

## Poetry Writing: Pushing the Envelope - OLLI- Winter 2017

January 23 – March 6

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This class will address strategies for writing and revising poems. We will discuss and experiment with various types of free and formal verse. We'll consider how sometimes contemporary poetry pushes the bounds or challenges our assumptions about what poetry should be. The class will discuss sample poems, spend time writing each week, and occasionally look at drafts class members choose to circulate. All writers are welcome; you need not be an accomplished poet to benefit from the pleasures of poetry. One class will feature a guest poet, who will read and discuss her work. Text: *Best American Poetry: 2016*, Lehman and Hirsch

January 23 Class Introduction

Why poetry?

Pushing the poetic envelope

Introduction to our text, *The Best American Poetry: 2016*

Internet sources for reading and writing poetry

READ: Bottoms, Emmanuel, Hayes

January 30 Anecdotal Poems and Variations

WRITE: After thinking about various anecdotal strategies the poems in our text employ, draft a poem of your own arising from a specific place, time, and circumstance.

READ: Bakken, Espada, Fancher, Gerstler, Kuipers

February 6 Visions of Place

WRITE: Draft a poem that turns on a quote from another (Bakken), a poem adopting a voice and persona not your own (Fancher), a poem built upon questions (Gerstler), or an unconventional love poem (Kuipers),

READ: Bohince, Everwine, Grotz, Hongo, Shaughnessy, St. John

February 13 Poems that Respond or Retell

WRITE: Beginning with a place, perhaps one you've not experienced, try a poem that isn't afraid to shift locations quickly or employ music or a foreign tongue.

READ: Diaz, Jackson, Hutchinson, Komunyakaa, Plumly, Richardson, Silver, Stewart

February 20 Wendy Cleveland and *Blue Ford*

READ: Selections from *Blue Ford* (handout)

February 27 Received Forms and Nonce Forms

WRITE: Draft a poem that responds to another poem, story, myth, or play.

READ: Fort, Gray, Kane, Phillips, Stallings, Su, Young

March 6 Poetry Readings

WRITE: Draft a poem that tests the limits of a traditional form or develops your own (nonce) form.

READ: Graham, Levine

## **Hubert Blankenship**

David Bottoms

Needing credit, he edges through the heavy door, head down,  
and quietly closes the screen behind him.

This is Blankenship, father of five, owner of a plow horse and a cow.

Out of habit he leans against the counter by the stove.  
He pats the pockets of his overalls

for the grocery list penciled on a torn paper bag,  
then rolls into a strip of newsprint

the last of his Prince Albert.  
He hardly takes his eyes off his boot, sliced on one side

to accommodate his bunion, and hands  
the list to my grandfather. Bull of the Woods, three tins

of sardines, Spam, peanut butter, two loaves of bread (Colonial),  
then back to the musty feed room

where he ignores the hand truck leaning against the wall

and hefts onto his shoulder a hundred-pound bag of horse feed.  
He rises to full height, snorting

but hardly burdened,  
and parades, head high, to the bed of his pickup.

## **My Life**

Lynn Emmanuel

Like Jonas by the fish was I received by it,  
swung and swept in its dark waters,  
driven to the deeps by it and beyond many rocks.  
Without any touching of its teeth, I tumbled into it  
with no more struggle than a mote of dust  
entering the door of a cathedral, so muckle were its jaws.  
How heel over head was I hurled down  
the broad road of its throat, stopped inside  
its chest wide as a hall, and like Jonas I stood up  
asking where the beast was and finding it nowhere,  
there in grease and sorrow I build my bower.

## Barberism

Terrance Hayes

It was light and lusterless and somehow luckless,  
The hair I cut from the head of my father-in-law,

It was pepper-blانched and wind-scuffed, thin  
As a blown bulb's filament, it stuck to the teeth

Of my clippers like a dark language, the static  
Covering his mind stuck to my fingers, it mingled

In halfhearted tufts with the dust. Because  
Every barber's got a gift for mind reading in his touch,

I could hear what he would not say. He's sworn  
To never let his hair be cut again after his daughter

Passed away. I told him how my own boy,  
His grandchild, weeps when my clippers bite

Behind his ear, but I could not say how  
The blood there tastes. I almost showed him

How I bow my own head to the razor in my hands,  
How a mirror is used to taper the nape.

