

ENGL 338 – Oral Literature – Fall 2006
10:30 am - 11:30 am (Sec 001 CRN: 13311)
MWF Leonard Hall 218
Dr. Kenneth Sherwood
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Overview

Before there were books, grammars, or even letters, humans produced oral literatures. From voice to ear, the body finds rhythms and patterns to verse. This could be the story of a child coming into language and the story of all known cultures coming into language arts, through 30,000 years of shouts, whispers, chants, and stutters. This course exposes students to the fundamental concepts of orality through the study of the oral genres and practices including narrative, lyric, chant, toast, proverb, and riddle. "Readings" may be drawn from a variety of past and present literary traditions, from popular as well as high-cultural domains. We will approach oral literature as a living art that continues to be produced and consumed in radio art and spoken word CDs, American poetry slams and open mics, in the bardic contests of Europe, and in podcasts and web audio. We'll take advantage of this to trade some reading assignments for "listening" sessions (Bring your I-Pods, seriously) and draw on the many audio archives on the web, including my own project WWW.Audibleword.org. In addition to writing about oral literature, students will be encouraged to develop alternative projects that might involve composing and performing an original piece, producing a CD anthology, making and analyzing field recordings, or recording an original podcast. Hopefully, we will also have the chance to link up with live performance events at the Commonplace Coffeehouse or in Pittsburgh and enjoy the visit of a guest writer/performer from the Offpage series. Contact sherwood@iup.edu for more information.

Course Objectives

Acquaints with the nature of oral composition, the habits of thought that orality fosters, and the particular mode of awareness the oral dimension of literature demands of an audience (and awakens in a reader). At the conclusion, students will have an understanding of the formulaic nature of such purely oral forms as the ballad and the epic and an awareness of the manner in which orality patterns thought differently from writing, and they should be able to detect oral features and patterns in works of literature from cultures not primarily oral but containing a high "oral residue."

Required Texts

1. How to Read an Oral Poem, John Miles Foley. 0252070828 (paperback \$20)
2. Get Your Ass in the Water & Swim Like Me, ed. Bruce Jackson 0415969972 (\$20 pbk)
3. The Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation. eds. Mark Smith et al (\$17-25 w/CD 1402200374)

For Consultation –

1. Shaking the Pumpkin. Ed. Jerome Rothenberg (IUP:PM197.E3 R6 1972)
2. Technicians of the Sacred. Ed. Jerome Rothenberg (IUP: PN1347 .R6)
3. Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia Roger Abrahams. (IUP:GR103 .A2 1970)
4. Poetry Speaks. Book and CDs (Res. Personal Copy)
5. Orality and Literacy. Walter Ong (Personal Copy)

Other Resources

Will include websites, downloadable audio, and video. Accessible through course web.

Technology and Resources Requirements

Printer access, E-reserve, IUP email account, IUP network password, and web access.

Requirements and Expectations

<p>Daily Participation</p> <p>Prepared and engaged discussion makes the class a success: I value students who contribute by posing questions, or venturing observations. You may also seek and contribute materials for listening sessions. (Additional in-class writing and group-work or any other minor, daily assignments may also fall under this category.)</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>Close Listening Blogs</p> <p>The Blog enables us to extend class discussion through a form of semi-public journaling via a web interface. Many of your blog entries for this class will take the form of "close listening" statements. At least once each week, you will post a semi-formal reflection on class reading and discussions to your web log at blogger.com. You'll also keep up with posts of your group members and contribute to the online discussion by contributing comments to at least two classmates posts a week. Comments should be substantial, not just two word "I agree"s. (Save your own posts and comments in a word file; for grading purposes, I will ask you to assemble them as a paper portfolio at the middle and end of the semester.)</p>	<p>30</p>
<p>Minor Writing Assignments</p> <p>To better appreciation oral literature, I'll ask you to complete a few unconventional writing assignments. One will be a transcription (you'll use or develop a system for accurately graphing what you hear); another will be a review or report of a live oral performance you have attended.</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>Final Project</p> <p>This may take the form of a critical essay or an alternative project; in either case, the topic and approach should be developed in consultation with me.</p>	<p>30</p>

Note On Attendance

Presence and participation in class should be assumed. I want to respect the maturity of students and the decisions they make, thus each student is allowed three absences, no questions asked. There is no need for you to provide documentation or excuses. A student with perfect attendance will receive a 5% bonus to his/her final grade.

