

Poetry & Poetics

English 130-01, Spring 2016, TTh 9:30–10:45 in Stein 301

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Office hours: T 2–3, W 1–2:15, Th 11–11:45, & by appointment, in Fenwick 224

Goals:

In this course, you'll learn how to get more kinds of pleasure out of reading poetry. We'll start by comparing poetry with prose, to investigate why poems get written and how they convey meaning. We'll then explore how a poem produces emotional and intellectual effects through its language, sound, and form. In examining poems from a broad range of writers and periods, you'll hone your close reading skills as you engage with the devices poets use to prompt imaginative work in their readers. We'll start out with sonnets and progress to poems featuring more complex and surprising forms. Throughout the semester, you'll also be learning how to use the writing process to develop and refine your analyses, and ultimately to express them in the form of persuasive critical arguments.

Texts:

- J. Paul Hunter, Alison Booth, and Kelly J. Mays, *The Norton Introduction to Poetry*, 9th Edition.
- Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 7th Edition (Bedford).
- A number of shorter texts available on Moodle

Expectations:

Class participation and study questions (10%): This course is designed to help you develop your thinking about poetry both independently and collaboratively. To take full advantage of the opportunities it offers, the most important thing you can do is to read all material closely, more than once, and always in hard copy, filling your margins with questions and observations. This will prepare you to advance your thinking even further by engaging in thoughtful class discussion. You will typically need to spend around two hours preparing for each regular class session, more when papers are due. If you aren't yet comfortable participating in class discussion, please stop by to see me so that we can work

on strategies for developing that skill. You need not be adept at it at first, only willing to improve through preparation, practice, and patience with yourself.

Since regular attendance is essential in a discussion-centered course, more than three absences will lower your final grade. That's a full week and a half of class – an ample allowance for most illnesses, although not if you've allowed yourself to be flaky about attendance earlier in the semester. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to borrow the notes from another student, acquire any materials that were handed out, and learn if changes have been made to the syllabus. I do not need to know why you have been absent unless you need my help with a crisis.

To help you think critically about our readings and practice the steps leading up to paper-length analyses, for most sessions I will provide study questions on our Moodle course site. Your responses to these questions need not be typed, as you will not normally be submitting them to me, but they should be thorough and thoughtful. From time to time I will spot-check your responses. Since the writing in these exercises is informal and exploratory, collected responses will receive general marks (✓, ✓-, or ✓+).

Please bring your book and a binder of all Moodle texts to class. We'll often be looking back at texts discussed earlier in the semester, so you'll need to have them with you.

Literalization Exercises (5%): Early in the semester you will be “literalizing” several short poems, translating them into ordinary prose. Literalization Exercises will be graded for precision. For legibility's sake, I ask that they be typed and double-spaced. They must be on time to receive credit.

Papers (60%): one 4–5pp paper (15%) and two 4–6pp papers (the first 20%, the second 25%), each due *at the beginning of class* on the dates specified in the Schedule. As you grow as a writer over the course of the semester, your work is weighted more heavily to reward your progress. We will discuss paper topics in advance. For papers we workshop in class, grades will be based on completion of first drafts, thoughtfulness of peer reviews, and quality of revision work as well as final drafts.

I am delighted to meet with you to discuss your papers as you develop them. For me, email is not an effective medium for substantive discussion, so I ask that you come to talk with me in person, either in office hours or by appointment. To ensure that I can be helpful to you, please come in well before a paper is due. I will gladly sit down with you anytime prior to the day before a final due date.

Late papers lose 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from A to A-) for each class period or part of a class period they are overdue. Last-minute extensions will not be granted; if you foresee any problem with the due date for a final draft, please speak to me well in advance. We can usually work out a solution.

I do my best to return papers no more than two weeks after they come in, and always before the final drafts of the next paper are due so that my feedback on an earlier paper can inform

revisions of a later one. If you have any questions about my comments (or my handwriting!) never hesitate to stop by office hours or make an appointment.

