

100 Great Poems

LIT 391.02, CRN 75028

Professor John Hunt, LA 127
Fall 2016, TR 12:30-1:50
T 11-12:30, R 2-3 and by appt.
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Texts:

No textbooks are required for this class. The poems we're reading are all available online, and links are available on the Moodle course shell. Your costs for the class will be limited to printing off the course texts, and purchasing some kind of binder to keep them in.

Course goals:

This class will introduce you to a wealth of short, non-narrative poems that I think are among the best ever written. The poems come from many different authors and cultures, but the greatest number were written in the twentieth century, and all but a handful were written in English. I hope that many of them will stick with you for a long time to come. Our analysis of the texts will help you develop your skills in reading lyric poetry, and will introduce you to terms and concepts having to do with imagery, metaphorical comparison, formal structure, sound-patterning, extra-textual reference, ambiguity, and the voice and tone of speakers. You will be expected to post weekly informal responses to Moodle, write three mid-length formal papers, and offer a memorized recitation and discussion of one poem.

Schedule of assignments:

Aug. 30	Introductions
Sept. 1	Encountering animals
Sept. 6	Animals and us
Sept. 8	Sensing the world
Sept. 13	Nature's splendor
Sept. 15	Adding to nature
Sept. 20	Aloneness
Sept. 22	Sexual excitement

Sept. 27	Unhappy love	
Sept. 29	Parents and children	First paper due
Oct. 4	The sonnet	
Oct. 6	The villanelle	
Oct. 11	The sestina	
Oct. 13	In brief: epigrammatic writing	
Oct. 18	Bah!	
Oct. 20	Politically speaking	
Oct. 25	Searching	
Oct. 27	This world and another	Second paper due
Nov. 1	Visionary places	
Nov. 3	Putting pieces together	
Nov. 8	No class (Election Day)	
Nov. 10	Separations	
Nov. 15	Torn identities	
Nov. 17	Scraping by	
Nov. 22	War up close	
Nov. 24	No class (Thanksgiving)	
Nov. 29	War: the long view	
Dec. 1	Mourning the dead	Third paper due
Dec. 6	Reflections on death	
Dec. 8	Ars poetica	
Dec. 15	Memorized poems (finals week meeting, 10:10-12:10)	

Reading:

Please complete all readings by the start of class on the day for which they're listed. You are responsible for keeping up with the reading at all times, and for reading each poem multiple times. Even when I lecture on poems, it is essential for you to have actively engaged in trying to make sense of the poem ahead of class. I will ask questions, and if I think that people aren't working hard enough, I will give unannounced quizzes for reading comprehension.

Taking notes:

Please print off each assigned poem when you first do the reading, and bring the copies to class. This will give you printed texts on which to take notes, both as you prepare for class and as you listen to class lectures and discussion. For poetry, there is no better way of taking notes than in the margins.

Moodle posts:

Once every week, by 7 PM on Monday, I will expect you to post an informal response on a Moodle forum to one or more of the current readings. Posts should be from 200 to 400 words long and can go in almost any direction you like. I will sometimes post prompts, often offer feedback, and always consider your thoughts as I prepare for Tuesday's class.

Memorization:

Some time before finals week, you'll need to memorize one of our assigned poems and prepare some remarks about it. The poem should be at least the length of a sonnet (14 lines). It's OK to choose a poem that you've written a paper on, and it's OK for more than one person to choose the same poem. Excerpting a section of a longer poem, or doing a couple of shorter poems, is also OK. This should not be a last-minute exercise. Ideally, you should give yourself about a month to learn the poem, practice reciting it, leave it, return and practice it again, and again, until you have it down cold. At our finals week meeting, each of you will recite your poem from memory, hopefully with some feeling, and talk about it for 5 minutes or so. I hope this will be a festive occasion.

Papers:

The three 7-8 pp. papers will all follow the same format. I'll ask you to combine three different kinds of analysis: a thesis-based argument about some important feature of a poem; explication and description of some of the poem's most striking effects; and investigation of the personal experiences or historical circumstances that helped produce it, the literary traditions in which it situates itself, or theoretical approaches which can illuminate its concerns. Doing all three things in one paper may prove tricky, which is why the format will remain unchanged: you can improve as you go. Email all papers to me (my address is at the top of the syllabus) by the end of the day on which they're due.

Grading:

Your course grade will be determined as follows:

25% first paper

25% second paper

25% third paper

25% participation, Moodle posts, and recitation (+ quizzes)

If your grades improve after the first paper, I'll weight that one a bit less. If your participation grade is high, I'll weight that a bit more.

Attendance:

I will check attendance every day. You are allowed three absences, no questions asked. If you must miss class for a good reason, let me know *in advance or within one day*, and I will note it as an excused absence. After three *unexcused* absences, your course grade will go down.

Lateness:

Having everybody in their seats at the beginning of the hour is important to me, but I would rather have you in class than not. So if something in your life falls apart, please join us late. If it happens often, however, it may lower your course grade. Similarly with papers: I will read ones that arrive a day or two late and grade them without penalty, but if it happens more than once I may lower the grade.

Students with Disabilities:

Students with documented disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations. Please speak with me privately at the beginning of the semester about any accommodations you need, and be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. I will work with you and Disability Services in the accommodation process.

Plagiarism:

All work submitted for this course must be your own and written solely for this course. While all the ideas discussed in our classroom are common property, unacknowledged use of others' written work, whether paraphrased or used verbatim without attribution, constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is an affront to the fundamental values of an academic institution, indicating a lack of respect for intellectual labor and a lack of responsibility for one's part in sustaining an academic community. You must acknowledge, by citation of name, title, and location, all work that has influenced your thinking, using established academic guidelines for documentation. If you violate this policy I will take action according to university procedures spelled out in the Student Conduct Code.

Academic deadlines:

Please consult the university's Official Dates and Deadlines calendar for all add/drop and fee deadlines. The last time to drop individual classes on CyberBear and receive a refund is 5:00 PM, September 19.