

## Issues in Modern Poetry

English 229

Fall 2004

Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 3:30-4:20

King 243

DeSales Harrison

Rice 024

Department of English

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30-3:30 and by appointment.

[dhrrsn@earthlink.net](mailto:dhrrsn@earthlink.net), [desales.harrison@oberlin.net](mailto:desales.harrison@oberlin.net)

*Description:* An introduction to the reading of British and American lyric poetry, with emphasis on works from the first half of the twentieth century. We will consider the complex relation between innovation and tradition, music and discord, pattern and disruption, as well as that between public discourse and intimate awareness. A central goal will be to explore the particular challenges and opportunities that lyric poems present to writers of critical prose.

*Introduction:* This course is an immersion in the study of modern lyric poetry, a poetry distilled from a historical period of extraordinary innovation, struggle, violence, and creative vitality. Because the poems in question take as their subjects love, hatred, death, transcendence, longing, passion, and regret, these larger topics will preoccupy us as well. While we will consider such topics, necessarily, as philosophical and spiritual matters, we will address them primarily as aesthetic problems, problems in the realm of artistic representation, problems of expression. Looked at from one vantage, *every* poem tests a poet's powers against a fundamental difficulty: the difficult labor of converting lived, immediate experience into written experience, experience mediated by words. The poems we read will become objects of minutely fine-grained analysis, and each one, in diverse ways, will test and hone our skills in close textual analysis. In this sense, the difficult labor of the poets will be our difficult labor as well. The primary challenge—in essays and in class discussion—will be to speak clearly and coherently about artifacts that frequently violate—or seem to violate—the proprieties of clarity and cohesion. We will pay special attention to the resistance that the poems present to simple or straightforward explanation, but always with the goal of finding ways to express, in simple, straightforward terms, the inherent complexity of the work. To say, then, that this is a course in close reading is to say that it is a course in close *writing*. Students should be prepared to return to the texts in question—not only the poetic texts assigned on the syllabus and but critical texts they author themselves—with scrupulous, tenacious, and unflinching care.

*Prerequisites:* This course, as indicated in the English department course guide, “is open to students who have completed any Writing Intensive course, or have gained Writing Certification in any course in the Humanities. It is also open to those who have achieved a 5 on the AP exam in English Language/Composition

or English Literature/Composition, or a score of 710 or better on the SAT II Writing test. Other students may be admitted by consent of the instructor, with the understanding that students should be able to demonstrate the ability to handle writing, discussion, and analysis in ways typically taught in Writing Intensive classes.”

*Honor Code:* All work must be submitted in adherence to the honor code. If you have any questions concerning the honor code, please consult the instructor, or refer to the following web page:

[http://www.oberlin.edu/wwwcomm/r\\_r/honor.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/wwwcomm/r_r/honor.html)

*Written Assignments:* Students will submit three papers. The first two papers, each between 1250-1500 words in length, are due on September 27 and November 15, respectively, and a final research paper, somewhat longer (up to 2000 words) due December 13.

*Sample Papers:* Samples of strong papers, with identifying details removed, will be available for your perusal.

*Grade Breakdown:* Your grade will represent primarily your essays’ success in grappling vigorously, imaginatively, and clearly with the course’s primary texts. A smaller but crucial component in the final evaluation will reflect your willingness to comment cogently in class and to engage with the comments of your fellow students.

*Attendance:* Prompt attendance in all classes is mandatory; more than 2 unexcused absences will place your grade in peril. Class will begin promptly at 3:30; arrival more than 10 minutes late constitutes an absence.

*Required Text:* *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Eds. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, Jon Stallworthy. New York: Norton, 1996. Available (or soon to be available) at the Oberlin Bookstore. Additional readings will be placed on reserve or on Blackboard.

*Schedule of Readings:* Unless stipulated otherwise, readings will consist of all selections in the Norton. The following list will inevitably shift. Please check Blackboard frequently for updates. All readings for the coming week should be completed by Monday's meeting, to give our local discussions depth and context. The fundamental requirement for all class meetings is an intimate and precise familiarity with the assigned texts. Please be prepared each week to answer very specific questions about the poems, either orally or in writing.

<b>Week of</b>	<b>Poems</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Sept. 2	Introduction	
Sept. 6	Shakespeare, "Sonnet 73" Herbert, "Virtue" Donne, Holy Sonnet 14: "Batter my heart" Smart, from <i>Jubilate Agno</i> : "My Cat Geoffrey" Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" Blake, from <i>Milton</i> : "And Did Those Feet" Keats, "To Autumn" Julia Ward Howe, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"	No Class Monday
Sept. 13	Whitman	
Sept. 20	Dickinson	
Sept. 27	Hardy, Arnold	1 <sup>st</sup> Essay Due 9/27
Oct. 4	Housman, Hopkins	
Oct. 11	Yeats, Dunbar	
Oct. 18	FALL RECESS: NO CLASS	
Oct. 25	Frost	
Nov. 1	Eliot	
Nov. 8	Pound, HD	
Nov. 15	Williams, Moore	2 <sup>nd</sup> Essay Due 11/15
Nov. 22	Catch-up, Thanksgiving	
Nov. 29	Wallace Stevens	
Dec. 6	Owen, Gurney, Rosenberg	
Dec. 13	Auden, Hughes, Eberhardt	3 <sup>rd</sup> Essay Due 12/13