

English 618

Mary Ann Samyn, Spring 2008, English 618

English 618: Poetry Workshop Spring 2008: Tuesdays, 7-9:50 pm G10 Colson Hall: *isn't this exciting?*

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Course Description This time around, we'll focus on recent first books, which includes, of course and among other things, the influence of teachers, a consideration of contests/presses, and an examination of brilliance, shortcomings, and brilliant shortcomings.

Texts (listed alphabetically, which is the order we'll read them too) Chiasson, Dan. *The Afterlife of Objects*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002.

Fisher, Jessica. *Frail Craft*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007.

Hairston, Alena. *The Logan Topographies*. New York: Persea, 2007.

Lamers, Sara. *A City Without Trees*. Greensboro: March Street, 2007.

Olstein, Lisa. *Radio Crackling, Radio Gone*. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon, 2006.

Peterson, Katie. *This One Tree*. Kalamazoo: New Issues, 2006.

Schomburg, Zachery. *The Man Suit*. Boston: Black Ocean, 2007.

Assignments/Expectations Because I believe that reading poetry, writing poems, and writing about poems and poetry are all intertwined and equally valuable—all part of getting to your own best work—this is what we'll do. As you may know, I like lots of different kinds of responses, so:

- Two Point of Craft Responses: in response to any two books we'll be reading: a page (single-spaced), in which you discuss some particular issue of craft—line, metaphor, page space, etc.—as seen in one of the texts.
- One Trajectory Response: in response to one book (and, obviously, not a book you're dealing with in any other response): again, a page response in which you trace a book's poetic forebears. This might mean teachers and/or other members of a writer's family tree as evidenced in the work at hand. More info on this in class.
- One Reading Essay: a longer piece (again, on a book/poem/poet not already dealt with): a la George Saunders' essay re: Donald Barthelme's "The School." Copies forthcoming. In this essay you read like a writer and show us how that's done and how the writer you're

discussing might have come to create the final product we have before us. Basically, this kind of essay traces your reading-as-a-writer experience.

- Presentation of this longer reading essay: a general read-/talk-through of the essay.
- Contributions to discussion and to any other information-gathering scheme I might devise as we go along. Some specific attention to book structure and where to send manuscripts would seem helpful, too.
- Some final thing, yet to be determined.

Basically, then, four responses (to four different books/poets)—though you'll want and need to be prepared to discuss all of the reading.

Of course you're also responsible for writing poems. Ten is always a good goal, though if you're working on your thesis, you're welcome to bring more/less/more at once/sections of the thesis/revisions. If you're not working on your thesis, new poems will be best.

Evaluation Workshop is just the best, isn't it? Well, we hope so, anyway. You'll be evaluated on your prose, your poetry, and your overall contributions to creating a supportive atmosphere for the study of the craft of writing.

Attendance Policy I take attendance seriously, don't you? You should let me know, ahead of time, if you must, for some unavoidable reason, be absent. I do grade down for absences and tardiness. We only meet once a week. Be there, on time, ready to participate.

Social Justice WVU is committed to social justice, as am I. That means you can expect a learning environment that is constructive, based on mutual respect and non-discrimination. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Questions? Ask me. And of course I encourage you to come to my office, or email me, to discuss your work, publication, teaching, anything. That said, I also encourage you to visit the Carruth Center if you're having difficulties that go beyond the scope of my abilities. Figuring out how to write is good; figuring out how to live is better, and crucial.

- And now, a thought that might help us in workshop:

From Notes on Directing by Frank Hauser and Russell Reich:

1. Introduce bad news with “and” not “but.”

Do: “The costume looks great, and when you keep your hat up, we can see your gorgeous face.”

Don’t: “The costume looks great, but you’re not keeping your hat up, and we can’t see your face.” (47)

Let’s see what we can do with that.

Weekly Schedule

Week 1: January 15 Course introduction, etc. First & Last Lines exercise; When Good Advice Goes Bad exercise

Week 2: January 22 Workshop begins and continues weekly...

- Thursday, January 24: Lynn Emanuel reading, 7:30, Robinson Reading Room

Week 3: January 29 Discussion of Dan Chiasson’s The Afterlife of Objects Responses begin...

Week 4: February 5 Workshop/Discussion of Jessica Fisher’s Frail Craft

- Monday, February 11: Love & Other Dislocations reading, 7:30, Blue Moose

Week 5: February 12 Workshop

Week 6: February 19 Workshop/Discussion of Alena Hairston’s The Logan Topographies

Week 7: February 26 Workshop/Discussion of Sara Lamers’ A City Without Trees

Week 8: March 4 Workshop

Week 9: March 11 Workshop/Discussion of Lisa Olstein’s Radio Crackling, Radio Gone

- Thursday, March 13: Gail Adams reading, 7:30, Gold Ballroom
- Friday, March 14: Writing Contest deadline
- Saturday, March 15: Graduate Student Colloquium, Mountainlair

Week 10: March 18 Workshop/Discussion of Katie Peterson’s This One Tree

- Spring Break

Week 11: April 1 Workshop/Discussion of Zachery Schomburg's The Man Suit

Week 12: April 8 Workshop

Week 13: April 15 Workshop

Week 14: April 22 Workshop Reading Essays due: presentations

- Wednesday, April 23: English department awards luncheon, 11:30, Blue Ballroom*
- Thursday, April 24: Calliope reading, 7:30, Shenandoah Room*

Week 15: April 29 Final workshop Finish Craft Essay presentations

- Thursday, May 1: MFA reading, 7:30, Gold Ballroom*

Final Something (more info forthcoming): due Thursday, May 1, by noon in my mailbox.