2014

221-01 Poetry

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ENGL 221 / 01  
Spring 2014  
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Office Hours: M 6:00-7:00; W 1:30-2:30

\textbf{Poetry}

\textbf{Text:} \textit{The Norton Anthology of Poetry,} shorter 5\textsuperscript{th} edition

The study of poetry and of the poetic canon is a crucial part of an undergraduate English major and an education in the liberal arts; it is also one of the best means of becoming a “deep reader” and a perceptive, appreciative literary critic. Writing about poetry is especially valuable in fostering one’s analytic, interpretive, and discursive skills. Therefore, the goals of the course are as follows:

- To develop students’ understanding of English and American poetry from a historical perspective. We will consider the poems and poets in relation to their time, how they speak to and are shaped by their historical circumstances; we will also consider them in more specifically literary historical terms, as part of an unfolding tradition of intertextuality, constituting a canon in which each poem and poet has a part.

- To refine the students’ interpretive and analytic skills, their ability to perform “close readings” of individual poems, sensitive to the specifically linguistic and discursive qualities of the poem.

- To develop an concrete understanding of English versification: the formal or structural dimension of poetry (meter, rhyme, stanza structure, etc.), its generic and discursive conventions, its uses of syntax, imagery, and figures of speech.

- To gain the skills necessary for the composition of clear, coherent, convincing, and fully supported critical writing about poetry, including an introduction to the use of secondary sources in writing about poetry.

- To appreciation the oral and musical qualities of poetry through careful listening and recitation of poetry.

This course fulfills a core literature requirement of the University. It is taught through a combination of lecture and class discussion. Students are expected to keep up with assigned readings—be prepared to read poems aloud in class, and to contribute to the conversation which leads to our interpretation of the poems under consideration. Class will often begin with a few minutes of questions and answers. \textbf{Remember: if you have a question about a particular poem or author, chances are that others in class have a similar question. Therefore, asking your question will probably further everyone’s understanding of the work. Don’t be shy!}
Calendar
(subject to change)


Jan. 21 Spenser, 125-139
Jan. 23 The sonnet sequence: Spenser, Sonnet 75 (p. 142); Sidney, *Astrophil & Stella* 71 (p. 160-61); Daniel, *Delia* 50 (p. 166); Shakespeare, Sonnet 55 (p. 172-73).

Jan. 28 Shakespeare, 169-179.
Jan. 30 Shakespeare, cont.

Feb. 4 Donne, 193-195, 202-204.
Feb. 6 Donne, 205-208; Shapiro, “Riding Westward” (handout). Paper #1 due.

Feb. 11 Herbert, 239-240; Marvell, 293-294.
Feb. 13 Exam #1.

Feb. 20 Milton, 274-280 (plus one or two handouts).

Feb. 25 Bradstreet, 282-286; Behn, 318-322.
Feb. 27 Rochester, 325-326; Swift, 336-339

Mar. 11 Gray, 410-413
Mar. 13 Blake, 441-450

Mar. 18 Wordsworth, 458-462, 471-472

Mar. 25 Coleridge, 489-505.
Mar. 27 Keats, 567-569, 579-580, 582-584.

Apr. 1 Keats, 585-588.
Apr. 3 Exam #2.

Apr. 8 Tennyson, 619-629.
Apr. 10 Whitman, 679-689.

Apr. 15 Whitman, 691-696; Dickinson, 719-724.
Apr. 17 Dickinson, 725-732.

Apr. 22 Eliot, 862-878.
Apr. 24 Stevens, 816-826. Paper #3 due.
Apr. 29  Ashbery, 1080-1084; Palmer, 1204-1206.
May 1  Howe, *Thorow* (handout).

May 6  10:30-12:20  Exam #3 (Final)

**Assignments and Grading:**

**Three exams, 15% each. Three papers, 15% each. Class participation, 10%**. Class participation includes your contributions to class discussion on a daily basis, and your oral presentation of one or more poems over the course of the semester. After you read the poem aloud to the class, you will be asked about the reading: what did you need to be aware of about the poem’s rhythm, syntax, vocabulary, etc., in order to produce an effective oral presentation that captured the spirit of the poem?

