

Prof. Carol Ann Johnston
East College 410; x1268
Office Hours: M 11:30-1/Th 3-4:30

English 319: Advanced Creative Writing–Poetry; Fall 2016

Required texts:

Purchase at Whistlestop Books:

Kazim Ali. *Bright Felon: Autobiography and Cities*. ISBN 978-0-819-52-7276-9

Purchase at the College Bookstore:

Sara Dunn, Ed. *Poetry for the Earth*. ISBN 978-0-449-90599-9

Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura (The Nature of Things)*. A.E. Stallings, translator.

ISBN 978-0-14-139690-3

Davis McCombs. *Dismal Rock*. ISBN 978-1-932195-48-4

Octavia Wynne. *Poetic Meter and Form*. ISBN 978-1-63287-444-4

In this course, we will approach poetry through the idea, broadly construed, of sustainability. Reading, writing, and teaching poetry always have participated in sustainability. As readers, writers, and teachers, we invest our time, thought, and effort in passing on and refreshing a the genre of poetry, one that we find necessary to sustain us and that we wish, in turn, to sustain. The correlation between poetry and sustainability holds for poetry and the world as well. Many of the most memorable poems address our relationship to the world and how it sustains us. More recently, poets' meditations upon how we can sustain the world that sustains us have intensified. Our reading and writing will explore these subjects in depth.

Requirements:

- Complete interviews for Carlisle Heart and Soul Project, Sept. 10 ([sign up](#))
- Attend Elizabeth Kolbert Lecture, 7:00 p.m., Sept. 20
- Attend Kazim Ali Reading, 7:30 p.m., Oct. 6
- Attend Field trips to places of local interest, during class time
- Submit all drafts, notes, and essays on time
- Turn in a final portfolio

Grading:

“A” work will meet these requirements:

–**Serious and imaginative** approaches to the writing assignments, drafts, and reports. **All** assignments completed and submitted **on time**. **For the workshop to be effective, poems and comments must be done on time**. We will not discuss late poems, nor will credit be given for them. **Written commentary on peer poems must be done on time to receive credit**. **All poems and commentaries must be done (even if late) in order for you to pass the class**. If you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and posting required work on Moodle. Electronic snafus are your responsibility. The helpdesk at x1000 can answer most questions.—25%

–**Clear evidence** of preparation for each workshop's discussion of assigned readings and of student poems. I expect you to be ready with verbal and written comments on your peers' work. Your attendance and participation, especially thoughtful responses to peers' poems—are the main ingredient of the course. Thoughtful critiques by peers are essential to the success of the workshop experience—30%

--**Growth.** How you respond to critiques and work on revision.—20%

--A **final portfolio** that shows thoughtful revision and organization—25%

Attending all workshops is essential. Since this class meets only once a week, missing class is especially hurtful to you, both in terms of your progress and in terms of my evaluation of you.

Poems are due by 5:00 p.m., Monday, before the Wednesday they are to be work-shopped. In order to submit these poems, use Moodle's submission of assignments feature. For each assignment, I will post a new forum window. To submit your poem, access this window, and then post your poem as an attachment (MS WORD). _ You are responsible for any technical snafus. Late poems will receive no commentary.

Written critiques of your classmates' work. Post your comments on drafts to Moodle **by 5:00 p.m. Tuesday** before Wednesday's class. Each of you will write weekly critiques on each of your classmates' poems using the MS WORD comment feature. Insert suggestions within the poem and write a summary paragraph at the end, giving your overall thoughts. Remember to keep personal copies (electronic or hard) of all written documents for your own use. Guidelines for writing critiques are at the end of this syllabus. Bring your critiques to class for distribution and discussion.

Schedule

The nature of the writing assignments may evolve as the needs and desires of the class become clear. You must turn in all assignments by the end of classes in order to pass the class.

Read the poems assigned by professional poets multiple times. **Listen** to them being read, if possible. Poets.org often posts a recording with the textual version. **Be prepared** to discuss all aspects of prosody with each assigned poem. Your understanding the plot of the poem is essential. **Know everything** you can about each poem. **Look up** the author. **Look up** words you don't know. You have access to the greatest dictionary in the world, the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Use it early and often.

August 31— **How to sustain poetry: Imitations and parodies; Passing texts forward. Your writing and the future of English.**

Introduction to course. Defining sustainability.

Workshop: *Ars Poetica*. Discussion of imitation poems.

Reading:

Ars Poetica:

["Why I Write"](#)—Reginald Shepherd.

