English 40: Major British Poets

Summer Session One, 1999

INSTRUCTOR

Erik Simpson

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DESCRIPTION

From the stately sentiments of Restoration verse to the self-conscious poetics of high Modernism, this course will survey a varied selection of British poets and poetry. Why is eighteenth-century verse cluttered with soiled petticoats, tea-cups, and decks of cards? How is London abhorred, revered, or feared by different poets at different historical moments? How does the choice to write an elegy, an ode, or a sonnet, invoke a literary tradition and impact the meaning of a poem? As these questions suggest, we will consider the material and social content and contexts of the poems as well as such formal aspects as genre, rhyme and meter. We will also examine assumptions about literary periods--Romantic, Victorian, Modern--and the ways in which changes in English poetry across time contribute to changing notions of the English nation and its subjects. Emphasis will be placed on class discussion and close reading. Students should expect frequent short writing assignments as well as a paper, a midterm, and a final exam. Poets will be selected from, among others, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Anne Finch, William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, Charlotte Smith, Christina Rossetti, Robert Browning, Yeats, and Eliot.

TEXTS

Norton Anthology of Poetry, Fourth Edition. Available at Penn Book Center (on 34th Street near Starbucks).

I will provide handouts and/or web links for other readings.
CALENDAR: WEEK 1

Note well: all readings and assignments are due the day they are listed. Therefore, you should always be looking one class period ahead to see what work is assigned.

Tuesday, May 18

First day. Class overview, mutual introductions, making of appointments for introductory meetings, all manner of administrative festivities. Close reading of Anne Finch’s "Adam Pos'd" in class. (Again, for this night’s assignment, see tomorrow's entry, not this one.)

Wednesday, May 19

Reading:
Anonymous, "Lord Randal" and "Sir Patrick Spens."
John Gay, songs from The Beggar's Opera: the six songs from the anthology.

Assignment:
"Sir Patrick Spens" is a ballad. In light of Tuesday's discussion, do the best you can to identify the characteristics of the ballad form as you see them here: the meter, the rhyme scheme, and other poetic values you see exhibited here. I will hand out a basic introduction to poetic terms in class.

Thursday, May 20

Reading:
Anne Finch, "On Myself" and "The Answer" [to Pope's "Impromptu"]. "Some Hints To Help You Read Poetry With More Pleasure" [handout].

Assignment:
Apply one of the approaches described in the handout to one of the poems assigned for today’s class, explaining how your chosen approach reveals something about the poem that you wouldn't have noticed without using it.
CALENDAR: WEEK 2

Monday, May 24

Reading:
Alexander Pope, The Rape of the Lock, Cantos I-II.  
Jonathan Swift, "The Lady's Dressing Room."

Assignment:  
Daily analysis assignment (first of a bunch--see "Requirements" section for details of the assignment).

Tuesday, May 25

Reading:
Thomas Gray, "Ode On a Distant Prospect of Eton College."  
John Barrell, "The Idea of Landscape in the Eighteenth Century" [article].

Assignment:  
Article summary of Barrell (see "Requirements" section for details of the assignment). Be prepared to connect the article to the poems scheduled for today.

Wednesday, May 26

Reading:
Thomas Gray, "Sonnet (On the Death of Mr. Richard West)," "Ode (On the Death of a Favorite Cat, Drowned in a Tub of Goldfishes)," and "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard."  
Martha Woodmansee, "Genius and the Copyright" [article].

Assignment:  
Article Summary of Woodmansee. As ever, be prepared to connect the article to the poems scheduled for today.

Thursday, May 27

Reading:
Charlotte Smith, Elegiac Sonnets I and VII, "Verses intended to have been prefixed to the novel of Emmaline, but suppressed," and "The Female Exile" [handout].  
Stuart Curran, Introduction to Smith's poems [handout].

Assignment:  
Daily Analysis Assignment.
Monday, May 31

*No class: Memorial Day Observed.*

Tuesday, June 1

**Reading:**
- William Wordsworth, "Preface" to the 1802 *Lyrical Ballads*, "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," "The Thorn," "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey." The first three of these will be in a handout.
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

**Assignment:**
- Daily analysis assignment.

Wednesday, June 2

**Reading:**
- M.H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" [article].

**Assignment:**
- Article Summary of Abrams. You guessed it: be prepared to connect the article to the poems scheduled for today.

Thursday, June 3

**Reading:**
- Secondary materials on odes and other forms.

**Assignment:**
- Daily analysis assignment.
**CALENDAR: WEEK 4**

**Monday, June 7**

*Midterm Exam.*

**Tuesday, June 8**

Reading:
- Anna Letitia Barbauld, "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven" [handout].

Assignment:
- Article Summary of Lovejoy. Say it with me: be prepared to connect the article to the poem scheduled for today.

**Wednesday, June 9**

Reading:
- George Gordon, Lord Byron ("Byron"), from *Don Juan*, Cantos I and VIII [handout].