Note On Jazz and Emergent Performance

As an amateur jazz performer, I am interested in improvisation – what happens when a group of people join together to create new variations or versions of established music. I like to think each course I teach is a kind of semester-long, collaborative performance: a series of events that is planned or structured but remains open to accident, discovery, and collaboration. Jazz depends on the participation of musicians and the audience as well. To unpack the metaphor, I want you to begin the semester at least as an active audience member; but I hope you will find your way onto the stage as an engaged participant. I hope you find this course asking you to do things that are unfamiliar, different from what you have experienced in prior English classes. At its best, reading literature is performative, exploratory, even challenging.

Note On Texts and Technology

In designing this course, I look to the way that different texts and technology can be made into tools for your active use. I will ask you to use various digital communication tools this semester as part of our performances with literary texts. Students in past semesters have found this profitable; such activities and assignments help you to learn to use the tools themselves, and they also stimulate you to thinking and working differently than you otherwise might in an English classroom. Unavoidably, students will have different levels of prior experience and access to technology. I do expect all students to participate. If the technological component of the course presents you with difficulties, please speak with me, as I should be able to point you to IUP facilities or recommend free, helpful training to you.

IUP Events

Students (e.g. athletes) attending IUP sponsored events should notify the professor in advance via email; a typed, 350-word discussion of any assigned reading will be expected within one week of such absences; any pre-scheduled assignments should be submitted in advance.

Cheating, Plagiarism, and Collusion

Scholastic Dishonesty is a serious matter. I am savvy and vigilant in detecting students who use unattributed web sources, "collaborate" (beyond what I may ask in group work etc.) with fellows students, or utilize other "clever" methods to enhance their grades. Take the grade you honestly earn on an assignment. Should a classmate attempt to use your work, refuse; I make no distinction between cheaters and those who aid them. A plagiarized assignment will earn you a zero for the assignment and referral to administrators for disciplinary action. We may use turnitin.com as a safety net for formal writing assignments.

Make-up Work, Computer Breakdown, and Other Exigencies

Successful mastery of course material requires students to complete assignments in a timely fashion. Make-up work does not serve the learning process and so will not generally be permitted. Writing assignments should be handed in at the beginning of class on the day due. In an exceptional case a late assignment may be accepted, but the grade will be reduced by a 1-letter-grade for each day or portion of a day it is late; after one week, a grade of F will pertain, though the student should still submit a paper in order to avoid getting a zero. Should you unavoidably miss a class, be sure to convey any assignment to me: leave it in my English-office mailbox; use a classmate as courier or email it (sherwood@iup.edu). There will be no make-up of quizzes.

Computers have not saved us from Murphy's Law: anything that can go wrong will. Make paper and back-up copies of work done on computers on at least two different disks (learn how to do this today if you're not computer literate). Keep written notes, but also print and save intermediate drafts. If you begin work in advance of deadlines, you will have more time to troubleshoot disk errors, virus alerts, and printer problems. I know intimately how unreliable technology can be, but you are responsible for submitting work despite the gremlins.

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

How do I blog?

I will lead the class through the process of registering at blogger.com for a free blog. (Instructions will also be available on the class webpage.) This semester, much of your written work will involve posting reading responses to a blog accessed by your classmates. Your posts should be clearly titled, signed, and posted promptly as assigned. Individual posts will not be graded, but I will read and comment to your group, and then assess your posts for grades twice – when you assemble them for the portfolio.

Is Blogging Safe?

