
Like, Love, Loathe: Lyric in the Western Literary Tradition

Description

When one imagines the Western European literary tradition, big important poems about national, religious, or metaphysical topics come to mind: *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, *The Divine Comedy*, *The Faerie Queene*, *Paradise Lost*. All very serious business, as all those definite articles imply. This course takes a different tack and explores the equally interesting literary tradition of short lyric poems, written to seduce, convince, woo, or otherwise trick lovers (or patrons); to commemorate important (or unimportant) occasions; to praise friends, patrons, or acquaintances (dead or alive); to accompany music or celebrate booze during ritual or social gatherings; to condemn, insult, or revile enemies; to anatomize and judge a speaker's own thoughts or emotions; and to do a host of other things. Yet all of these activities share a common logic: they're all instances of evaluation and valuing, celebrating, condemning, deriding, or loving something. That common logic leads to a host of questions: Do we always praise someone or something for mercenary reasons, trying to extract favor or reward from some higher power (i.e., liking something implies submission to a broader hierarchy)? Is value an entirely subjective judgment or an unarguable matter of taste (i.e., there's no point in talking about it)? Can individuals learn to love, or is it just a default emotional setting, like breathing (or, relatedly, can I make you love me if you don't)?

This course begins with poems of praise and condemnation so as to explore the relationship between lyric and value: i.e., do Catullus' invectives or Herrick's epigrams insult or represent insults? And what's the relationship between these two actions? We then turn to two paradigmatic versions of love poetry, Petrarch's and Ovid's, followed by John Donne's Renaissance rethinking of these paradigms. Finally, we'll examine how two more recent poets, Emily Dickinson and Charles Baudelaire, adapt these traditions to value or condemn some of those items that modernity posits as universal goods: e.g., connection, relation, and community.

Course Organization

You Rock! You Suck!

Catullus
Sappho
Robert Herrick

I Can Make You Love Me.

Petrarch
Ovid
John Donne

Everything's Connected.

That's Horrifying.
Emily Dickinson
Charles Baudelaire

Texts

Sappho, *Stung with Love: Poems and Fragments*, trans. Aaron Poochigian (Penguin, 2009).
Ovid, *The Erotic Poems*, trans. Peter Green (Penguin, 1982).
Catullus, *The Complete Poems*, trans. Guy Lee (Oxford, 2009).
Petrarch, *Selections from the Canzoniere and Other Works*, trans. Mark Musa (Oxford, 2008).
John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (Penguin, 1977).
Robert Herrick, *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. J. Max Patrick (Anchor, 1963).
Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Back Bay, 1976).
Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford, 2008).

Requirements

Five analysis papers and two short-answer exams.