Course Title: The Apprenticeship: Taking Inspiration from Ten Masterpiece Poems

Course Code: POET 24 W

Instructor: Greg Wrenn

“I saw a striped snake run into the water, and he lay on the bottom, apparently without inconvenience, as long as I stayed there.... It appeared to me that for a like reason men remain in their present low and primitive condition; but if they should feel the influence of the spring of springs arousing them, they would of necessity rise to a higher and more ethereal life. I had previously seen the snakes in frosty mornings in my path with portions of their bodies still numb and inflexible, waiting for the sun to thaw them.”

—Henry David Thoreau, Walden

Course Summary:
Please see course page for full description and additional details.

Grade Options and Requirements:

• No Grade Requested (NGR)
  o This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.

• Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  o Score will be determined by student participation.

• Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  o Written work, as assigned by the instructor, will determine a student’s grade.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.

Grade Breakdown

Posting of Poems: 50%
Posting of Feedback: 25%
Discussion Participation: 25%
There will be ten distinct poem assignments during the quarter. To earn full credit, you must submit to seven (7) of the workshops; in other words, you can opt out of submitting your work three (3) times. I will offer you extended feedback on four (4) of your poems; for the others I’ll offer you brief, targeted advice for improving your work.

Workshop

By Wednesday at 11:00 AM PST of each week each student will upload a poem to the forum, though you are encouraged to do this sooner. Every writing assignment will have a core question to reflect on as you offer feedback on the various poems. In addition, I’ll be moderating our discussion, posting comments on poems as they appear. A paragraph of specific feedback from you should suffice for each poem.

Chat / Office Hours

On Wednesdays at 12:00 PM PST I will hold a live chat discussion session, via Zoom (a video conferencing platform), which is optional and recorded in case you cannot attend. It’s an opportunity for me to answer any of your questions and to broaden our forum discussion for the week. It is our live virtual writing community, so your engaged, constructive, spirited presence is most welcome. If you can’t come, you may also email me questions beforehand that I can address during the Zoom session, so that you can see me answer them on the video.

I will be offering optional one-on-one conferences in the last month of the course.

Required Texts

*Poems, Poets, Poetry*
Helen Vendler
ISBN-10: 0312463197
http://www.amazon.com/Poems-Poets-Poetry-Introduction-Anthology/dp/0312463197/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1413157732&sr=8-1&keywords=poems+poet+poetry
Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week 1: Introduction / “Poems as Pleasure”  
*Robert Hayden, “Those Winter Sundays”*

Writing Assignment: Write a poem of fourteen lines about one of your parents or caregivers from childhood. The poem should attempt to visually resemble “Those Winter Sundays,” with approximately the same beats per line and the same stanza lengths and stanza breaks. Be sure to choose your own unifying (but not too unifying!) consonant sound, just as the consonant K sound is “a melodic map” for Hayden’s poem.


Week 2: “Describing Poems” / Poetry Workshop  
*Walt Whitman, “A Noiseless, Patient Spider”*

Writing Assignment: Write a binary poem (i.e. in two stanzas) of ten lines.

• In the first stanza, suggesting at least “the germ of a story,” describe an experience with an animal or plant in the natural world. Be sure to use specific, vivid details from the senses!

• In the second stanza, offer us some meditation on that living thing—what does it mean to the speaker? Perhaps the speaker will partially reject the living thing as an appropriate metaphor for the self, as Whitman does in “I Saw in Louisiana a Live-Oak Growing” (p. 199), another nature poem about loneliness.

• In order to practice traditional meter, please write your poem first in free verse and then as ten lines of blank verse (i.e. unrhymed iambic pentameter).


Week 3: “The Play of Language” / Poetry Workshop  
*“Nineteen,” Elizabeth Alexander*

Writing Assignment: Write a free verse poem of memory in the past tense, with a strong rhythmic sense to it. An age (e.g. “Ten”) should be its title, and it
should contain three stanzas of eight lines, for a total of 24 lines. Use
assonance, alliteration, consonance, and internal rhyme each at least once,
indicating below the poem where each has been employed. Pay special
attention to word connotations and ordering.