["Artistic Statement"](#)—Denise Duhamel

Essay:

"What we have loved, others will love" -Helen Vendler (Moodle)

Poems:

["The Passionate Shepherd to His Love"](#)—Christopher Marlowe

["The Nymph's Reply"](#)—Sir Walter Raleigh

["The Bait"](#)—John Donne

["Come, live with me and be my love"](#)—C. Day Lewis

[“The Armadillo”](#)—Elizabeth Bishop
[“Skunk Hour”](#)—Robert Lowell
[“This is Just to Say”](#)—William Carlos Williams
[“Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams”](#)—Kenneth Koch

Writing: Post on Moodle (Sept. 5 by 5:00) a poem you love enough to imitate, with a draft of that imitation.

September 7—How Poems Sustain Us: Formal Elements of Sound

Workshop: Imitation Poems

Reading:

Wynne—pp. 1-30.

[Genesis 1-3](#), *King James Bible*

[“The Lake Isle of Innisfree”](#)—William Butler Yeats

[“Song”](#)—Seamus Heaney

[“How They Brought the Good News From Ghent to Aix”](#)—Robert Browning

[“Devouring Time, Blunt Thou the Lion’s Paws”](#)—William Shakespeare

Writing: Post on Moodle (Sept. 12 by 5:00) a poem that incorporates at least three sound elements that we have discussed.

September 10—Carlisle Heart and Soul project: collect interviews.

September 14— Poems about Place sustain us: Writing and Habitat. Place/Space reflect action/thinking

Workshop: Sound poems

Reading:

Essay:

“The Beholding Eye”—D. W. Meinig (Moodle)

Poems:

[“Birches”](#)—Robert Frost

[“Digging”](#)—Seamus Heaney

“Dream Variation”—Langston Hughes (Dunn 5)

[“London’s Summer Morning”](#)—Mary Robinson

[“Love Poem”](#)—Leslie Silko

“Spring in the Lowlands”—Denise Levertov (Dunn 13)

“Dispossessed”—Janice Gould (Dunn 34)

“The Tropics in New York”—Claude McKay (Dunn 41)

Writing—take a breath and revise a poem based upon notes and class discussion.

September 20: Elizabeth Kolbert Lecture

September 21—Can we save ourselves?

Workshop: Fieldtrip!

Reading: Selections from Elizabeth Kolbert

[“The Seige of Miami”](#)

[“Stone Soup”](#)

[“Is it too Late to Prepare for Climate Change?”](#)

[“Lines in the Sand”](#)

[“Dry Spell”](#)

Historical Documents about our surroundings (Moodle)

Writing: Post on Moodle (Sept. 26 by 5:00) a poem about a place that you would want preserved from change if bulldozers were roaming the earth (which they are). Your examples are above from Sept. 14. Think about how each poet uses habitat. Place and space reflect modes of action and thinking. Write not only in an evocative sense about the place (appeal to the senses is the only way to write well), but also include the abstract idea that you connect with the place. But convey the idea through the senses. “Ideas, but in things,” says W.C. Williams.

September 28— **We have traveled widely in Carlisle**

Workshop: Habitat Poems

Reading:

“This is Why I Sent You to Carlisle”: Carlisle Poetry and the Demands of Americanization Poetics and Politics.” *American Indian Quarterly*, Winter/Spring 2013, Vol. 37, Issue ½, p. 34. (Moodle)

“So Which is the Truth”—Molly Holden (Dunn 122)

“Inner”—Liz Lochhead (Dunn 123)

“Carlisle, Pennsylvania”—Adrienne Su (Moodle)

[“Turtle,”](#) Kay Ryan

Description of Carlisle—Marianne Moore letters (Moodle)

Rural Poems: Moral and Descriptive—John Hayes: call #1805 H417r

Poems on Various Subjects—Isabella Oliver: call #811 O48

(Examine each volume in the college archive. Choose two passages to copy and bring to class).

Writing: Post on Moodle by October 3 at 5:00. Using what you have learned about habitat and sustaining ourselves, write a poem based in a local Carlisle location. Move beyond personal knowledge, but know that developing intimacy and communication of intimacy helps to sustain your place.

October 5—**Writing about Life and Carlisle: Kazim Ali to Class**

Workshop: Carlisle poems

Reading:

Bright Felon: Autobiography and Cities

Writing: Post on Moodle by October 10 at 5:00 an imitation or a response to a poem in *Bright Felon*. Use your own “coming of age” experience and set the poem in Carlisle. Notice that the poems are “prose poems” and follow that form in your response.

