

University of Southern Maine  
LEWISTON-AUBURN COLLEGE  
Fall 2004

HUM/SBS 399: Transforming Words: Poetry and Psychologies of Change

Instructor: Jan Hitchcock

Office: Room 162U

Office hours: Wed. 5:30-7:00, Thurs. 2:30-4:00, and other times by appointment

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Required Texts:

Hirsch, E. (1999). *How to read a poem: And fall in love with poetry*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc.

Orr, G. (2002). *Poetry as survival*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.

Pack, R. & Parini, J. (Eds). (1997). *Introspections: American poets on one of their own poems*. Hanover, NH: Middlebury College Press.

Additional required readings will be available through electronic reserves. Please note that you need to print out these articles.

Recommended Text:

Hacker, D. (2002). *The Bedford Handbook* (6th Ed.). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

See also LAC's Writing Center's website:

<http://www.usm.maine.edu/lac/student/writing/writing.html>

Course Description:

This course examines the interrelationships between poetry and psychology, with a focus on transformations of meaning in words and lives. Topics will include the varying functions of poetry over the life span, poets' reflections on how and why they write, poetry as political witness and community catalyst, therapeutic uses of poetry, and the distinctive qualities of "poetic" language. This semester's offering will include opportunity for community-based projects involving poetry.

At heart, this course is based on a conviction that common territory exists between fundamental psychological processes of change and the power of poetry to capture and evoke new ways of seeing the world and self. There are likely many ways to experience, identify and investigate these common territories, these “convergences,” between psychology and poetry. I’ve proposed the theme of “transformation” as a structure for our inquiries this semester.

Transformative processes are integral to psychological perspectives on poetry – how poetry is written, what poetry reflects, and what it has the potential to evoke. Poets’ transformations of experience and perspective, along with transformative use of language, underlie the making of poetry. Transformation is reflected in the functions and appeals poetry can have for readers and writers of different ages, and it is sought in the practice of poetry therapy.

There is a long tradition of psychological study of poetry and the transformations entailed in its making. We can find – and extend for ourselves – psychological applications, including from developmental psychology, counseling and psychoanalysis, cognitive studies, social psychology, humanistic psychology, and research on creativity. Poetry, in turn, can be a powerful and evocative vehicle for understanding and communicating transformative processes as studied by various psychological subdisciplines.

While our discussions will be “psychologically-informed,” poetry will not be reduced in this course to “illustrations” of psychological concepts! As Thomas Moore has asserted, “A small amount of good literature can often teach more about the inner life than volumes of psychology.” (*Original self: Living with paradox and originality*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2000, p. 5).

## Objectives

In this course we will:

1. Increase appreciation for poetic use of language, how poems are made, what “poems make”...
2. Review and explore the implications of diverse psychological perspectives on how people change vis-a-vis the writing and reading of poetry
3. Develop a forum for the interdisciplinary discussion of poetry and psychology. Some of us bring pre-existing interests and skills from the Humanities; others from the Social Sciences. Together, as a group and individually, we will endeavor to broaden and deepen our understanding of the variety of “transformations” discussed.
4. Explore how poetic explorations of the human experience can sometimes deepen, sometimes fundamentally challenge standard psychological approaches to understanding.
4. Consider the significance of poetry for the “community,” historically (including politically) and in our own time, place and college. This objective may be pursued through involvement in a service-learning project.

## Course Format

The course will be conducted as a seminar and include both small group and student-led discussion. Most class meetings will include, in addition to discussion of assigned chapters and articles, direct consideration of a poem or poems – most often in the voice of the poet, through audio or video recordings. Pairs of students will be responsible for a brief in-class presentation on a poem. A total of five essays, ranging from two to 10 pages, will be assigned. We will have two guest speakers, a poet, and a psychotherapist who utilizes poetry in her practice. Finally, there will be opportunity for modest service learning projects in the LAC and L-A community,

## General Policies

1. Since active learning and participation will be central to this course, it is very important that you keep up with the reading assignments, actively prepare for each class, attend class meetings, and make genuine efforts to participate. Up to one point will be deducted (from the 20 points of the class participation grade) for each absence from a class after the first two occasions. Please let me know if you experience or anticipate any extended absences. Don't disappear!
2. Extensions may be given if you encounter unusual circumstances and inform me prior to the assignment due date. Less flexibility with extensions is possible towards the end of the semester.
3. Papers may be re-written and re-submitted for re-evaluation. New grades will be taken into account for the final course grade. Revised papers (attached to the original copy containing my comments) should be submitted within two weeks of return of first version of the paper.
4. Avoid incompletes!! Incompletes will be assigned as a course grade only in extreme circumstances.
5. Students who may need assistance due to a disability are encouraged to contact the office of Academic Support for Students with Disabilities (ASSD), 242 Luther Bonney Hall, Portland campus (780-4706) or Mary Sylvain-Leonas, LAC's liaison (753-6561), who can assist in arranging an appointment with ASSD's Coordinator.

