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ENGL 329: THE POETICS OF PERFORMANCE
(Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:00-11:20am)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Poetry is not merely a written form; it is an oral art and a prompt to performance. Students in this course will learn to use “close listening,” as well as the embodied experience of performing poetry themselves, in order to access poetic meanings that are unavailable through silent reading alone. Students will also experiment with how to write about poetry as an experiential, multi-sensory art.

On seminar days, I will bring specimen poems for us to dissect and anatomize with the tools gained from our secondary readings. On rehearsal and performance days, you will breathe life into your own repertoire of poems. All of the assignments ask you, in some measure, to combine embodied and analytic approaches to poetry. No prior performance experience is required.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide* (1999) (available at Amherst Books)
Course Packet (available in Johnson Chapel #001; required by Sept. 11)

COURSE FORMAT & REQUIREMENTS:

Class meetings: Sometimes this will look like any other seminar: we will sit around dissecting and discussing what we have read for the day, or else we will use what we have read to approach poems or audio-recordings that I bring to class. However, often we will be doing in-class exercises and performances of the sort required in theater or creative writing classrooms. I will warn you whenever physical activity will be required and advise you to dress accordingly.

Classroom environment: The limited enrollment of this course allows us to work closely together. We’ll get our hands dirty, exploring the details of poems and poetry criticism more directly than lecture alone allows. We’ll work together to test out different argument and to try unfamiliar approaches on for size. A seminar like this is a place for dynamic dialogue and experimentation. Don’t hesitate to contribute; nobody expects a polished disquisition. This spirit of active engagement and respectful collaboration extends to our in-class rehearsals and performances as well. When other students perform in class, you will be expected to participate by offering feedback and constructive criticism.

Readings: I have attempted to reduce the reading load whenever preparations for a paper or performance will likely preoccupy you. In return, I expect that you will come to class prepared to discuss the readings in detail and with some critical distance. Although no

poetry is specifically assigned as reading each day, you will find that you need to read widely in order to complete the written assignments and prepare your performances. Remember to budget time for this work.

Writings & Performances: This course requires frequent informal exercises (from one paragraph to two pages in length), three papers (one of 3-4 pages, two of 4-6 pages), and three performances (two solo, one collaborative). Informal performance exercises will be required occasionally throughout the course.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance: Your attendance is expected and required. You are allowed to make up two absences, but after that, each day missed will lower your grade by one step (e.g., from A- to B+).

Grading: Your grade for this course depends upon your brief exercises (20%), full-length papers (50%), and performances (30%). All assignments must be completed in order to earn a passing grade.

Academic Integrity: Any time you use another person's words or ideas without giving them credit, that is plagiarism. Plagiarism is not only bad for your personal education; it also fundamentally undermines the process of academic dialogue. Make sure to cite your sources properly, and please ask me if you are unsure whether citation is necessary in a particular circumstance.



COURSE SCHEDULE: *(Starred items are online resources.)*

Week One – Introduction

9/4 *Scripted Sound, Printed Performance*

9/6 *Vocal Realities*

Robert Pinsky, Chapters 1 & 3 and prefatory remarks on “Theory”

Week Two – A Third Dimension ...

9/11 *Placing Sound*

Walter Ong, “The Word and the Sensorium”

Judith Pascoe, *The Sarah Siddons Audio Files* (excerpt)

9/13 *Imagined Sensations*

Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (excerpt)

Susan Stewart, “Touch in Aesthetic Forms”

Week Three – Sound & (Non)sense

9/18 *Musicality*

Kenneth Burke, “On Musicality in Verse”
Susan Stewart, “Sound” (excerpts)

9/20 *Tone and Talk*

Robert Frost, a selection of essays and letters
Laurence Perrine, “Tone”
Levertov, “An Approach to Public Poetry Listenings”

Week Four – The Reading

9/25 *The Poetry Reading*

Peter Middleton, “A History of the Poetry Reading” (excerpt)
Charles Bernstein, Introduction to *Close Listening*

9/27 *Pattern & Play*

Robert Pinsky, Chapter Two
Laurence Perrine, “Pattern”
John Cage, “Lecture on Nothing”

Week Five – Voice/Breath

10/2 *What is Voice?*

Lesley Wheeler, “Sounding Poetic Voice”
Roland Barthes, “The Grain of the Voice”

10/4 *Organic Reactions*

Don Geiger, “Oral Interpretation and Literary Study”
Charles Olson, “Projective Verse”

PAPER DUE ON FRIDAY (on poetic voice)

Week Five – Rehearsal Week

10/9 No class (mid-semester break)

10/11 *Using Your Voice* (rehearsal)

Patsy Rodenburg, excerpts from *The Right to Speak*

Week Six – Performance Week

10/16 *Performance #1*

10/18 *Action*

Kenneth Burke on “symbolic action”
J.L. Austin, excerpt from *How to Do Things with Words*

PAPER DUE ON FRIDAY (on first performance)

Week Seven – Doing with Words

10/23 *Gesture*

R.P. Blackmur, “Language as Gesture”

10/25 *Stance*

Erving Goffman, “Footing”
Mark Rylance, “2011 Tony Awards acceptance speech”*
<http://youtu.be/20lm7Ow9RSY>
“Shadows Meet the Clouds ...” from *The Onion**
<http://www.theonion.com/articles/shadows-meet-the-clouds-gray-on-gray-like-dusty-ch,28355/>

Week Eight – Literature and Play

10/30 *The Play of Writing*

Richard Poirier, “The Performing Self”

11/1 *Playing with Writing*

Johan Huizinga, “The Nature and Significance of Play ...” (excerpt)
Clifford Geertz, “Blurred Genres” (excerpt)
Joseph Roach, “The Blunders of Orpheus”

Week Nine – Oversound

11/6 *The Saying*

Peggy Phelan, “‘Just Want to Say’: Performance and Literature ...”

11/8 *The Hearing*

Ronald Pelias, “The Performative Role of the Audience”

Week Ten – Performance Week

11/13 *The Counterfactual Poem*

Cleanth Brooks, "The Heresy of Paraphrase"

Robert Pinsky, "In Praise of Memorizing Poetry—Badly"*

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/poem/2011/11/william_butler_yeats_on_being_asked_for_a_war_poem_single.html

11/15 *Performance #2*

11/20 & 11/22 No class (Thanksgiving break)

11/27 *Presentations on performance #2*

11/29 *Presentations on performance #2*

11/30 Poetry/Performance Symposium & *This Verse Business*

12/4 Group rehearsals

12/6 Group rehearsals

12/11 *Final performance*

12/16 Final Paper due