Assignment:
- Daily analysis assignment.

**Thursday, June 10**

Reading:
- Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mont Blanc," "England in 1819," "To a Skylark," "Ode to the West Wind."

Assignment:
- Daily analysis assignment.

**Friday, June 11**

Paper Prospectus due via email by 5:00; see "Requirements" for details of the assignment.
CALENDAR: WEEK 5

Monday, June 14

Reading:
John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "To Autumn."

Assignment:
Daily analysis assignment.

Tuesday, June 15

Reading:
[Jerome J. McGann], "Literary History, Romanticism, and Felicia Hemans" [article].

Assignment:
Article Summary of McGann. As you'll see, this article is written in three voices, and it can be difficult to follow at times. If you would rather not attempt a summary of this piece, then identify one or two issues that are at stake in the conversation of the article and the different views that the speakers propose relating to it/them.

Wednesday, June 16

Reading:

Assignment:
Daily analysis assignment.

Thursday, June 17

Reading:
In-class reading aloud and discussion of Christina Rosetti’s "Goblin Market" [handout].

Assignment:
Work on your paper; you should already be well under way, but I'm clearing out this day and the next to help you finish up.

Friday, June 18

Paper due in my box at 3:00.
CALENDAR: WEEK 6

Monday, June 21

Reading:

Assignment:
Daily analysis assignment.

Tuesday, June 22

Reading:
T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "La Figlia che Piange" [handout], and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales."
Secondary materials [handout].

Assignment:
Daily analysis assignment.

Wednesday, June 23

Reading:
In-class listening to "The Waste Land," wrapping up, tying of loose ends.

Assignment:
Study for the final.

Thursday, June 24

Final Exam.


**Requirements**

Because this class covers such a wide variety of poetry so quickly, and it does so at an introductory course level, the requirements are designed first to give you tools with which to understand and enjoy the poems you read and then to help (or make) you use them. Therefore, the reading load is relatively light, and the writing load is heavy, but it is broken up into many small assignments rather than two or three large ones.

**Conferences**

You will be required to meet with me at least three times during the term: once for an introductory conference in the first or second week of class, and once to discuss your paper prospectus, and once to discuss your graded paper. If all goes well, this should be a pleasant requirement to fulfill; I just want to let you know the conferences are coming. All I ask--nay, beg--is that you show up when we agree that we'll meet. If you really can't do so, please email me to let me know not to wait for you.

**Memorization/Recitation (5% of Grade)**

At some point during the term, you must memorize and recite at least 70 consecutive metrical feet of poetry (in other words, a sonnet or the equivalent length of other verse). You can recite this in class or in my office; make an appointment to do the latter.

**Reading Log I: Daily Analysis Assignments (15% of Grade)**

During the first week of class, we will be discussing "Some Hints To Help You Read Poetry With More Pleasure." That document will outline a number of approaches to reading poems. For a Daily Analysis Assignment, write a brief (150-250 words) essay applying one of those approaches to a poem to be discussed that day. You have a lot of leeway on how you do that, but I ask that you quote a specific passage of the poem at least once and that you explain at some point what your chosen approach taught you about the poem that you didn't see at first. **Alternate assignment:** once or twice during the term, you can so an imitation of one of the poems or poets covered on that day. I recommend parody as a fruitful approach, but you may also do a serious imitation if you like.

**Reading Log II: Article Summaries (10% of Grade)**

We will read five scholarly articles in this class. Two of them, those by Lovejoy and Abrams, are landmark documents in 20th-century criticism, and the others, those by Barrell, Woodmansee, and McGann, represent some of the most important work produced by scholars who are helping to redefine the study of the works we cover in the class. Consequently, in many ways they are the most important aspect of the course, in that they will familiarize you with reading literary criticism, and with the kinds of issues that lately have dominated scholarly work on British Poetry. As a way of encouraging you to gain control of this material by writing on it, I have assigned an Article Summary for each of the five; the summaries should be no longer than 400 words, but they should
demonstrate that you have read the article carefully. If you are struggling with an article and do not feel comfortable summarizing it as a whole, explain what you can and then explain specifically what parts are giving you trouble and why. I'm looking for sincere effort here, not critical brilliance; show me that you've read the stuff and taken it seriously, and your grade will be fine.

**Midterm Exam (20% of Grade)**

The exam will have one section of passage identification, a short answer section covering poetic terms, and an essay question asking you to apply what you've learned to a poem you haven't read for this class. The best way to study for the passage identification section is to read the poems over carefully and to have taken good notes on class discussions; I will test you on passages about which we have talked in class.

**Paper Prospectus**

**Paper (20% of Grade)**

You will receive separate information about the paper prospectus and the paper as they approach. This information will be linked to the electronic version of the syllabus and also handed out in class.

**Final Exam (30% of Grade)**

The structure of the final will be similar to that of the midterm, and it will be a cumulative exam, covering the material of the whole course. The final will place a greater emphasis on examining your ability to connect works we've read to each other and to apply (rather than merely identify) the terms and concepts we have used in the class.

