

Fall Semester, 2014

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Syllabus

Week One: Prosody Lecture and audios.

Explication: the Poetic Line. Pick any poem by Donne, Milton, Browning, Yeats, Eliot or Auden and analyze it, focusing on the inter-relationship of Form and content. Make it as clear as you can how form determines content and vice versa.

Obviously it would be nice to be brilliant. But the purpose of this exercise is to 'break you in': to get you used to paying close attention to the sound and texture of poetry, instead of simply taking the safe road, and sticking to content (as we usually do). 500-750 words is sufficient for this introductory exercise. Please send it to me via **dropbox**.

Week Two: Poetry, Continued (lecture).

Explication. Pick one poet – any poet – living between 1500 and 1900, except one of the five below. Then analyze how they use poetic technique to communicate a particular persona or point of view. LISTEN to your poet. Does he/she make write open-ended lines, or end-stopped, or a balance between the two (i.e. do they tend to end their lines with punctuation or run over)? Consider their use of caesuras (punctuation pauses within the lines), whether the poetic structure reinforces or undermines the sentence structure, what they do with line length or rhyme or accent, how they violate the structures they set up, whether the poetic structure reinforces the "message" of the poem or undermines it, etc etc. No, you won't be able to do ALL of this – but do some of it.

For this assignment you may pick any English language poet (American is fine). 500-750 words.

Participate in Discussion

Week Three: Read Tetrameter and The Social Contract

Reading Assignment: Donne's Tetrameter and ballad: Song (Go Catch a Falling Star); Song (Sweetest Love, I, do not go...), A Fever, Community,

The Bait, A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.

Tetrameter PLUS (these poems are mixed form with an emphasis on tetrameter. Think about why he switches): The Legacy, Break of Day, The Message, The Broken Heart.

Participate in Discussion.

Week Four: Read Pentameter Perfection

Assigned Reading: The Good Morrow, Elegy To His Mistress Going to Bed, Elegy On His Mistress, Holy Sonnets 2-4,6,10, 15;

Pentameter Plus (in these poems pentameter predominates. Consider, as before, the exceptions): The Prohibition, Love's Alchemy.

Participate in Discussion.

Week Five: Flexible Forms

Read Donne: The Flea, Triple Fool, Sun Rising, Love's Alchemy, The Indifferent, The Canonization, Love's Infiniteness, Love's Usury, A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day.

Turn in: 750-1000 **explication** of selected Donne poems, explaining how the form determines context and vice versa. You may discuss poems assigned, or include others, but do not simply regurgitate lectures or discussions: show me you've been thinking.

No Discussion

Week Six: Milton's Blank Verse and the Caesura

Read Milton: *Paradise Lost* intro Book 1 1-16; Book 1 (Satan), 242-263; Bk IV (Eve's love song):639-656; Bk II (Belial), 119-225

Participate in Discussion

Week Seven: Milton's Public and Private Rhetoric

Read Milton's Private Rhetoric: Sonnet VII, Sonnet XIX, *Samson Agonistes* 23-109; *Paradise Lost* BK 4 32-113.

And Public Rhetoric: *Paradise Lost* Book 1 84-124; 315-330; Bk II (Mammon):237-256.

Participate in Discussion

Week Eight: The Dramatic Monologues in Rhyme

Read Browning: Porphyria's Lover, Soliloquy of The Spanish Cloister, My Last Duchess, Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came

Turn in 750-1000 page explication of selected MILTON passages, analyzing what effect Milton is aiming for, and how he achieves it. I have delayed the due date a week so that you could participate in the MILton discussion first. Note however that I do read discussions, and am expecting more polished and thought out explication than the spontaneous nature of discussion allows.

No Discussion this week.

Week Nine: The Dramatic Monologues in Blank Verse

Read Browning: Fra Lippo Lippi, Andrea Del Sarto. Also Tennyson's Ulysses (okay, this isn't Browning. But another Victorian Dramatic Monologue, and it works).

Participate in Discussion.

Week 10: Early Yeats.

Read Yeats: The Lake Isle of Innisfree, Who Goes with Fergus, Into the Twilight, The Song of the Wandering Aengus, The Folly of Being Comforted, Adam's Curse, A Woman Homer Sung, No Second Troy, Brown Penny, To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing.

Turn in 750-1000 word Browning Explication, focusing particularly on how Browning develops very different personalities in his speakers, despite using similar verse technique. Is it vocabulary, sentence structure, imagery? And if it is conceptual (there's content again), how does he make this change the tools at his disposal?