Papers should be printed in a conventional twelve-point text font (like Times), and double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around. In the upper left corner of the first page, list your name, my name, the course number, and the date on separate lines. At the center of the next line, please provide a title designed to prepare your reader for your argument. Remember to proofread carefully for spelling and mechanical errors before you print. To preserve your instructor's sanity and good humor, always number and staple your pages.

Recitation (5%): In preparation for Paper 3, you will select a poem to study intensively, memorize, and recite for the class. I'll ask you to keep a daily journal to reflect on the experience of coming to know a poem so intimately. After the recitation, we'll have an opportunity to ask you about the decisions you made in preparing it. We might ask, for instance, what in the poem encouraged you to emphasize a certain word or sound, or what prompted you to speed up or slow down or pause at particular moments. Every decision you make in speaking a poem aloud reflects your understanding of the poem's structure, form, and meaning.

Scansion quiz (5%): After practicing the techniques of scansion in the classroom and at home, you'll be asked to demonstrate your skills on some unfamiliar passages.

Presentation of a recently published poem (5%): Near the end of the semester you and a group of classmates will select a poem from a recent *New Yorker* and lead the class through an analysis of how it works, bringing to bear all of the tools you've amassed from the course.

Sonnet project (ungraded): We return to the sonnet form at the very end of the course to give you a chance to try your hand at writing a poem. You will workshop the written and spoken versions of your sonnet with a small group of classmates in preparation for reciting it on the final day of class. To make the experience as stress-free as possible, the sonnet project will not be graded. You do need to complete it to pass the course.

Exam (10%): A final exam will be given during the exam period – one last opportunity to show off your understanding of a poet's tools.

Academic Honesty: Your work must be your own and must be prepared exclusively for this class. Since you are developing your own close reading skills in this course, **please do not consult any secondary sources except reference texts like dictionaries or encyclopedias.**

Whenever you do make use of language **or ideas** from outside sources (**including web sites**, books, high school classes, roommates, etc.), you must acknowledge the sources in formal citations, formatted according to MLA guidelines. You'll find an overview of MLA format in *A Pocket Style Manual*. For issues the overview doesn't address, consult the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (call number LB2369.M53) in Dinand's main reading room.

Failure to acknowledge sources constitutes plagiarism, a serious violation of academic honesty. Other violations include cheating and collusion. Just as you need to be able to trust that I will evaluate your work fairly, I must be able to trust that the work you present as your own is, in fact, your own. Therefore any violation of academic honesty will incur a zero on the assignment and academic probation, suspension, or dismissal from the College, as determined by the college-wide academic honesty policy described on pages 17–19 of the College Catalog (<http://www.holycross.edu/catalog/>).

The process of learning which sources need to be cited and how takes time. I am always happy to field questions about acknowledging sources before you submit an assignment. Afterwards is too late. Always err on the side of giving credit where credit may be due.

Schedule:

This schedule offers a tentative outline of the course; it may change as the course progresses.

Tues. 1/26: Introductions
Alexander, "Nineteen" (handout)

I. "PRETTY ROOMS" AND "WELL WROUGHT URNS": CLOSE READING THE SONNET

Thurs. 1/28: Alexander, "Nineteen"
Shakespeare, "[Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea]"
(Moodle)
Literalizing
Writing for a reader: style choices in email
Due: 1. Read "Poetry: Responding, Reading, Writing" (Norton 1–15, especially 14–15)
2. Study Questions 1

Tues. 2/2: Shakespeare, "[That time of year thou mayst in me behold]" (166)
Summarizing
Figures of speech
Due: 1. Study Questions 2
2. Literalization Exercise 1 (typed)

- Thurs. 2/4: Donne, “[Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You]” (174)
Using the OED
Due: 1. Read Norton pages 255–261 on “External Form”
2. Study Questions 3
3. Literalization Exercise 2 (typed)
- Tues. 2/9: Sidney, “[Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show]” (Moodle)
Due: 1. Study Questions 4
2. Literalization Exercise 3 (typed)
- Thurs. 2/11: Wordsworth, “Nuns Fret Not” (259)
Frost, “Design” (297)
Discussion of Paper 1 and the Writers’ Workshop
Due: 1. Study Questions 5
2. Print out assignment for Paper 1 and accompanying poem from Moodle. Bring them and any questions you may have about them to class.

**** REQUIRED: Reading by Christian Wiman 7:30 p.m.****

- Tues. 2/16: Millay, “[I, being born a woman and distressed]” (88)
First paragraphs, paper structure, quotations, and citations
Due: 1. Read Norton pages 660–666 on “Effective Quotation.” *Note:* some of the Norton examples feature a more elaborate form of parenthetical citation than the form described in the MLA section of *A Pocket Style Manual*. Please follow the more streamlined form described in the style manual.
2. Study Questions 6
3. Literalization Exercise 4 (typed)
- Thurs. 2/18: Milton, “[When I consider how my light is spent]” (266)
Library hunt – meet at Dinand reference desk
Due: 1. Literalize Milton’s sonnet for yourself, taking care to distinguish what you may expect the poem to say from what it is actually saying.
2. Read Norton pages 654–655 on “The Internet” and “Evaluating Sources” (first section only)
3. Please bring *A Pocket Style Manual* with you to class in the library. You will need to consult it to find out what bibliographic information to record for documentation of your sources.

**II. “BEGIN[NING] WITH A LUMP IN THE THROAT”:
INTERPRETATION**

- Tues. 2/23: Selected poems by visiting poet Christian Wiman (Moodle)
Moving from explication to interpretation – developing a thesis

Discussion of Paper 2

Due: 1. Paper 1: Explication (4–5pp)

2. Study Questions 7
3. Print out assignment for Paper 2 from Moodle. Bring it and any questions you may have about it to class.

Thurs. 2/25: Larkin, “Church Going” (236)

Clustering

Due: 1. Read Norton pages 626–629 on “The Elements of the Essay”:
“Tone (and Audience),” “Thesis,” and “Structure.”

2. Study Questions 8
3. Library hunt worksheet

Tues. 3/1: Lee, “Persimmons” (24)

Constructing body paragraphs and structuring an analytical argument

Due: 1. Read Norton pages 633–639 on “The Writing Process”: “Getting Started,” “Planning,” and “Drafting”

2. Read Norton pages 183–mid 187 on “Symbol”
3. Study Questions 9

Thurs. 3/3: Olds, “The Victims” (240) and student writing sample (Moodle)

Clarifying Cores

Integrating quotations

Discussion of recitations

Due: 1. Study Questions 10
2. Print out Recitation assignment and poems from Moodle. Bring them and any questions you may have about them to class.

Tues. 3/8 &

Thurs. 3/10: Spring break. Enjoy!

Tues. 3/15: Writing workshop – peer reviews

Due: full draft of Paper 2

**Sign-up sheet for recitations posted on Moodle at 6:00 this evening.

Maximum of two reciters per poem. **Start journaling today!****

III. SOUND AND SENSE

Thurs. 3/17: Kinnell, “Blackberry Eating” (516)

Poe, “The Raven” (212)

Pope, “Sound and Sense” (204)

Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” (543)

Due: 1. Read Norton pages 639–644 on “The Writing Process”:
“Revising” and “Crafting a Title”

2. Read “Memory” chapter from *Sound Ideas* (169–178) (Moodle)

3. Read Norton pages 199–top of 206 on “The Sounds of Poetry”
4. Write marginal notes on any interesting sound effects you notice in the assigned poems. Pay close attention to the sounds of letters, words, and sequences of words.

Tues. 3/22: Herbert, “Easter Wings” (284)
 Emanuel, “Jazzanatomy” (228)
 Dickinson, “[I stepped from Plank to Plank] (532)
 Rhythm and rhyme

Due: 1. **Paper 2: Analysis (4–6pp), with draft and peer reviews**

2. **Extra hard copy of Paper 2**

3. Read pp. 3–19 of “Line” chapter from *Sound Ideas* (Moodle)
4. Reread Norton pages 255–258 on rhyme
5. Study Questions 11

Thurs. 3/24 Easter Break. Happy spring!

Tues. 3/29: Sidney, “[Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show]” (Moodle)
 Jonson, “Still to Be Neat” (149)
 Steele, “Waiting for the Storm” (Moodle: Study Questions 12)
 Prose rhythm: varying sentence openings, structures, lengths
 Discussion of Paper 3

Due: 1. Read Norton pages 206–212 on “The Sounds of Poetry”

2. Study Questions 12

3. Print out assignment for Paper 3 from Moodle. Bring it and any questions you may have about it to class.

Thurs. 3/31: **Recitations**

Due: 1. Scansion Exercise 1 (Moodle): check against answer key and bring corrected exercise to class.

2. Thoroughly prepare all poems scheduled to be presented today, with special attention to how sound and rhythm relate to sense.

Think about what decisions will have to be made when the poem is spoken aloud. What is at stake in each choice? Mark significant elements, circle crucial moments, and come in ready to ask good questions.

Tues. 4/5: **Recitations**, continued.

Discussion of scansion quiz

Due: 1. Read Caplan’s “Background and Structure of *Accentual Meter*” and Kennedy & Gioia’s “Rap” (Moodle)

2. Scansion Exercise 2 (Moodle): again, check against answer key and bring corrected exercise to class.

3. Prepare for today’s recitations as for Thurs. 3/31.

**IV. “MAKE IT NEW”:
FORM AND FREEDOM**

- Thurs. 4/7: **Scansion quiz**
Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow” (142)
Whitman, “A Noiseless Patient Spider” (66)
Choosing poems from *The New Yorker*
Due: 1. Read Norton pages 508–515 on “Evaluating Poetry”
2. Study Questions 13
- Tues. 4/12: Writing workshop – peer reviews
Due: full draft of Paper 3
- Thurs. 4/14: Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (275)
Bishop, “Sestina” (277)
Discussion of sonnet project
Due: 1. Read Norton pages 274–275 on “Stanza Forms”
2. Study Questions 14
3. Print out assignment for sonnet project from Moodle. Bring it and any questions you may have about it to class.
- Tues. 4/19: Poems from *The New Yorker* (handout)
Discussion of presentations
Due: 1. Paper 3: Sound & Sense (4–6pp), with draft and peer reviews
2. On your own, thoroughly analyze every aspect of the poem your group selected. Look back at your class notes from across the semester and also at the Norton glossary to remind yourself of the tools your poet may be using to evoke responses in readers. (Great practice for the final exam!)
- In class, compare notes with the members of your group. Decide together which of your analytical observations most helpfully illuminate what your poem is doing. Design a 15-minute presentation to guide the class to an appreciation of those aspects you find most compelling. Avoid merely listing poetic elements; instead, show how they work in concert to produce effects as the poem proceeds.
- Practice your presentation aloud to refine approach and timing. You will need to be ruthlessly focused to present a meaningful analysis within the strict 15-minute limit.
- Thurs. 4/21: Group presentations on poems from *The New Yorker*
Due: Thoroughly prepare the three *New Yorker* poems your group is not presenting, annotating each with an eye to all of the poetic elements you have learned about this term.
- Tues. 4/26: Writing workshop – peer reviews of sonnets
Group presentation debriefings

- Due:**
1. complete draft of sonnet
 2. complete draft of sonnet printed without lines 13–14
 3. your reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of your group's presentation

Thurs. 4/28: Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (538)

Due: Study Questions 15

Tues. 5/3: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" cont'd

Discussion of final exam

Due: sonnet – please send **in body of email** (rather than as an attachment) to ccoeh@holycross.edu by 11:00 so that I can distribute the whole collection in time for everyone to prepare for our final class

Thurs. 5/5: Sonnet recitations & celebration

Exam period: **Final exam**