

## **The Lyric in English from Donne to Yeats**

English 294 (CRN 12553)

T-Th: 9:35-10:50 Mudd 202

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Office Hours: T-Th: 3-5pm. And by appointment.

### **Basic Premises:**

**This is a course in the poetry of the last four hundred years, which is to say, it is a course in contemporary poetry.** The broadest goal of the course is to foster in you a sense of how this statement might, in fact, be true. As antiquated as some of these poems may seem, and as widely as different styles and periods might appear to diverge, each work participates in our present sense of what it means to be human. While we will give exquisitely close attention to the attributes of individual poems—the formal, syntactic, and rhetorical surface—our primary preoccupation will be with how these poems engage **elemental aspects of existence**: the transience of beauty, the exhilaration and tyranny of the passions, the vicissitudes of mood and affection, the claim of death, the ineluctable progress of time. We will dedicate ourselves to the challenge not only of describing artworks but of pondering what kinds of work these artifacts undertake to accomplish in the world. If at times the discussion will seem more native to a course on philosophy, psychology, theology, or history, this is only because the works in question are never content (as no artwork ever is) with being merely a thing of beauty. Another way of putting this is to say that there is no such thing as aesthetics distinct from ethics—**no such thing as art for art's sake alone**. For the sake of what, then—we will continually ask—do these poets ply their craft?

### **Requirements:**

Dispatches and Presentations:

The writing in this course will consist only of very small papers, called **dispatches** (50%). While 10 dispatches have been assigned, you may skip one dispatch before midterm and one week after midterm. (The deadline for giving notice that you'll be skipping a dispatch is 5pm the day before.) A dispatch should be between **250 and 400 words in length**, which is to say, **somewhere between a page and two pages**.

The **virtues of a successful dispatch** will include **incisiveness, imagination, clarity of thought, rhetorical command, stylistic grace, felicity of phrase, and perfection of surface**. These are not response papers, they are **decisive, intensely focused critical engagements**.

**The extension policy is that no extensions will be granted**, and except with a dean's excuse, there are no exceptions to the extension policy. **But why?** Here is why. In the beginning of each class, two or three students will be asked (without prior warning) to present their dispatches on the day's reading. Other students will be asked to respond to these presentations. This is how the discussion will begin. Together with frequent and adventurous comments in class, these presentations will be the basis for your **participation grade (10%)**.

#### Tests and Final Examination:

**Two reading tests. (20%)** Your performance on these will reflect the thoroughness of your preparation, and will consist of **passage identifications**, in which you will be asked to name the poet, poem, and in some instances, to comment on context. While these tests will be designed in part to confound those who read quickly or superficially, their primary goal will be to reward richly those who have read the work with care, which is to say, at least twice, with a dictionary at hand.

There will be a **final examination (20%)** which will consist of passage identifications and essay questions.

#### Conferences:

The class will be divided into three groups. The students in a group will **meet with the instructor individually once every three weeks**. These conferences will be dedicated primarily to discussing your dispatches, but they will also represent an opportunity to discuss and reflect upon the course at large.

#### Attendance:

**Class will begin promptly at 9:35.** More than two unexcused absences will drop your participation grade to zero. Arriving in class more than 10 minutes late constitutes an absence.

#### Text:

*The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Eds. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, Jon Stallworthy. 5<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Norton, 2005. Books are available at the Oberlin Bookstore.

Unless stipulated otherwise, the readings for each week will consist of the complete selections in the Norton for the assigned author.

Supplemental readings may be distributed from time to time.

Week	No.	Reading	
2/8	1	Intro: Shakespeare	
2/15	2	Donne	Dispatch
2/22	3	Herbert	Dispatch
2/29	4	Milton	Dispatch
3/8	5	Pope	Test 1
3/15	6	Wordsworth	Dispatch
3/22	7	Keats	Dispatch
3/29	8	SPRING BREAK	
4/5	9	Whitman	Dispatch
4/12	10	Dickinson	Test 2
4/19	11	Tennyson	Dispatch
4/26	12	Hopkins	Dispatch
5/3	13	Hardy	Dispatch
5/10	14	Yeats	Dispatch
5/19	15	Final Examination	2:00pm