No Discussion this week.

Week 11: Middle Yeats

Read Yeats: September 1913, Easter 1916, On a Political Prisoner, On Being Asked for a War Poem, The Coat, The Second Coming, A Prayer For My Daughter, Sailing to Byzantium.

Participate in Discussion

Week 12: Late Yeats (Apologies for the rhyme)

Read Yeats: Leda and the Swan, Among School Children, Three Movements, For Anne Gregory, Lapis Lazuli, Long-Legged Fly, The Circus Animal's Desertion, Under Ben Bulbin.

Turn in Paper Proposal. Be specific: tell me what you will argue, and how.

Participate in Discussion

Week 13: Eliot and the Modernists

Read Eliot: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, The Wasteland, The Hollow-Men.

And (For context – but okay, this is cheating) Auden: Musee des Beaux Arts and In Memory of W.B. Yeats

Turn in 750-1000 word **Explication** on selected poem(s) of Yeats. In this explication be sure to identify not only what poem(s) you are focusing on, but what aspect of the chameleon Yeats you will be focusing on. For instance, you might focus on Yeats the Victorian, Yeats and the Ballad, Yeats and pentameter, Yeats the modernist, etc.

No Discussion this week.

Week 14: Eliot, Pound and the Wasteland

Read Eliot's Wasteland.

Participate in Discussion

Turn in Annotated Bibliography via dropbox. Please include normal MLA citation plus 3-4 sentence summary of the argument and what you found most useful.

Week 15: Conclusion

By Friday of this week, please **turn in your final research paper**, complete with final bibliography (note: even if your biblio does not change, I DO need it attached to the paper. This is for my convenience – so that I can check your citations.

Aim for a paper 2-3 pages longer than a conference paper: say, 10-15 pages times. You want a paper that has so much good stuff in it, you have to cut at least two pages to read it – but not so long that you make ducks and drakes of the argument, in doing so.

There is no reading or discussion this week, folks: just work on your paper.

I have enjoyed teaching this class, folks. Thank you.

Course Description For English 531 Fall 2014

Textbook: None! All the poems assigned this semester are available for free, either via Project Gutenberg, or simply via Google, as you prefer.

Advantage: Financial chiefly; it is much cheaper this way.

Disadvantage: No Notes. Fortunately you are graduate students, and adept at using the OED (Oxford English Dictionary), looking up lines, and generally digging up meaning and nuance in all forms. Fortunately too, none of the poets assigned use Old or Middle English; we start in the Renaissance.

Welcome, All! This is not a “typical” Literature class (one that focuses on a particular period or single major author), so some of you may be wondering what to expect. Let me begin therefore by explaining what this class is **not**. First of all, this is definitely not a survey course; there will be no attempt to “cover” English poetry this semester. Likewise, this is not a random collection of poetry, or even an idiosyncratic collection based on personal taste (though I definitely “like” all my poets).

Rather, this is a “technique” course: a course focusing on **how to read, analyze and teach poetry**. Teachers today are expected to teach large amounts of poetry when they leave with a degree. It doesn't really matter whether you teach high school, or community colleges or 4 year, British or American or World literature; almost all of you (if you teach at all) will find yourselves teaching large amounts of poetry – despite the fact that many or most of you have never been taught **HOW** to analyze it. No wonder if many people are a little scared of poetry: we are expect instant experts. This class, then, is designed to make up for this gap.

To facilitate this, and to prevent distractions, I have decided to focus chiefly on “short” poems, sometimes called “lyric” poems. When this is not possible – and it is clearly not possible with Milton, the supreme master of blank verse – I have chosen to limit the assignment to selections that can stand alone.

The purpose of this restriction is simple. If I assign *Paradise Lost* or *Dr. Faustus*, it is easy to focus on elements that are familiar to us from prose – narrative or characterization say. We are comfortable analyzing story and persona; we do this every time we read a novel. And there is nothing wrong with this per se; just because something is written in verse does not mean it cannot also tell a story. It becomes a problem however if we *avoid* discussing an epic or a play as poetry because poetry is outside our comfort zone, and we prefer to stick to familiar territory. And all too often, this is exactly what happens. In the poems we will read this semester on the other hand, poetic **form** plays a

much larger role. What is the relationship between form and content in this poem, and how would changing the form necessarily change the effect? Say for instance each line ends in punctuation. This is “closed” form, and it suggests neatness and order, stasis, control. Is this what the content of the poem also suggests? If so they reinforce each other.

