

SYLLABUS

HUMS 619-01:

Flash Fiction/Prose Poetry: An Immersive Reading and Writing Workshop

Instructor: Martine Bellen, email mbellen@wesleyan.edu

Room: DWNY 100 Time: Mon-Fri 9-5

Though flash fiction (short short stories) and prose poetry have been known to rub elbows from time to time, readers of flash fiction will tend to discuss texts in terms of character, plot, conflict, while readers of prose poetry will deliberate about sound devices, figurative language, and rhythm. In this workshop, close readings of these two genres will be conducted, investigating, side by side, how they work as a means to explore fresh avenues of entry into fiction and poetry, using the other as a springboard to more deeply navigate each genre. In the reading component of the workshop, we will learn how ordinary prose can be heightened to create extraordinary word environments for both fiction and poetry and in the creative writing component, we will apply to our writing the techniques identified in discussions about texts. All participants will be expected to write both flash fiction and prose poetry and to workshop both genres.

Texts (can be found at bookstore or ordered online):

James Thomas and Robert Shapard (editors), *FLASH FICTION FORWARD* (Norton)

Lydia Davis, *ALMOST NO MEMORY* (Picador)

David Lehman (editor), *GREAT AMERICAN PROSE POEMS* (Scribner)

Gary L. McDowell and F. Daniel Rzicznek, *THE ROSE METAL FIELD GUIDE TO PROSE POETRY* (Rose Metal Press)

Harryette Mullen, *SLEEPING WITH THE DICTIONARY* (University of California Press)

James Tate, *RETURN TO THE CITY OF WHITE DONKEYS* (Ecco)

To read before immersion class begins (during July & first week of August):

From *THE ROSE METAL PRESS FIELD GUIDE*:

P. XV-XXIV Intro—Rebellion still has its attractions

P. 19-24. Andrew Michael Roberts

P 25-30. Denise Duhamel

P 74-78. Mark Wallace

P. 104-111. Robert Miltner

P 140-145 Maureen Seaton

From scanned files:

“Cheers or How I Taught Myself to Write”—Jayne Anne Phillips

“Put Yourself in Danger”—Deb Olin Unferth (Diane Williams)

“The Monument” (excerpt) –by Mark Strand

Full books:

RETURN TO THE CITY OF WHITE DONKEYS—James Tate

SLEEPING WITH THE DICTIONARY and read the interview with Harryette Mullen by Barbara Henning
ALMOST NO MEMORY—Lydia Davis

Oral presentations: prepare a 15-minute oral presentation on the author (and his or her book/prose) that you're assigned. (See assignments below, each student has been assigned to a book. Only the student doing the oral presentation needs to read the complete book. The other students need to read the few works of that author's that have been published in one of the anthologies or have been scanned, with the exception of the 3 books assigned to the whole class, which should be read). Oral presentations should include author's bio, information about the tradition (author's influences/intentions) of the work. If possible, find an interview, or two, to better understand the author's practice. Analyze author's writing techniques and analyze, unpack the poem / story that the class has and discuss how that work fits into the entire collection that you've read. If you feel inclined to discuss another work from the book in detail that the class doesn't have a copy of, please Xerox the work to be discussed so everyone has a copy and can participate. If you have been assigned to do a presentation on Tate or Davis, you can choose the prose piece or group of up to three to discuss from the book. For Mullen, we'll work with the three poems in the Lehman anthology but you can also choose to discuss other pieces. Prepare one or two discussion questions for the class.

Final Project: Due August 23—email me 6 prose pieces (3 poetry and 3 fiction) that have been written for the class—first draft and revised drafts of two of them (one prose and one poetry) and first draft of all others.

Attendance policy: Since class lasts for only one week, no absences are permitted. If an emergency arises where you **have** to miss a partial day, please speak to me before the missed portion of the day or it will not be counted as excused and you'll fail the class.

Grades will be based on attendance and participation, writing assignments and oral presentation.