Reading Assignment: Elizabeth Alexander, “Nineteen”; Chapter 5 of PPP; John
Donne, Holy Sonnet 14; Lorna Dee Cervantes, “Poema para los Californios
Muertos”; Robert Browning, “My Last Duchess”; Joy Harjo, “Song for the Deer
and Myself to Return On”

**Week 4: “Constructing a Self” / Poetry Workshop**

*“Mending Wall” by Robert Frost*

Writing Assignment: Choose a speaker other than yourself and write a dramatic
monologue, what Vendler paradoxically calls “a self-protective public speech
and an unconsciously self-revealing document” in that voice. In 25 lines or
less, try to create a self using the list included in the lecture. Have the
speaker point out various objects in his vicinity in order to create a sense of
time and space, for example. (The Duke of Ferrara does this in “My Last
Duchess” by pointing out both the painting of the woman he had killed and the
sculpture of Poseidon riding a seahorse.)

Reading Assignment: Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”; Chapter 6 of PPP, Adrienne
Rich, “Diving into the Wreck”; Victoria Chang, “$4.99 All You Can Eat Sunday
Brunch”; George Herbert, “The Collar”; Henri Cole, “Carwash”; Eduardo
Corral, “Monologue of a Vulture’s Shadow”

**Week 5: “Poetry and Social Identity” / Poetry Workshop**

*Adrienne Rich, “Transcendental Etude”*

Writing Assignment: Write a poetic response to “Transcendental Etude” in any
form. Your poem is not necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with Rich’s politics
or vision—instead ask yourself what poem rises up in you as read and reread
Rich’s long meditation and think about your own social identity.

Reading Assignment: Adrienne Rich, “Transcendental Etude”; Chapter 7 of PPP;
Sheila Ortiz Taylor, “The Way Back”; Seamus Heaney, Terminus”; Sylvia Plath,
“The Applicant”; Rita Dove, “Wingfoot Lake”

**Week 6: History and Regionality / Poetry Workshop**

“For the Union Dead,” Robert Lowell
Writing Assignment: Think of some historical event or trend and have your lyric speaker engage it in some way. You could imagine your speaker in front of an historical monument, as Lowell’s speaker is, or standing before an artifact, as in Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” Or you might simply imagine your speaker experiencing that historical event (e.g. the speaker imagines their grandfather watching the first moon landing in his Montana living room) or an imaginary history event (as in Jorie Graham’s “What the End is For.” The poem should be no longer than 30 lines.


**Week 7: The Power of Syntax / Poetry Workshop**

*Carl Phillips, “As from a Quiver of Arrows”*

Writing Assignment: Taking “As from a Quiver of Arrows” as syntactical inspiration, write a poem—of no more than 40 lines—consisting solely of questions. That is the only restriction. Think especially about whom you are addressing and why.


**Week 8: “Attitudes, Values, Judgments” / Poetry Workshop**

*“Mock Orange,” Louise Gluck*

Writing Assignment: Please write a lyric poem of no more than 30 lines—no restrictions other than that!

Reading Assignment: “Mock Orange,” Louise Glück; Chapter 9 of PPP; William Shakespeare, Sonnet 60; William Blake, “The Tyger”; Eavan Boland, “The Room In Which My First Child Slept”; Allen Ginsberg, “Sunflower Sutra”

**Week 9: ‘The Poem as Life” / Poetry Workshop**

*Sylvia Plath, “Daddy”*

Writing Assignment: Please write a lyric poem of no more than 30 lines—no restrictions other than that!
Reading Assignment: “Daddy,” Sylvia Plath; Chapter 1 of PPP; Julia Alvarez, “Homecoming”; Emily Dickinson, “A narrow Fellow in the Grass”; John Keats, “When I have fears that I may cease to be”; Walt Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”; Katie Ford, “Colosseum”

**Week 10: ‘The Poem as Arranged Life’ / Poetry Workshop**

*Elizabeth Bishop, “One Art”*

Writing Assignment: Please write a lyric poem of no more 30 lines—no restrictions other than that!