced between stanzas. **The form of the poem must be stated on your poem (beneath your name).** All poems must be titled.

~ All poems must be your own work (no translations), and written for this course exclusively—that is, you may not hand in any poem that you wrote for another course, per university policy.

~ Adherence to the fundamental tenets of literacy is expected. This includes the correct usage of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. **Failure to do so will result in a significant grade reduction, as per department policy stated above.** Regarding your

poetry, you must have—and be prepared to articulate—aesthetic reasons for wishing to deviate from proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

~ **Concerning attendance:** I *strongly advise* your making a friend in the class from whom you can get notes and hand-outs, should you happen to be absent, or to distribute hard copies for your workshop. **I will not conduct a private tutorial with you, either by email or during office hours, in order to replicate what you missed by not attending class. Please do not ask me to do so. However, after you have considered thoughtfully your friend’s notes, feel free to ask me specific questions should you need clarification. Further, I will not act as your secretary by distributing hard copies of your workshop poems. Do not ask me to do so or leave them in my office or mailbox for distribution.**

Some Suggestions for Poems: Remember that poetry is possibility. Ideas for poems are boundless, originating from one’s personal history, private thoughts and ideation, observations, or any combination of these—and more, of course. Following are but few suggestions for poems that might help you to get started:

~ Write an “imitation poem,” in the manner of a masterful poem. Your poem should be imitative of the master-poet’s style, rhythm, essentials of craft, and principal subject matter—as these relate to a specific poem. (The exercise isn’t as successful when you try to imitate a master-poet’s style in general.) Should you workshop an “imitation poem,” please provide a copy of the poem you have imitated along with your poem.

~ Write a poem about a particularly memorable childhood experience. Try to evoke the mood of a child while retaining an adult’s capacity for descriptive language. Mark Strand’s “Shooting Whales”—discussed in my book *Creating Another Self*—is exemplary, as is Countee Cullen’s “Incident”.

~ Write a poem about the far future and your place in it. Imagine yourself 100 years from now. What will be the circumstances? What will you be doing? Where will you be?

~ Write a “dictionary poem” in which you use—correctly—ten words previously unknown to you. In addition to a dictionary, make use of a thesaurus or synonym finder.

~ Imagine yourself as another person, maybe a member of the opposite sex, or an animal (or your relation to one, such as Galway Kinnell’s “The Bear”, also treated in *Creating Another Self*), or a mythic figure, and write a poem as that subject, in the imagined voice, to evoke a significant event in the life of that “other.” *Dramatic Monologues* is replete with examples, such as “Andrew” (p. 7), “Tantalus” (p. 100), “Pilate” (p. 117), “Lot’s Wife Looks Back” (p. 119), and “Hades Welcomes His Bride” (p. 191)—among many others.

University Policies: The following link contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc.: www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/

131-1 FALL 2018 ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

- Aug. 27, 29 Course overview.
Discussion of **meter** and the **Italian Sonnet**: Francesco Petrarca, “Canzoniera 1”; John Keats, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”; Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Sonnet 43”; Oscar Wilde, “On the Sale by Auction of Keats’ Love Letters”; Edna St. Vincent Millay, “What Lips My Lips Have Kissed, And Where, And Why”; Robert Frost, “Design”; Carrie Jerrell, “The Processional” (handout).
- Sept. 03 Labor Day (Campus Closed)
05 Discussion of the **Italian Sonnet** from *Dramatic Monologues*: Gwendolyn Brooks, “the children of the poor” (p. 26) and “gay chaps at the bar” (p. 28); Robert Daseler, “Night Fog” (p. 35), “At the Barrier” (p. 36), “14 Tamalpais Street” (p. 37), and “Shadows” (p. 38); Anthony Lombardy, “When Love Was Rome” (p. 105); Samuel Maio, “The Paintings of Arnesti Gaspári” (p. 118); Felix Stefanile, “Taking Sides with John Ciardi” (p. 208).
- 10 **Draft of Italian Sonnet due for small group workshop.**
12 Small group workshop of Italian sonnet continued.
- 17, 19 The **English Sonnet** from *Dramatic Monologues*: William Baer, “The ‘2’ Train” (p. 6) and “Eclipse” (p. 8); Rhina P. Espaillat, “On Being Accused of Optimism After Predicting Good Weather” (p. 48); A. M. Juster, “Fugitive Son” (p. 83); Gail White, “For a Senior Killed on Prom Night” (p. 247); R. S. Gwynn, “Shakespearean Sonnet” and Len Krisak, “Mark Fleiss” (handout). “English Sonnet: Definitive Components / Scansion of ‘Shakespearean Sonnet’” (handout). “Summary of Four Ways to Learn, Identify, and Write in Meter” (handout). Copied Dictionary Pages (handout).
- 24 **Draft of English Sonnet due for small group workshop.**
26 Small group workshop of English sonnet continued.