October 6—Kazim Ali Reading, 7:30

October 12—**Precise Observation**

Workshop: Ali imitations

Reading: Bring Wynne

[“The Fish”](#)—Elizabeth Bishop

[“At the Fishhouses”](#)—Elizabeth Bishop

from “Scottish Scene”—Hugh MacDiarmid (Dunn 7)

“Morning Sea”—C. P. Cavafy (Dunn 154)

[“The Oven Bird”](#)—Robert Frost

[“All’s All”](#)—A.R. Ammons

De Rerum Natura, from Book 1

Writing: Post on Moodle by October 17 at 5:00. Return to your location for your Carlisle poem. Write a second poem that incorporates the kind of precise observation in the reading. Remember that precise details need to evoke feelings. Detail for the sake of detail will not achieve an emotional response. *Write in one of the forms from Wynne*

October 19—**Stories people tell us**

Workshop: Carlisle poem

Reading: Transcriptions from your Heart and Soul interviews

Davis McCombs: *Dismal Rock*

Writing: Post on Moodle by October 26 at 5:00. Using your Heart and Soul Interviews, convey the story from the interview in a poem.

October 26—**Looking Outward to Look Inward**

Workshop: Heart and Soul Poems

Reading:

[“A Noiseless Patient Spider”](#) – Walt Whitman

[“Acquainted with the Night”](#) –Robert Frost

[“Wild Geese”](#) – Mary Oliver

[“Dover Beach”](#)—Matthew Arnold

[“The Bear”](#) – Galway Kinnell

Writing: Post on Moodle by October 31 at 5:00. Use a figure from nature and write an allegory—a story based upon that natural element that symbolizes a larger thematic concern.

November 2—**Part of Nature, Part of Us**

Workshop: Natural Allegory Poems

Reading:

Essay: Vendler “Elizabeth Bishop: Domestication, Domesticity and the Otherworldly” (Moodle).

Poems: “The Garden”—‘Abd Allah ibn al-Simak (Dunn 11)

[“The Bog Queen”](#)—Seamus Heaney

[“Elegy XIX”](#)—John Donne

[“Composed Upon Westminster Bridge”](#)—William Wordsworth (Dunn 23)

“Temps Perdu”—Dorothy Parker (Dunn 32)

[“Study of History”](#)—Adrienne Rich

“Connections”—Rose Flint (Dunn 129)

“As Imperceptibly as Grief”—Emily Dickinson (Dunn 166)

November 9—Separating Ourselves from the World/ Separating Ourselves from Ourselves

Workshop: Catch up

Reading:

Essay: Berry, “What are People For” (Moodle)

Poems:

[“The Anecdote of the Jar”](#)—Wallace Stevens

“I Go from the Woods”—Wendell Berry (Dunn 56)

“Alone in the Woods”—Stevie Smith (Dunn 57)

“The Trees are Down”—Charlotte Mew (Dunn 58)

“Domus Caedet Arborem”—Charlotte Mew (Dunn 196)

“The Mower Against Gardens”—Andrew Marvell (Dunn 63-64)

[“The Flower”](#)—George Herbert

“Sheltered Garden”—H. D. (Dunn 65)

“Advice”—Czeslaw Milosz (Dunn 138)

Writing: Post on Moodle on November 16 by 5:00. Think about a dystopian situation you have observed. Revisit that, and write a poem that captures the dystopia. You may express anger, regret, sadness, and redemption—any of these in the emotional logical that you devise for the poem. Revisit the examples from the reading.

November 16—Nature and Desire

Workshop: Dystopian Poems

Reading:

[“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day”](#)—William Shakespeare

[“Last Night”](#)—Sharon Olds

[“The Ecstasie”](#)—John Donne

[“The Shampoo”](#)—Elizabeth Bishop

[“Litany”](#)—Billy Collins

Writing: Post on Moodle on November 28 by 5:00. Write a poem based upon a natural element that captures the emotion of love. Avoid sentiment & bathos.

Thanksgiving Break, November 23

November 30 –Form and function: Is print sustainable; is digital writing sustainable?

Readings TBA

Visit to Thomas-Printers in Carlisle, PA

Writing: Post on Moodle by 5:00. Take one of the poems from the term and revise it based upon the revision handout posted on Moodle.

December 7—Revision Session

Reading: Revision examples from Heaney, Bishop & others.

You are welcome to discuss revisions with me at any time. I’ll schedule revision conferences for everyone at mid-term.

You will grow as a poet if you read widely in contemporary poetry in addition to the reading assigned for class. Poets carry on a dialogue with one another through their work; you will want to find that place where you may enter into the conversation. You will want to familiarize yourself with various journals where poets whom you like are published. When you open a book of poems, places where poems first found publication appear as a list. **American Poetry Review** is a good place to start. When you find poems that interest you, bring them to class.

Office Hours: My office hours are for you. Consider them an extension of class: we discuss your reading and writing questions, your questions about the class, about literature and the world, about your future, about other courses to take, and any other questions that I am qualified to discuss. Do drop in.