## Assignments

1. Reading assignments -- assignments are outlined in the syllabus. Please note that these are subject to change. In fact, I will be seeking class input in this regard and am likely to make adjustments based on your interests! **If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to check if there have been any changes in assignments for the next week.** Check our Blackboard course site "Announcements" for such changes.
2. Two essays, approximately 4 to 5 double-spaced pages each.
3. Two briefer papers, 2 to 3 double-spaced pages, each responding to one poem in Pack and Parini's book, *Introspections*, and the poet's reflections on how and why the poem was written. The brief in-class presentation will be based on the second of these papers.

4. A final project and paper (approximately 10 pages, double-spaced), topic and project negotiable based on class themes and your interests. Note: If an extensive service-learning is chosen as a final project, one that involves more than 10 hours of contact time in the community, its weighting towards your course grade may be increased to 35%, the essay weightings reduced as indicated below. Let me know if you want to exercise this option.

## Grading

The course grade will be determined as follows (see comment immediately above for explanation of ranges in assignment weights):

first essay	12½% - 15%
second essay	12½% - 15%
two responses to a selection from <i>Introspections</i>	20%
final project	30% - 35%
class participation	20%

## TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Hirsch = "H"                  Orr = "O"                  Pack & Parini = "Introspections"

## Date

**September 1**                  Introduction to class  
Video excerpt: Joy Harjo [Lannan series]\*  
Audio excerpts: Edward Hirsch, key note speech  
& Poet workshop, National Poetry Therapy  
Association annual meeting, DC, 2001

**September 8**                  Entering Poetic Territories  
Video: Sharon Olds [Lannan series]\* (first 37 minutes, up through her  
discussion of mortality and love)

Read: H: Preface, Chs. 1-3, & pp. 80-87 (begin reading with new section, labeled "3") in Ch. 4  
O: Introduction

In addition to being prepared to enter into discussion of the readings as a whole, come to class ready to identify the poem (or poem excerpt) that most engaged you from this week's readings and, in addition, **if** so moved, bring in from any other source a poem that you think, in turn, speaks powerfully to the themes in this week's readings.

\* An asterisk indicates that a videotape is part of the LAC library collection. These tapes, as well those on loan to LAC, may be viewed on your own, in the library. Videotapes may not be checked out of the library. Those without an asterisk will generally be available for viewing the Thursday and Friday following the class meeting at which they are shown.

**September 15**          Declaring the Self/Developing the Self

Read: H: “Acts” 3-5 in Ch. 6 (pp. 127-155)

O: Chs. 1-4 (pp. 13-58)

Oloayee, E.H. (1998). On psychology and poetry in self-development. In *Passions of the soul*. Red Bank, NJ: Northwind Publishers, p. 6 to top of p. 12.

Elliott, A. (1994). The making of the self. In *Psychoanalytic theory: An introduction*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, pp. 5-34.

**September 22**          Other Models for the Self and Change

Read: *Introspections*: Alvarez (pp. 13-18), Huddle (pp.117-122), and Thompson (pp. 279-282).

Crain, W. (2000). Conclusion: Humanistic psychology and developmental theory. In *Theories of development: Concepts and applications* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, pp. 361-368.

Lewis, M. (1997). *Altering fate: Why the past does not predict the future*. NY: The Guilford Press, pp. 31-70.

Miller, W.R. & C’de Baca, J. (1994). Quantum change: Toward a psychology of transformation. In T.F. Heatherton & J.L. Weinberger (eds.), *Can personality change?* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, pp. 253-280.

Scotton, B.W. (1996). The contributions of C.G. Jung to transpersonal psychiatry. In B.W. Scotton, A.B. Chinen, & J.R. Battista (Eds.). *Textbook of transpersonal psychiatry and psychology*. New York: Basic Books, pp. 39-51.

**September 29**          Poetic Origins

Video: excerpts from “Where Poems Come From” [Lannan series]\*

Guest poet: Lillian Baker Kennedy

Read: Getzels, J.W. (1990). Creativity In R.M. Thomas (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of human development and education: Theory, research, and studies*. Oxford: Pergamon Press, pp. 291-296.

Jung, C.G. (1966, orig. 1923). On the relation of analytical psychology to poetry. *The spirit in man, art, and literature*. (R.F.C. Hull, trans.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 65-83.

Williams, C.K. (1998). Beginnings. In *Poetry and consciousness*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp. 72-88.