**Some observations on reading and studying poetry for this course:**

Reading poetry, especially poetry from a different historical period and culture, often poses a number of challenges. First, there are linguistic and formal difficulties. At times you will need to determine the meaning(s) of a word in a poem. I recommend that you consult the Oxford English Dictionary (available online at the Xavier library website), since the OED will give you the origin of a word and the ways it has been used since it first entered the language. Additionally, the syntax of the poem—the structure of its sentences, especially as they are shaped by the poetic form—may prove hard to understand. Follow the grammar, and perhaps write it out as prose. But most importantly, *read the poem out loud*. Remember that most poetry, even in a literate, text-based society, is meant to be sounded out. The sound of the poem contributes immensely to its overall meaning. And keep in mind that a regular part of our work in the class will involve oral presentation.

Second, there are difficulties posed by historical and cultural differences between the reader and the poet, as well as the idiosyncrasies of style (and personality!) of each poet we read. Many of the poets we are reading have completely different attitudes toward class, gender, race, and religion. Perhaps even more importantly, their assumptions about the social functions of poetry itself—how (or if) it gets published and read, who constitutes its audience, why it is important to society and to the poet him or herself—may differ significantly from our own. In addition, the poet may be referring to or alluding to ideas, myths, or contemporary events or institutions about which you as the reader need to be informed and take into account as you seek to understand the poem.

Third (and perhaps this is the outcome of what I’ve said above), many poems, for a variety of reasons, are strange, troubling, and, well, just weird. Poetry is an art of “defamiliarization,” or as an early twentieth-century Russian critic puts it, of “making strange.” Poetry may take you places you don’t want to go and tell you things you don’t want to hear. Then again, the more you study poetry, the more pleasure it tends to yield. And beyond any critical analysis or scholarly knowledge, it’s the pleasure in reading poetry that counts.
Course Policies

Attendance. Regular attendance is a requirement of this course. I will permit two unexcused absences per semester. More missed classes will adversely affect your grade. If a problem of any sort arises, please get in touch with me. We can usually work it out.

Lateness. Coming late to class is rude and disruptive, and indicates a lack of respect for your instructor and your fellow students. I expect you to arrive on time. If you do come late, please slip in unobtrusively. If I see that you are chronically late (that is, more than a couple of times in a row), then we need to talk.

Cell phones. Cell phone use is forbidden. Upon entering the classroom, if not before, turn off your phone immediately and remove it from your desk. Don’t even think of texting during class—I will ask you to leave.

Laptops and Tablets. I permit the use of laptops and tablets in class, because I know that some students legitimately use them to take notes and read electronic versions of the texts. However, I reserve the right to stroll over behind you and take a look at the screen. If I see Facebook pictures of your best friend getting drunk last Saturday night, you will be invited to continue your viewing outside of the classroom.

Email. Check you Xavier email at least twice between classes for course updates, assignments, additional materials, etc. Feel free to email me with your questions, comments and concerns. I usually turn off my computer about 10 PM, so if you email me at 3 AM, don’t expect an answer till at least noon on the next day. A good start to your email is “Dear Dr. Finkelstein.” “Hey” just doesn’t cut it.

Papers. Papers are to be turned in at the start of class on the day they are due. Papers sent by email will not be accepted. Papers turned in by noon on the following day to my mailbox in Hinkle Hall will be accepted, graded and returned, with no comments and no opportunities for rewrites. Papers will not be accepted after this time—the grade for the assignment will be an automatic F. Rewrite policy: I encourage you to rewrite your paper if you receive a grade in the C range or lower. A grade of F requires a rewrite. Please meet with me before you begin rewriting. Turn in your first version along with your rewrite on the due date we agree upon.

Plagiarism. From the Xavier Catalog: “All work submitted for academic evaluation must be the student's own. Certainly, the activities of other scholars will influence all students. However, the direct and unattributed use of another's efforts is prohibited as is the use of any work untruthfully submitted as one's own. Penalties for violations of this policy may include one or more of the following: a zero for that assignment or test, an "F" in the course, and expulsion from the University. The dean of the college in which the student is enrolled is to be informed in writing of all such incidents, though the teacher has full authority to assign the grade for the assignment, test, or course. If disputes of interpretation arise, the student, faculty member, and chair should attempt to resolve the difficulty. If this is unsatisfactory, the dean will rule in the matter. As a final appeal, the academic vice president will call a committee of tenured faculty for the purpose of making a final determination.”