You will be instructed not to advertise your blog, since doing so often results in comment spam. But you should note that writing posted to your blog can be found and read by others outside of our class. You publish to the blog, making your writing public. There are pedagogical reasons for choosing this technology for our course which I am glad to talk with you about. As always on the web, you should be cautious about disclosing personal information; you may choose to remove your blog after the semester closes.

What counts as good participation?

Comments sharing insights, posing questions, and responding to classmates. Your readiness to participate in class (attentive listening, informed and thoughtful contribution to class and group discussions, raising of questions) is assumed. Informed and attentive participation is the key. Verbal contributions to class may be combined with electronic contributions to the web discussion.

How Much Do You Love Cell Phones?

Please silence cell phones and beepers during class time. Do not text-message, play games, or do work for another class during our time together.

		ENGLISH 121	Fall 2006
Week			
		Oral Traditional Poetry	
1	M	LISTENING SESSION	
	W	Songs of Ritual License, Nigeria & Trans.	
Sep	F	1 Finding the Center, Zuni/Tedlock (Selections, see Linebreak Audio)	
2	M	x	
	W	6 Yaqui Deer Songs, Evers and Molina (selections; see tape)	Orality and Literacy (Intro, C3), Walter Ong
	F	8 Maria Sabina (sel)	
3	M	11 Night Chant: A Navajo Ceremonial. (In Four Masterpieces, ed. Bierhorst, pp. 279-348)	
	W	13 <u>How to Read an Oral Poem 1</u>	
	F	15 PERFORMANCE CLASS	
		Folk Poetry	
4	M	18 "With His Pistol In His Hand": A Border Ballad and Its Hero, Américo Paredes. Sel	
	W	20 W T Goodwin, Easter Sunrise Sermon & Audio; <u>How to Read an Oral Poem 2</u>	Reserve Reading on Folk Poetry
	F	22 <u>Get Your Ass in the Water</u> (Toasts)	
5	M	25 <u>How to Read an Oral Poem 3</u>	
	W	27 <u>Get Your Ass in the Water</u> (Toasts)	
	F	29 <u>Get Your Ass in the Water</u> (Toasts)	
Oct		Sound Poetry	
6	M	2 LISTENING SESSION (Navajo Horse Songs Rothenberg)	Reserve Reading on Sound Poetry
	W	4 Kurt Schwitters, Hugo Ball, FT Marinetti	
	F	6 PERFORMANCE CLASS	
		Print Poetry for Literary Recitation	
7	M	9 19th C. Longfellow, Tennyson, Whittier, Whitman	
	W	11 20th c. Dylan Thomas, Vachel Lindsay, Claude McKay	
	F	13 PERFORMANCE CLASS	
		Jazz Poetry, Beats, and Projective Verse	
8	M	16 James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes	Reserve Reading on Jazz Poetry
	W	18 Kenneth Rexroth, Poetry and Jazz at the Blackhawk	

	F	20	Ginsberg, Howl; & Amiri Baraka	
9	M	x		
	W	25	Creeley/Olson. Selection: Projective Verse, Daybook, ...	
	F	27	Kerouac, Old Angel Midnight; Michael McClure..., Ghost Trantras and For Jim Morrison Audio	
			New Spoken Word	
10	M	30	United States of Poetry (video Selections)	
Nov	W	1	LISTENING Session / Def Poetry (video)	"Poetic Screams of 'I am'", Chris Beach
	F	3	<u>Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop</u>	
11	M	6	<u>Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop</u>	
	W	8	<u>Spoken Word Revolution: Slam, Hip Hop</u>	
	F	10	PERFORMANCE CLASS	
			Ethnopoetics	
12	M	13	Kamau Brathwaite, XCP	Ethnopoetics, Sherwood
	W	15	Anne Waldman, Fast Speaking Woman	
	F	17	Cecilia Vicuna, at Audibleword	
			Postmodern Performance Poets	
13	M	20	David Antin	
	W	x		
	F	x		
14	M	27	Chris Cheek	
	W	29	John Taggart	
	F	1	Review	
15	M	4	PERFORMANCE CLASS	
	W	6		