
What is Poetry?

Description

What is poetry? How is it different from other types of literature, let alone other types of linguistic objects? This course examines the competing definitions of poetry (functionalist, formalist, nominalist, and expressivist) in anglophone literature and introduces students to a variety of different poetic types and devices. To that end, we will read poems across a range of traditions and historical periods—pastoral, elegiac, epideictic, epigrammatic, obscene, satiric, lyric; early modern, Romantic, modernist, and contemporary—and try to get a sense of the ways in which poetry is more than just a fancy brand of communication. We'll also read some very bad poems, not just so that we can snicker at them, but so as to get a better understanding of the ways that poems go right.

By the end of this course, you'll be able to write and speak intelligently about poetic forms, kinds, devices, and a variety of literary terms; understand what the literary can do other than tell stories; and have read quite a few important poems in the anglophone tradition. And finally, if someone ever asks you what poetry is, you'll be able to say something more intelligent than "it's up to the reader." It's not.

This course fulfills the genre requirement for the English major, but is also open to any students interested in English poetry.

Selected Readings and Poets

Anne Lok, <i>A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner</i>	Emily Dickinson, selected poems
Philip Sidney, <i>Astrophil and Stella</i>	T.S. Eliot, <i>The Wasteland</i>
Mary Wroth, <i>Pamphilia to Amphilanthus</i>	William Butler Yeats, selected poems
Robert Herrick, selected poems	Langston Hughes, <i>A New Song</i>
Andrew Marvell, selected poems	Gwendolyn Brooks, <i>The Anniad</i>
John Donne, <i>Anniversaries, Holy Sonnets, Songs and Sonnets, Elegies</i>	Wallace Stevens, <i>Harmonium</i>
Aemilia Lanyer, "Description of Cookham"	Dylan Thomas, "The Force that through the Green Fuse Drives the Flower"
Anne Finch, "A Nocturnal Reverie"	Adrienne Rich, selected poems
Alexander Pope, <i>The Rape of the Lock</i>	Derek Walcott, selected poems
Jonathan Swift, "The Lady's Dressing Room"	Audre Lorde, selected poems
John Keats, selected poems	Anne Sexton, "In the Deep Museum"
Percy Bysshe Shelley, selected poems	Connie Fife, selected poems

Texts

The Broadview Anthology of Poetry, 2nd ed., ed. Amanda Goldrick-Jones and Herbert Rosengarten (Broadview, 2008).
John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (Penguin, 1977).
Very Bad Poetry, ed. Kathryn Petras and Ross Petras (Vintage Books, 1997).

Requirements

Three papers, two short-answer exams, two recitations, one non-narrative poem.