- Oct. 01 **Other Sonnet Forms and Variations** (handout): Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ozymandias” and “Ode to the West Wind”; Countee Cullen, “Yet Do I Marvel”; Weldon Kees, “For My Daughter”; Robert Frost, “Acquainted with the Night”; Edmund Spenser, “Amoretti (Sonnet 64)”.
- 03 **Dramatic Monologue** from *Dramatic Monologues*: Introduction (pp.xvii-xxiv). **Sestet Stanze** from *Dramatic Monologues*: Anthony Hecht, “The End of the Weekend” (pp. 74-75) and “Death Sauntering About” (p. 80); Samuel Maio, “Projections” (p. 114); W. D. Snodgrass, “April Inventory” (pp. 183-185) and “Looking” (p. 189); Timothy Steele, “Practice” (p. 198) and “Joseph” (pp. 203-204); Thomas Hardy, “Ah, Are You Digging On My Grave?”; Chidiok Tichborne, “Tichborne’s Elegy” (handout).
- 08 **Draft of Sestet Stanze poem due for small group workshop.**
10 Small group workshop of sestet stanze poem continued.
- 15, 17 **Blank Verse** from *Dramatic Monologues*: Jim Barnes *from* “Bombardier” (pp. 14-16); A. M. Juster, “Harapha’s Counsel to the Philistines” (pp. 81-82); David Middleton, “A Quiet Reply” (pp.153-156); Joseph S. Salemi, “Laocoön in Hades” (pp. 170-172); A. E. Stallings, “Hades Welcomes His Bride” (pp. 191-192); Felix Stefanile, “The Dance at St. Gabriel’s” (p. 205); Henry Taylor, “Breakings” (p. 209); John Updike, “Dry Spell” (pp. 222-223); Derek Walcott, “Fight with the Crew” (p. 231).
- 22 **Assignment I (4 poems) Due Monday, October 22nd.**
Villanelle from *Dramatic Monologues*: Joseph S. Salemi, “Penelope’s Postscript” (p. 173); A. E. Stallings, “Menielle” (p. 197). Dylan Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night”; Edwin Arlington Robinson, “The House on the Hill” (handout).
- 24 **Ballade** from *Dramatic Monologues*: Len Krisak, “Ballade: 1985” (p.94); François Villon, “Ballade of the Hanged Men” (handout).
- 29 **Vers Libre** from *Dramatic Monologues*: Samuel Maio, “Love Song” (pp. 112-113); Henry Taylor, “San Francesco d’Assisi: Canticle of Created Things” (pp. 216-217); Derek Walcott, “A Far Cry from Africa” (pp. 238-239); Robert Lowell, “Skunk Hour” (handout).

- 31 **Free Verse:** Mark Strand “Pot Roast” and “Shooting Whales”
(handout).
Distribution of November 5th workshop poems.
- Nov. 05 Workshop (3 students).
07 Workshop (3 students).
- 12 Veteran’s Day (Campus Closed)
14 Workshop (3 students).
- 19 Workshop (3 students).
21 Non-Instructional Day (Campus Open)
- 26 Workshop (3 students).
28 Workshop (3 students).
- Dec. 03 Workshop (3 students).
05 Workshop (3 students).
- 10 **Assignment II (3 poems) due Monday, December 10th.**