

Syllabus

Instructor: Jonathan Morse, Kuykendall 518, MWF 2:30-3:20 and by appointment.
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The web page where class documents will be posted: jonathanmorse.net

Text: *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, fifth edition

Grades: based on two exams at 20% each, a five-page paper at 30%, and a final at 30%. There will also be two assignments graded pass-fail: a mini-lesson, five or ten minutes long, where you'll teach the class a sonnet, and a sonnet that you'll write yourself. To get a pass for the mini-lesson, put in the effort to help your fellow students get some pleasure out of the reading. To get a pass for your own sonnet, rewrite and rewrite and rewrite and rewrite and rewrite until the poem (1) rhymes accurately, (2) scans accurately, and (3) makes some paraphrasable sense. Keep writing and I'll keep reading. I'll think about the results at final grade time, especially in borderline cases.

And yes, Walt Whitman wrote a poem called "Spontaneous Me." But something else old Spontaneous Me did was revise.

Other administrative matters: We'll probably begin the sonnet-teaching exercise around March 29 and proceed at two poems per period, with some time-out days. To help us get the most out of your lesson, tell us the title of your sonnet a week in advance. If you'll be teaching a sonnet that isn't in the anthology, e-mail me a copy and I'll post it on the web page.

The document "Classroom Policies" on the web page has more information about things like coming to class (do it), e-mailing me your papers (don't do it), and plagiarism (if you do it, you get an F).

And to start the semester off with two morals, consider the forgotten American poet Merrill Moore (1903-1957), possibly the most facile versifier in the history of the English language. Moore wrote only sonnets, but he composed those as fast as he was physically able to write the words down -- and he learned shorthand so he could physically write the words down still faster. By the time he was 35 he estimated that he'd written 50,000 sonnets. But -- and this is moral 1, for your poetry and your prose -- *nobody reads them now, because he refused to revise.*

However, Moore earned his living as a psychiatrist, and in that capacity he wrote a sonnet that I was able to memorize in just one reading. It goes:

You'll be all right, you'll be all right, you'll be
All right, you'll be all right, you'll be all right,
You'll be all right, you'll be all right, you'll be . . .

and so on for the full fourteen lines. And there's your moral 2.

Tentative calendar

1/11-15 "Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object": introduction to the idea of poetry as a language game. Viktor Shklovsky's essay "Art as Technique" (print from web page).

18 Holiday

20-29 (five periods) Figurative speech: connotation, metaphor, metonymy

2/1-17 (seven periods; February 15 is a holiday) Communication by sound: rhythm, rhyme, and stanza form

19 Exam 1

22-26 One important stanza form: the sonnet

3/1-10 (five periods) We learn what poets do by writing some sonnets

12 Your sonnet is due.

Now that you're beginning to understand the life of the language game, we'll spend the rest of the semester experiencing a few major poems and major periods of poetic history, this way.

3/15-19 The idea of classicism: Pope's *Essay on Criticism*

22-26 Holiday

29 - 4/7 (four periods; April 2 is a holiday) Some seventeenth-century poems

4/9 Exam 2

12 Exam 2 discussed, along with ideas for the paper

14, 16 Milton's *Lycidas*

19-23 Another master of the sounds of English: Keats

26 Paper due

28, 30 From Keats to Key West: Stevens

5/3, 5 Happy ending: Whitman's *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*

Final: Monday, May 10, 2:15-4:15