**Extra Credit: OED Assignment**

At any time before June 15th, you may complete and turn in an assignment using the Web version of the Oxford English Dictionary to gain insight into the workings of a poem. This wonderful tool is online at [http://oed.library.upenn.edu/](http://oed.library.upenn.edu/) and I will try to arrange for an in-class demonstration early in the term. To complete the assignment, use the OED to look up a number of words in the poem that you suspect may not be working as they do today. (This isn't about simply looking up words you don't know; rather, the goal is to find ways that your chosen poem created meaning differently for its past readers.) When you find such a case, use your new-found insight to write an essay of approximately 1000 words about the way your OED discovery works with the rest of the poem to change the overall effect in some important way. If I find that you have completed this optional assignment thoughtfully and well, I will add 1-4 points to your semester grade score (which will be on a 100-point scale).
Participation in class discussions

Participation in class discussions is a very important part of this class. If you do not participate, I will lower your grade by at least one notch (i.e., B to B-). If you do a great job of supporting our discussions, I may raise your grade similarly.

If you are shy, here is what to do: Simply bring in one question that you want to ask the rest of us and ask it—and you should, when possible, choose interpretive questions ("I don't understand how these two passages can be part of the same poem") rather than factual questions ("When did Pope write this?") In particular, I urge you to pay special attention to those points where you don't understand something in the reading--where you've tried to find out the answer for yourself and failed--because they are the most important for the class.

Attendance

Attendance is absolutely required, and the compressed schedule of the summer term makes this even more critical an issue than usual. Because I understand that accidents and illnesses happen, even in the summer, I will allow you two non-emergency absences if--and only if--you make up for the class work of that day by writing an essay of approximately 800 words explaining your take on the reading and how it fits in (or doesn't fit in, if that's more productive) to the context of other works we have read in the class. This is in addition to the regular writing assignment, not instead of it. This assignment must be completed to my satisfaction within four class days after the one that you miss, and it is your responsibility to keep track of this, not mine.

Each day you miss over two will constitute an unauthorized absence automatically unless you make specific arrangements with me in advance.

Every unauthorized absence will affect your grade. Three absences will lower your grade by 1/3, four by 2/3, etc. More than 5 absences will constitute failing the course.

If you have extreme emergencies--such as a death in your immediate family, or an extended illness requiring hospitalization--you must give me a letter from your physician or, in the case of family emergencies, from the College Advisor Diane Frey.
Plagiarism

Plagiarism, according to the Writing Across The University office, “is taking a passage or passages from another person’s discourse, either word for word or in general, and incorporating them as your own into written work you offer for credit.”

That doesn’t mean that you aren’t allowed to use other people’s ideas; in fact, good writing often uses the ideas and words of other writers extensively. This practice becomes a problem when you don’t acknowledge your sources. To avoid plagiarizing, use the following techniques (which I am borrowing in part from WATU):

1. **Direct Quotation**: If you use the exact words or a writer you consulted, you must put their words in quotation marks and tell your reader where the quotation came from.

2. **Indirect Quotation**: When you summarize or paraphrase another writer, use phrases such as “According to . . . “ or “As . . . suggests” to tell your reader what you are doing.

3. **General Acknowledgment of Indebtedness**: When your thinking has been influenced by a source in a broad way, but you don’t have a specific place to acknowledge that influence, you need to let your reader know that with wording such as “Much of the following discussion is based on material found in . . . .” In most cases, though, one of the first two techniques works better than this one to let your reader know exactly what influence the cited writer has had on your writing.

4. **List of Works Cited**: This will allow you to list the specific sources you have used. We will discuss the format of the list later.

Basically, plagiarism is the academic version of forgetting to thank someone who has been nice to you. The consequences can be serious, though—any paper that contains plagiarized material **must be given an F** at Penn, and a University disciplinary committee may impose suspensions or other penalties on top of that—so be careful, and ask me if you have any questions about how to handle a given source.
E-mail

Information:

Erik’s E-mail Address: esimpson@english.upenn.edu
Class E-mail Address: simpson40@english.upenn.edu

Instructions:

Just send the email to the appropriate address. If you want to reply to a message that was sent to the whole group, make sure that you indicate whether you are sending your mail to the group or to the individual who sent the message. (Often, we don’t want everyone to see a private reply.)

World Wide Web

Information:

Erik’s Home Page: http://www.english.upenn.edu/~esimpson/
Class Home Page: http://www.english.upenn.edu/~esimpson/Teaching/40

Instructions:

In Netscape, insert the appropriate URL (that’s the address listed above) into the white space after the word “Location:” at the top of the screen. Everything must be exact, including the capitalization. Alternate route: go to the Penn English page (http://www.english.upenn.edu) and find me from there, following the menus to graduate student home pages.

A whole bunch of good stuff is online, including the syllabus.