“Ars Poetica” means “the art of poetry,” and you can find several poems with some version of the title “Ars Poetica.” Here’s an “Ars Poetica” by Dana Levin. You can find the poem on the web at http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/ars-poetica-cocoons

Ars Poetica (cocoons)

Six monarch butterfly cocoons
    clinging to the back of your throat—

    you could feel their gold wings trembling.

You were alarmed. You felt infested.
In the downstairs bathroom of the family home,
    gagging to spit them out—
    and a voice saying Don’t, don’t—

In this course, you will be exposed to many suggestions, such as the ones in this poem, about the nature of creativity and poetry. You will also be learning a variety of techniques that may be used to write, rewrite, and consider poems of our era.

Goals

By the end of the term, I hope you will be able to accomplish the following:

1) Demonstrate an understanding of the components that gather to make good poems
2) Write good poem drafts based on that understanding
3) Provide effective critiques of poems through the deployment of that understanding

Text

Course Structure & Student Responsibilities

During the semester, you will create drafts of several poems. These poem drafts will be considered and discussed by the class. I will grade them based on a rubric that I distribute with each assignment. Your drafts must be typed and submitted to me by email. I will distribute these drafts, minus the names of their authors, to the class.

Our discussions of poem drafts will be substantive—and not trivial or mean-spirited. Here’s an example of a trivial comment: “I like this poem. It’s so nice.” And here is an example of a mean-spirited comment: “This poem is worthless. It’s just a bunch of sappy clichés.” And, finally, here’s the kind of comment that would be most welcomed: “I think this poem is frightening. I mean it has frightening images, and that’s weird, because its music is delicate and beautiful. Can we talk about the tension between what’s frightening and what’s beautiful in this poem?”

You are also responsible for informed, thoughtful participation. It counts for 20% of your grade.

In addition to writing a critique of a poem by another member of the class, you will write a critique of one of your own poems.

Often, we will read and discuss poems found in Rita Dove’s anthology of 20th century American poetry.

Policies

More than 2 unexcused absences will result in the lowering of your final grade by one full grade. More than 4 unexcused absences will result in your failure of the course. Frequent tardiness will result in the lowering of your grade by at least one full step.

Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated. Consult your student handbook for more details.

All poem drafts and essays will be submitted to me electronically.

No cell phones in class. If you use a cell phone in class, you will be asked to leave, and your participation grade will suffer greatly.

Grades

Your final grade will be based upon the following percentages:

- Participation 20%
- Poem Drafts 60%
- Poem Critiques 20%