Email: I will respond to your emails within twenty-four to thirty-six hours. If I do not, email me again; your message may be lost or misdirected. (Make certain to use your college account so that you won't be the victim of an email filter). I won't necessarily address every issue in your email within that time frame. If you have a complex question, it will be best for you to see me in office hours so that we can exchange ideas. In general, email is a tricky medium; I advise everyone to send email as if you were addressing your boss or potential boss, and as if it will be available for all to read like skywriting. This will help you to prepare for the outside world and will keep embarrassment and regret to a minimum, always a good goal!

Accommodating Students with Disabilities

Dickinson College makes reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students requesting accommodations must make their request and provide appropriate documentation to the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in Dana Hall, Suite 106. Because classes change every semester, eligible students must obtain a new accommodation letter from Director Marni Jones every semester and review this letter with their professors so the accommodations can be implemented. The Director of ODS is available by appointment to answer questions and discuss any implementation issues you may have. ODS proctoring is managed by Susan Frommer (717-254-8107 or proctoring@dickinson.edu). Address general inquiries to 717-245-1734 or e-mail disabilityservices@dickinson.edu. For more information, go to www.dickinson.edu/ODS.

Plagiarism (also known as intellectual theft) and **cheating** devastate your college career.

The Dickinson College Plagiarism Policy:

- To plagiarize is to use without proper citation or acknowledgment the words, ideas or original research of another.
- Whenever one relies on someone else for phraseology, even for only two or three words, one must acknowledge indebtedness by using quotation marks and giving the source, either in the text or in a footnote.
- When one borrows facts which are not matters of general knowledge—including all statistics—one must indicate one's indebtedness in the text or footnote.
- When one borrows an idea or the logic of an argument, one must acknowledge indebtedness either in a footnote or in the text.

Most plagiarism is unintentional, the result of ignorance or inaccurate note taking. Your paper, however, cannot be evaluated by guesses about your intention; it can only be evaluated as it exists. Whether the plagiarism is intentional or inadvertent, the penalty is severe.

Poet Molly Fisk offers the following advice on writing critiques of workshop poems:

Dear Fearless Poets,

My philosophy of giving feedback on poems is that kindness is crucial, and so is honesty you can be opinionated about your own taste, but be sure to couch it in what you think is best for the poet, not what you would write if you were rewriting the poem.

I want you to focus on what you like about the poem, and say that first, and then on what is confusing about it. If nothing is confusing to you but you think the poem could go in some different directions, say that too. Please be careful of each other. These are all our babies, these poems, first drafts produced under pressure, and I want everyone to be safe. At the same time, I want real comments and not pablum. I know this can be done, because we've done it before. It just takes care.

In past classes there has been some grumbling because some critiques seem to go on forever and others seem cursory at best, so here are my guidelines about it: I want you to spend at least half an hour doing your critique, and no more than 45 minutes.

Read the poem three or four times, out loud if you can. If you aren't used to critiquing others or don't have an immediate first impression of what to say, look at the elements of the poem:

How do you feel about the words in it? Strong? Memorable? Helping the poem with its point?

Good metaphors and similes? Any? Would it help to have some to clarify the meaning or expand on it? Are any of them going off against the grain of the poem?

How's the pace of the poem, the momentum -- does it seem to flow or is it balky, and if it's balky, does that fit with the subject matter or is it interrupting your experience of reading the poem?

Do you like the voice in the poem, do you believe it? Want to follow it anywhere? Is there more than one voice? Should there be?

Can you hear a rhythm, is that an important component of the poem?

What about the ideas, are they interesting? Is the subject matter something you can relate to?

There are many more things to say about a poem, but why don't you start there if you're feeling blank and see how it goes.

Remember, say all the good things first, and then put what you are concerned about into a framework of how it makes the poem confusing.

Your watchword should be kindness as you help a serious poet just like yourself realize the best in his or her poem.

One more caveat: Some poets in the past have rewritten the poems they were assigned to critique, and since I find that hard to take personally I want you not to do that without the express permission of the poet. Rewriting like that is a kind of shorthand to describe how to change a poem, and I want you to think harder about why you would rewrite it that way and then express your opinion in sentences. **AFTER** that, you can send a rewritten line or two as an example of what you mean, or with the poet's permission, you can rewrite the whole poem that way. But just to do a rewrite is kind of cheating the poet out of the thinking behind your changes (and if you don't know what the thinking is, that's even worse--you'll learn a lot by making yourself figure it out).

This all sounds like tons of work, but it isn't. You'll get the hang of it quickly, from being critiqued by me and your other readers every week, and by practicing. You'll learn a whole bunch, too, which is half the fun of workshop.