Perhaps however the poet is in tumult, or the content veers more towards emotional chaos and instability. Why, in that case, would the poet choose to reinforce the pause at the end of each line with punctuation; is the poet trying to reign in the chaos of his emotions, or is he being ironic, or what? And what about pauses *within* the line? Multiple caesuras (punctuation pauses that occur anywhere but at the end of the line) put the poetic structure of the poem at odds with its basic sentence structure: after all, sentences tell you to pause at punctuation, whereas the poetic line tells you to pause at the end. And yes, I know you don't pick up on all this consciously, but read a few of Blake's Songs of Innocence; you can *feel* how all the patterns reinforce each other. And when they don't – well, either the poet is telling you something, or he is being complicated in interesting ways – and either way, we will talk about it.

We will also talk about meter and accent and rhyme: about prosody, in short. And word choice: is this elevated diction, is it common diction, or something else? And how does diction fit with the choice of genre?

By now a few of you have read this far, and started to panic; please don't. For one thing, you have done some of this already; you just don't realize it. All of you for instance have analyzed “speaker” and “voice” and “tone.” Imagine therefore that you have done a nice analysis of tone, and some rude person is pushing you with “why; how do you know?” Half the time, such people are just testing you – but it doesn't matter; when this course is done, you'll answer in more detail than they want to know; you will be able to tell them exactly how the poet conveys such subtleties.

In short, enjoy. :)

Course Objectives

Ultimately, the goal of this course is simple: to analyse poetry *as* poetry, knowledgeably and with an appreciation of the nuanced relationship between form and content. This class will focus particularly on those elements of poetry which distinguish it from prose: to wit, prosody (i.e. meter and feet, accent and rhyme), caesuras, open and closed form, etc. By the end of this course, students will be able to read poetry as poets do -- to explain in detail how content dictates form and form alters content.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students will be able to analyze external poetic form: to scan feet, meter, accent, rhyme scheme, caesura, alliteration and assonance.

Students will be able to analyze the limits of external form, and the way "internal form" dictates line length in modern poetry.

Students will be able to analyze the relationship between form and content in poetry: to explain in detail how form dictates content and vice versa.

Grading Criteria

Explications (6):	60% total (10% each)
Annotated Bibliography:	10%
Participation in Discussion:	10%
Research Paper:	20%

Grading Criteria, Explicated

This is a graduate class, so explications must begin with **at least** one full page of analysis: your conclusions, based on all the tools you have at your disposal. Analyze content, indicating both how you came to your conclusion, and how content relates to form. This analysis should make clear why I am reading your explication at all – in other words, show me the distillation of all your thoughts and re-readings.

Once you have done that, go through the poem **proving** what you have just said. This is the evidential portion of your explication. 3-4 pages is fine here.

Annotated Bibliography

Please start with your proposal. This proposal should already be approved by me in advance; it is just a reminder.

Next, include at least 8 peer reviewed MLA citations in your biblio, making sure each one directly relates to your proposal.

Finally, skip one line, and then include 3-4 sentences that summarize both the argument of each citation, and what you consider most valuable in it. You may explicate and comment as needed.

Discussion: To earn an A in discussion credit you need to show me that you are

- 1) following the discussion on a regular basis, and
- 2) contributing substantive analysis on a weekly basis.

To prove the first you need more than one comment a week; to prove the second

a scattering of comments is not sufficient. And folks, if you like a classmate's observation, don't just say so – say WHY.

Research Papers should be (roughly) 10-15 pages long. Think these as Conference papers you need to cut back; a little too long to read aloud without cutting, but not so long that you have to cut half your argument in order to read it aloud. Make sure your paper has a clear argument, shows knowledge of current critical discourse, and comes to insightful and individual conclusions.

Plagiarism

Instructors in the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty (including collusion and selling academic products). Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Students guilty of plagiarism may be failed for the course.

Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension, and expulsion. (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b[1,2,3]).

Courtesy Statement:

"All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment." (See Student's Guide Handbook, Policies and Procedures, Conduct).

Americans w/Disabilities Act Statement:

Americans w/Disabilities Act Statement: Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must go through the Academic Support Committee. For more information, please contact the Director of Disability Resources & Services, Halladay Student Services Bldg., Room 303D, (903) 886-5835.