

## What is Lyric?: Renaissance Short Poems and the Definition of Poetry

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### Description

What is lyric? How is it different from any other type of poetry, let alone from other types of literature? And is there a way to define it without recourse to such comparative procedures? This course examines the conflicted definition of poetry in Renaissance England, from the fight over rhyme and quantitative verse, to the distinctions between history, poetry, and philosophy. In this respect, we will explore whether lyric is primarily a musical designation, a catch-all category that refers to the length (temporal or spatial) of the poem, a form dependent on the type of presumed speaker, a genre that attempts immediacy in contrast to more representational forms, or something else—including an empty designation of approbation, as in the adjective “lyrical.” We will read short poems across a wide variety of traditions—Petrarchan, pseudo-Ovidian, cavalier, metaphysical, pastoral, elegiac, encomiastic, epigrammatic, obscene—in order to explore how this period imagined verse as well as what we can learn about poetry from an era that took poetic power so seriously. In short, this is a tour through Renaissance lyric with a point: inductively defining what we mean by poetry, lyric, and verse (as well as acknowledging that these terms might not be synonymous), instead of always defining it via what it is not—epic, narrative, prose, or drama.

To this end, we will also read some classical conceptualizations of poetry, from Aristotle, Horace, and Sidney, as well as a few modern accounts of the lyric (from Jonathan Culler, Hegel, and Agamben).

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### Readings

John Skelton, <i>Divers Ballads</i>	Thomas Carew, <i>Poems</i>
Thomas Wyatt, <i>Sonnets</i>	Andrew Marvell, <i>Poems</i>
Henry Howard, <i>Early of Surrey, Sonnets</i>	Margaret Cavendish, <i>Poems and Fancies</i>
Anne Lok, <i>A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner</i>	John Donne, <i>Songs and Sonnets/Divine Poems</i>
Edmund Spenser, <i>Amoretti</i>	Aemilia Lanyer, “The Description of Cockham”
Philip Sidney, <i>Astrophil and Stella</i> and <i>The Defence of Poesie</i>	Richard Crashaw, <i>Carmen Deo Nostrum</i>
Michael Drayton, <i>Idea</i>	George Herbert, <i>The Temple</i>
Mary Wroth, <i>Pamphilia to Amphilanthus</i>	Katherine Philips, <i>Poems</i>
Ben Jonson, <i>Poems</i>	Aristotle, <i>Poetics</i>
Robert Herrick, <i>Hesperides</i>	Horace, <i>Ars Poetica</i>

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### Texts

*English Sixteenth-Century Verse: An Anthology*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester (W.W. Norton, 1984).  
*Seventeenth-Century British Poetry, 1603-1660*, eds. John P. Rumrich and Gregory Chaplin  
(W.W. Norton, 2006).

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### Requirements

Four analysis papers, two short-answer exams, and a final research paper.