Science and religion come to the same conclusion:  
Someday all the hair on the body will fall away.

I'm certain he will only call on me for a few more years,  
The crown of his head is already smoother

Than any part of his face. It shines like the light  
In tiny bulbs of sweat before the sweat evaporates.

## A Late Aubade

Richard Wilbur

From *Walking to Sleep: New Poems and Translations*

You could be sitting now in a carrel  
Turning some liver-spotted page,  
Or rising in an elevator-cage  
Toward Ladies' Apparel.

You could be planting a raucous bed  
Of salvia, in rubber gloves,  
Or lurching through a screed of someone's loves  
With pitying head.

Or making some unhappy setter  
Heel, or listening to a bleak  
Lecture on Schoenberg's serial technique.  
Isn't this better?

Think of all the time you are not  
Wasting, and would not care to waste,  
Such things, thank God, not being to your taste.  
Think what a lot

Of time, by woman's reckoning,  
You've saved, and so may spend on this,  
You who had rather lie in bed and kiss  
Than anything.

It's almost noon, you say? If so,  
Time flies, and I need not rehearse  
The rosebuds-theme of centuries of verse.  
If you *must* go,

Wait for a while, then slip downstairs  
And bring us up some chilled white wine,  
And some blue cheese, and crackers, and some fine  
Ruddy-skinned pears.

## POETRY RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET

Academy of American Poets – Index to web pages of many, many poets  
<http://www.poets.org/poets/index.cfm>

Beloit Poetry Journal- complete archive available from one of the most established poetry magazines  
[http://www.bpj.org/bpj\\_archive\\_6.html](http://www.bpj.org/bpj_archive_6.html)

Billy Collins – selection of 180 poems for high school students  
<http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-list.html>

How a Poem Happens: Contemporary Poets Discuss the Making of Their Poems, blog editor, Brian Brodeur  
<http://howapoemhappens.blogspot.com/>

King Log On-line Magazine (Note the first poems in Volume 1; this was obviously an excellent online journal!)  
<http://www.angelfire.com/il/kinglog/frameindex.html>

Links to a bunch of poetry blogs  
[http://poetry.about.com/od/poetryblogs/Poetry\\_Blogs.htm](http://poetry.about.com/od/poetryblogs/Poetry_Blogs.htm)

*New York Times Magazine* weekly poem, selected by Natasha Trethewey (until 2/19/16) and then Matthew Zapruder  
<https://www.nytimes.com/column/magazine-poem>

Poetry Daily – a new poem every day with the previous 365 archived  
<http://www.poems.com/>

Poets and Writers Magazine – great writer's resource  
<http://www.pw.org/magazine>

Twentieth Century Poetry in English (a sprawling, curious, and rather dated site put together by a Japanese professor)  
[http://www.lit.kobe-u.ac.jp/~hishika/20c\\_poet.htm](http://www.lit.kobe-u.ac.jp/~hishika/20c_poet.htm)

Verse Daily – like Poetry Daily, a fresh poem each day  
<http://www.versedaily.org/>

Web del Sol: many online poetry chapbooks and a wealth of poetry features  
<http://www.webdelsol.com/solhome.htm>

Kevin Young poems along with Romare Bearden collages (published in *Virginia Quarterly Review*)  
<http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2004/winter/young-watching-good/>

LONG LIST OF LITERARY MAGAZINES, SOME OF THEM ONLINE

<http://www.newpages.com/literary-magazines/>

DUOTROPE SUBMISSION GUIDE AND MANAGER (recommended by Ralph Womer; note that there's a free trial membership)

<https://duotrope.com/>

POETRY CHAPBOOK CONTESTS

[http://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/resources/poetry\\_contest\\_chapbooks/](http://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/poetry/resources/poetry_contest_chapbooks/)

SAMPLES OF ONLINE MAGAZINES

crossXconnect (very avant-garde)

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/xconnect/index-text.html>

Blackbird

[www.blackbird.vcu.edu](http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu)