

English 240-01: Reading Poetry

Spring 2012: Tu/Th 2:00-3:20

Professor Ingrid Nelson

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Office Hours by appointment: <http://www1.mysignup.com/cgi-bin/view.cgi?datafile=inelson>

Description

A first course in the critical reading of selected English-language poets. Attention will be given to different styles and modes of poetry, especially how poetry appeals to the ear and to the eye. We will study poetry from the Middle Ages to the present day, looking at through-lines and discontinuities in the English-language poetic tradition. Poetry by Shakespeare, Donne, Wordsworth, Browning, Dickinson, Stevens, Moore, O'Hara, Snyder, and others.

Required textbooks

The Norton Anthology of Poetry, shorter Fifth Edition, ed. Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy. (Norton, 2005). Only this edition may be used. ISBN: 978-0393979213
Donald Hall, *The Back Chamber* (Houghton Mifflin, 2011). ISBN: 978-0547645858
Kathleen Fraser, *movable TYYPE* (Nightboat, 2011). ISBN: 978-0984459889
All texts available at Amherst Books

Assignments and Grading Criteria

1. **Close reading paper.** This paper should focus on *how* a poem makes meaning, by examining the formal devices (meter, figures of speech, figures of thought, verse form, and so forth) that the poem uses. Although this paper does not need to have an argument, it does need a focus. Pick one or two formal aspects of the poem that are most striking to you, and discuss those; do not make a laundry list of all the poem's formal features. About 3 pages long.
2. **Formal papers.** These three thesis-driven papers will make an argument about a poem or poems, that incorporates both the literal sense of the poem(s) and the formal devices used to convey that literal sense. Again, you should focus on the most important aspects of the poem's form that support your argument. Do not summarize the poem's message or list the formal devices indiscriminately. The papers will be 5-7 pages, with detailed assignments to follow.
3. **Test on Prosody and Poetic Form.**
4. **Participation.** This class requires active, engaged participation from all students. You are expected to come to class prepared, alert, and focused. More than 2 unexcused absences over the course of the semester will significantly lower your final grade. Excused absences require a doctor's or college official's note.

Special Accommodations

Students needing special accommodations for test-taking or other assignments should provide a doctor's note and arrange to meet with me in the first two weeks of class to

discuss their individual needs. I am committed to making this course accessible for all students; please do not hesitate to make an appointment with me to discuss any concerns.

Policy on Turning in Papers and Extensions

All papers must be submitted in class in hard copy. No extensions will be granted except in case of documented emergencies.

Policy on Absences

Because of the discussion format of the class, it is crucial that you attend and engage with the material. Two absences are permitted per semester, including illness and emergencies. After 2 absences, your final grade drops by a third of a letter grade (e.g., B+ to B).

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Jan 24 (Tu): Introduction. What is a poem? Why read poetry?

Jan 26 (Th): **Workshop:** Poetic Devices of Sound. Jonson, "Slow, Slow, Fresh Fount" (220); Langston Hughes, "Harlem Sweeties" (handout); Hopkins, "God's Grandeur" (755); The Cuckoo Song (14).

Jan 31 (Tu): **No class.**

Feb 2 (Th): **Workshop:** Prosody. Emerson, "Fate" (946); Blake, "The Lamb" (441-42) "The Tyger" (446-47); Longfellow, from "The Song of Hiawatha" (597); Starbuck, "A Tapestry for Bayeux" (handout)

Feb 7 (Tu.): **No class.**

Feb 9 (Th): Speakers. Skelton, "Mannerly Margery Milk and Ale" (81); Browning, "My Last Duchess" (643), Tennyson, "The Lotos-Eaters" (625-29); Ransom, "Piazza Piece," (882).

Feb 14 (Tu): Fixed and Unfixed Forms (1): Shakespeare, Sonnet 18 (171); Sonnet 73 (173-74); Donne, Holy Sonnet 14 (208); Frost, "The Silken Tent" (806). Ted Berrigan, Sonnet 15 (handout). **Workshop:** Stanza forms.

Feb 16 (Th): Fixed and Unfixed Forms (2): Bishop, "One Art," (966), "Sestina" (963); Sir Patrick Spens (91); Richard Wright, from *Haiku: This Other World* (958).

Feb 21 (Tu): **Close-reading Due.** Poetic Syntax. Wordsworth, "The World is Too Much With Us" (484); Milton, from Book 1 of *Paradise Lost* (277-78).

Feb 23 (Th): Visual Poems (1): Herbert, "The Altar" (235), "Easter Wings" (236); Hollander, "Swan and Shadow" (1104); Swenson, "Cardinal Ideograms" (972-73).

Feb 28 (Tu): Visual Poems (2): Visit to Frost Library

Mar 1 (Th): Kathleen Fraser, *movable TTYPE*; review for test.

Mar 6 (Tu): **Test on Prosody and Poetic Form**; Modes and Commonplaces: “Fowls in the Frith”(15); Chaucer, from *The Canterbury Tales*, lines 1-18 (15-16); Anne Bradstreet, “The Author to Her Book” (285).

Mar 8 (Th): Eros (1): Marlowe, “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” (168); Raleigh, “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd” (121); Barrett Browning, Sonnet 43 (594); Philips, “To My Excellent Lucasia, on our Friendship” (312-13)

Mar 13 (Tu): Eros (2): Keats, “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” (579); Yeats, “Leda and the Swan” (776); Hall, “Mangosteens” (1235-36).

Mar 15 (Th): **First Formal Paper Due**. Death (1): “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” both versions (720), “I heard a Fly buzz – when I died” (727); Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale” (582-84).

*******Enjoy your Spring Break!*******

Mar 27 (Tu): Death (2): Thomas Gray, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (410-13); Yeats, “An Irish Airman Foresees His Death” (handout); Browning, “The Bishop Orders His Tomb” (644-47).

Mar 29 (Th): Land and Landscape (1): Charlotte Smith, from “Beachy Head” (437-38); Derek Walcott, “A Far Cry From Africa” (1132-33); Gary Snyder, “Above Pate Valley” (1129-30), “Four Poems for Robin” (1130-32).

Apr 3 (Tu): Land and Landscape (2): Jean Toomer, from *Cane* (898-99); Robert Lowell, “For the Union Dead” (1007-09); Carl Sandburg, “Chicago” (handout).

Apr 5 (Th): **Second Formal Paper Due**. Poets on Poetry (1): Stevens, “The Idea of Order at Key West” (824-25); Hughes, “Theme for English B”(915); O’Hara, “Why I am Not a Painter” (1076).

Apr 10 (Tu): Poets on Poetry (2): Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (585-86); Dickinson, “I reckon-When I count at all” (727); “Tell all the truth but tell it slant” (731-32); Bernstein, “this poem intentionally left blank” (1219).

Apr 12 (Th): Poetry and History: Yeats, “The Second Coming” (774); Brathwaite, “Ancestors” (1122-24); Shelley, “Ozymandias” (541)

Apr 17 (Tu): Donald Hall, *The Back Chamber*

Apr 19 (Th): Long Poems (1): Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (478-83); Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (862-66).

Apr 24 (Tu): Long Poems (2) Whitman, "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" (689); from *Song of Myself* (679-84).

Apr 26 (Th): Invective and Humor: Edward Lear, "How Pleasant to Know Mr. Lear" (667-68); O'Hara, "A True Account of Talking to the Sun on Fire Island" (handout); Larkin, "This Be the Verse" (1033).

May 1 (Tu): **Third Formal Paper Due.** Readings: Students' Choice!

May 3 (Th): Wrap-Up and Review. More Students' Choice.