ASSIGNMENTS due on Day 1:

Read essay (scan) of Deb Olin Unferth essay on Diane Williams and Diane Williams story (bring print-out to class), RUSSELL EDSON poems in Lehman's GREAT AMERICAN PROSE POEMS anthology (bring anthology to class), RETURN TO THE CITY OF WHITE DONKEYS (bring book to class). Read in the FIELD GUIDE TO PROSE POETRY p 74-78. Mark Wallace, and p. 104-111. Robert Miltner, and p 140-145 Maureen Seaton.

Day 1

History of genres

Are there differences between them?—Pushed genres. Blurred genres.

Oral presentation—RETURN TO THE CITY OF WHITE DONKEYS, James Tate.
(Arcand, Andrew)
Oral presentation—EXCITABILITY, Diane Williams. (Bialobrzska, Jessica)
Oral presentation—THE TUNNEL, Russell Edson. (Bullock III, William C)
Critiquing your work (Imitate Tate or Williams exercises—exercise was emailed to you
before class began for you to bring to first day of class, along with 15 Xerox copies).
Write in-class writing exercise

ASSIGNMENTS for Day 2: Read SLEEPING WITH THE DICTIONARY and Harryette Mullen interview (see poems in ANTHOLOGY 254-256).

Read Carson poems (P. 215-2-16 in ANTHOLOGY).

Type up and print out copy of in-class writing exercise (bring 15 copies to class).

Bring to class a dictionary (any kind) and a newspaper (You will be using someone else's dictionary and newspaper for in-class writing exercise).

Day 2

Oulipo—Chance Operations

Oral presentation—SLEEPING WITH THE DICTIONARY, Harryette Mullen
(Fitzpatrick, Colleen)

Oral presentation—PLAINWATER, “Short Talks,” Anne Carson (McDaniel, Laura A)

In-class writing

Critique work

ASSIGNMENTS for Day 3: Read Jayne Anne Phillips (scan). Bring “wedding” photo to class). Read Charles Simic's Three Poems from THE WORLD DOESN'T END in anthology (125-126). Read ALMOST NO MEMORY, Lydia Davis. Also read “The Doctor” (146 in Flash Fiction anthology) by Ann Hood. In FIELD GUID TO PROSE POETRY read p. 19-24 Andrew Michael Roberts and P 25-30. Denise Duhamel.
Type up and print out 15 copies of yesterday's in-class writing for critiquing.

Day 3

Transforming autobiography

Oral presentation—BLACK TICKETS, Jayne Anne Phillips. (McNamara, Colin)

Oral presentation—THE WORLD DOESN'T END, Charles Simic (Melnik, Janice L.)

Oral presentation—ALMOST NO MEMORY, Lydia Davis (Michaud, Kerri)

Critique poems

In-class writing

ASSIGNMENTS for Day 4: Read Crace's “21” in flash fiction anthology (p. 137), Strand poems (scans from THE MONUMENT), Hass' poems in Lehman anthology (p 143-145).
Type up and print out 15 copies of autobiography in-class writing for critiquing.

Day 4

Book-length Projects

Oral presentations—THE DEVIL’S LARDER, Jim Crace (Nelson, Buster)

Oral presentations—THE MONUMENT, Mark Strand (Ogurick, Jessica)

Oral presentations—HUMAN WISHES, Robert Hass (Russell, Douglas F.)

Critiquing

In-class writing

ASSIGNMENT for Day 5: Read Amy Hempel’s “What Were the White Things” (p. 159 in flash fiction anthology. Read A.M. Homes’s “Things You Should Know” (p. 64 in flash fiction anthology and W.S. Merwin’s poems in Lehman anthology (p 101-102). Read “Test” by G.A. Ingersoll (p 189) in flash fiction anthology. Type up and print out 15 copies of in-class writing for critiquing.

Day 5

Narratives—Storytelling

Oral presentations—THE DOG FROM THE MARRIAGE, Amy Hempel (Samar, James)

Oral presentations—THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW (“Things You Should Know,” “The Whiz Kids,” “Raft in Water Floating,” “Please Remain Calm” are the shorter works that should be read.), A.M. Homes, (Shearer, Robyn)

Oral presentations—THE MINER’S PALE CHILDREN, W.S. Merwin (Whitehouse, Meredith)

Critiquing

In-class writing