“An artist’s life is an unconventional life. It leads away from the example of the past. It struggles painfully against its own conditioning. It appears to rebel but in reality it is an inspired way of life.”

—Agnes Martin, “Advice to Young Artists”

Course Description

In this intensive introductory course, you’ll write, read, and discuss poetry in a wide variety of forms and voices. Studying work by poets as diverse as Gwendolyn Brooks, John Donne, and Lyn Hejinian, we’ll spend the first three weeks learning the basics of poetic craft and deepening our ability to close read. Then, for the rest of the quarter, we’ll alternate between workshopping your poems and exploring in-depth a particular craft element.

My wish is for each of you to walk away less timid as artists, more open to the mystery of language and life.

Required Texts

*Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology.* 3rd Edition (Helen Vendler)
*Ariel: The Restored Edition* (Sylvia Plath)
Course Reader

Course Requirements

Quiz on Chapters 3-6 of *Poems, Poets, Poetry:* 15%
Class Participation / Presentations: 25%
Poem Revisions / Final Portfolio: 60%
Attendance and Class Participation

My attendance policies reflect the absolute importance of your physical presence in our classroom, where our nurturing, rigorous writing community meets. Each absence in excess of 2—and each tardy in excess of 3—lowers your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade. (For example, an A- becomes a B+.) 5 or more absences results in a failing grade for the course. If you are absent on your workshop day and do not arrange a substitute, your final grade will be lowered by 1/3.

Your intellectual and emotional presence in the form of class participation—being prepared, asking thought-provoking questions, answering questions, basically adding to the richness of our class—is also extremely vital. To earn full participation points, please contribute at least one substantive thing to each class discussion. In addition, I ask that electronic devices—especially cell phones but also laptops and iPads—be turned off for the duration of class. Texting during class is not acceptable. Please do not consume loud, crunchy foods (e.g. apples!) during class.

Assignments

We’ll spend nearly all class meetings discussing readings, whether from Vendler’s book, our Course Reader, or your poetry.

Write as much as you’d like and continue revising poems throughout the quarter. Those revisions are the basis of your portfolio. I’m always glad to comment on the poems that weren’t discussed in class, but please only show me work written during our quarter together. Your enthusiasm can only deepen your growth—and improve your class performance. If you’d like me to comment on work not discussed during workshop, please come to office hours, and we can chat—I’m more than happy to meet with you.

At least 48 hours before a poem of yours is being workshopped, you’ll email your poem to all of us. Be sure to come to class having printed out the poems, read them deeply, and written comments on them, which you’ll end up handing back to each of the respective poets. Failure to do this will negatively impact your grade. Please make logical and financial arrangements for printing – “the printer is not working” is not a valid excuse. At the end of class, I will periodically spot-check your comments.

You’re required to attend three poetry readings, though I encourage you to attend as many University-sponsored readings as possible. You’ll almost always see me in the audience. Check the Creative Writing Program website (http://creativewriting.stanford.edu/event-list) and “like” Stanford Creative Writing on Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/stanfordcw) for up-to-date information.

Mid-quarter I’ll meet individually with you in a required conference to discuss your poems and overall development. Again, throughout the quarter I’m happy to meet with you during my office hours or at another mutually agreeable time.
Please do not discard any completed assignments with my feedback on them. At quarter’s end, by 11:59 PM on December 12th, you’ll email me your final portfolio as a **single PDF file** that includes: the final versions of your poems; all drafts/revisions (including the scanned drafts with my comments on them); and an extended letter of at least 1000 words assessing your revision choices, tracking your growth as a writer during the quarter, envisioning future writing possibilities, and summarizing your experiences (using specific details!) at the three readings. If you’d like to get specific feedback on your portfolio, at the end of the quarter please make an appointment to meet with me in the Winter.

**Students with Documented Disabilities**

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (723-1066 / [http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae](http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae)).

**Honor Code**

The Honor Code is the University’s statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work.

The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2. that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

All work must adhere to the University’s policies on academic integrity. Failure to cite work that is not your own constitutes plagiarism.
SCHEDULE

Week 1  September 22: Defining Poetry: “I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all / this fiddle.” (Marianne Moore) Discussion of poems by Shakespeare, Whitman, and Kiki Petrosino, and a excerpt from Jean Toomer’s Cane.

[Read Ch. 3 of Vendler, paying special attention to Gwendolyn Brooks’ “We Real Cool,” D. H. Lawrence’s “Snake,” Frost’s “After Apple Picking,” and Theodore Roethke’s “My Papa’s Waltz.” Write a nine-line poem that responds to an arresting image, phrase, or argument found in one of the poems that you encountered in Ch. 3.]

September 24: Prosody

[Read Ch. 4 of Vendler, paying special attention to “Ode to a Nightingale,” Matthew Arnold’s “Dover Beach,” and Jorie Graham’s “San Sepulcro.” Continue writing as your inspiration guides you.]  

Week 2  September 29: Speech Acts

[Read Ch. 5 of Vendler, paying special attention to Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess,” Lorna Dee Cervantes’ “Poema para los Californios Muertos,” and John Keats’ “To Autumn.” Write a travel poem or a nocturne using rhymed tercets in iambic pentameter OR in the form of a Shakespearean sonnet. With the former option, you can devise your own rhyme scheme.]

October 1: In-Class Writing Day

Week 3  October 6: Words

[Read Ch. 6 of Vendler, paying special attention to Whitman’s “I Saw in Louisaia a Live-Oak Growing” and Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” Write a sestina.]  

October 8: Self & Voice

Quiz on the terminology and concepts of Ch. 3-6.
[Write a highly imagistic epistolary poem in a voice other than your own. See Pound’s “The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter” on p. 145 in Vendler.]

Week 4  
October 13: “Experimental” Poetry / WORKSHOP  
October 15: WORKSHOP

Week 5  
October 20: The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop / WORKSHOP  
October 22: WORKSHOP

[Midterm conferences will be held this week.]

Week 6  
October 27: Syntax / WORKSHOP  
October 29: WORKSHOP

Week 7  
November 5: WORKSHOP

Week 8  
November 10: WORKSHOP  
November 12: Ekphrastic Poetry and Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (Class meets at 1:20 PM at Rodin’s Gates of Hell outside the Cantor Center for the Visual Arts)

Week 9  
November 17: WORKSHOP  
November 19: Sonnets / WORKSHOP

Week 10  
November 24: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)  
November 26: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)

Week 10  
December 1: “The Glass Essay” (Anne Carson)  
December 3: WORKSHOP / Goodbyes

YOUR FINAL PORTFOLIO—EMAIL TO ME AS A SINGLE PDF FILE—IS DUE BY 11:59 PM ON FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12