Other brief readings TBA

**DUE**: First paper on one of the *Introspections* selections assigned for Sept 29 (see separate handout). Note that your second paper based on *Introspections* selection will be due on the day you make your in-class presentation (schedule to be determined earlier during course).

**October 6** Confronting Psychological Distress and Disorder  
Video excerpt: Voices & Visions: Robert Frost

Read: H: Ch. 7 (pp. 156-171)  
O: Ch. 5 (pp. 59-82)

**October 13** Trauma  
Video: Voices & Visions: Sylvia Plath

Read: O: Chs 6-9 (83-140) & Ch. 15 (pp. 189-203)  
Brewin, C.R. (2001). Memory processes in post-traumatic stress disorder. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 13, 159-163.  
van der Kolk, B.A., & McFarlane, A.C. (1996). The black hole of trauma. In B.A. van der Kolk, A.C. McFarlane & L. Weisaeth (Eds.). *Traumatic stress: The effects of overwhelming experience on mind, body, and society*. NY: The Guilford Press, pp 3-23.

**October 20** Children and Poetry  
Video: "Count to Five and Say 'I'm Alive'"

Read: Ellis, L, Gere, A.R., & Lamberton, L.J. (2003). Out loud: The common language of poetry. *English Journal*, 93(1), 44-49.  
Koch, K. (orig. 1970, with new Introduction). *Wishes, lies, and dreams: Teaching children to write poetry*. New York: HarperPerennial, pp. 1-54.  
Nowak-Fabrykowski, K. (2000). The role of poetry and stories of young children in their process of learning. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 27(1), 59-65.

## ESSAY DUE

**October 27** Children, Adolescents, and Poetry

Read: Ellis, L, Gere, A.R., & Lamberton, L.J. (2003). Out loud: The common language of poetry. *English Journal*, 93(1), 44-49.  
Koch, K. (orig. 1970, with new Introduction). *Wishes, lies, and dreams: Teaching children to write poetry*. New York: HarperPerennial, pp. 1-54.  
Nowak-Fabrykowski, K. (2000). The role of poetry and stories of young children in their process of learning. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 27(1), 59-65.  
**It's worth reviewing the Getzels article from Sept 29<sup>th</sup> also.**

Student presentations on Introspections selections start this week.

**November 3**            Extraordinary Transformations  
Video: Voice & Visions: Emily Dickinson

Read: H: Chs. 5, 10 & 11 (pp. 88-115 & 226-258) **FOCUS ON pp. 88-89, 226-245, 253-258**

O: Ch. 13 (pp. 171-181)

Bennett, P. (1986). Introduction in *My life, a loaded gun: Female creativity and feminist poetics*. Boston: Beacon Press, pp. 1-11.

**November 10**            Applying Poetry /Challenging Psychology

Read: Levine, S.K. (1992). *Poiesis: The language of psychology and the speech of the soul*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers: Introduction [p. xv] through p. 42 & pp. 77-109.  
**Be prepared for active involvement, student-led and group, on this material.**

**November 17**            Poetry and Therapy

Guest speaker: Sally Bowden-Schaible, psychotherapist who uses poetry in her practice

Read: Jones, A. (1997). Experiencing language: Some thoughts on poetry and psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 56, 683-700.

Mazza, N. (1999). *Poetry therapy: Interface of the arts and psychology*. Boca Raton: CRC Press, pp. 3-23.

## **ESSAY DUE**

**November 24**            No class – Thanksgiving break

**December 1**            Poetry, Power and Political Witnessing  
Video excerpt: Joy Harjo [Lannan Series]\*

Read: H: Ch 8: Poetry and History

Williams, C.K. (1998). The poet and history. From *Poetry and consciousness*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, pp. 14-30.

Espada, M. (Ed.) (2000). *Poetry like bread: Poets of the political imagination* (New expanded ed). Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, pp. 3-14, 70-73, 92-93, 100-105, 114-123, 241-242, 323-330. **Read pp. 9-14 & 323-330 first!**

**December 8**            Poetry as Transformative Agent: Individual and Community  
Video: “Il Postino”

This movie is a fictionalized account of the impact of poet Pablo Neruda’s – and poetry – on the life of a mailman from an isolated Italian village. In subtle ways, the movie also suggests the larger impact of poetry in world and local events. The movie contains, in addition, many moments that you may find to have immediate “transformative” value!

**December 15**      “To the Reader at Parting”  
    Video excerpt: Adrienne Rich [Lannan Series]\*

Read: H: Ch. 12

Lorde, A. (1984). Poetry is not a luxury. In *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, pp. 36-39.

**FINAL PAPER DUE**    Informal presentations of final projects and papers

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