

# **SYLLABUS FOR INTRODUCTION TO POETRY**

**Fall 2009**

James Swafford  
ENGL-11300-04, 05  
swafford@ithaca.edu

Office: 330 Muller Center  
Phone: 274-3540  
Office hours: 3:00-4:00 MW, 2:30-3:30 R.  
Other times by appointment.

## **COURSE GOALS:**

This course has two primary purposes: (1) to introduce you to some of the achievements of poets writing in English and (2) to help you become a discriminating and confident reader of poetry on your own, someone who is not afraid to seek out the poems published in, say, the latest *New Yorker* and who can read them with understanding and enjoyment. This is NOT a course in poetry writing.

By the end of the course, you'll find that poetry, though often difficult and demanding, can offer intense and complex pleasure, emotional, imaginative, and intellectual. You'll understand better what poetry is and what kind of responses it invites from its readers, realizing (I hope) that poetry is not just a prose idea cast into "secret code" or dressed in fancy clothes by a poet who could have made the point more directly.

We'll read a wide range of poems from different historical periods, written in a wide range of forms and styles. The first part of the course will tend to emphasize the various elements of poetry—imagery, figurative language, tone, sound and rhythm, and so on. In the second part, we'll spend more time considering what we can learn from studying a poem in the context of other poems by the same author or poems on a similar subject.

Finally, the course also aims to help you further develop your skills in analysis and writing.

## **FORMAT AND STYLE:**

I'll sometimes give brief lectures, but this course relies largely on discussion. You will be expected to do much of the talking.

## **REQUIREMENTS:**

Every student should do the following:

1. Attend class faithfully. I allow three unexcused absences. See the college catalog for the official definition of excused and unexcused absences. The former must be explained in writing, or I'll assume that an absence is not excused. Additional unexcused absences will result in a penalty to the final course grade. A student with nine absences will be either fail or be withdrawn from the course.

2. Read the assignments with care and on time. Especially when you are dealing with poetry, reading the material quickly just before class is not sufficient. Be an active reader: read the material several times, take notes, fill your margins with commentary and questions, jot down points you wish to ask about in class. You should also remember that unannounced quizzes (which cannot be "made up" later) over the assigned readings are always a possibility except on religious holidays.

Be sure to have your poetry textbook with you at each class session.

For full credit, “thinkpieces,” informal writing assignments about the day’s readings, must be turned in during the class session when the reading is discussed.

Papers submitted after the due date will receive a grade penalty.

**3. Participate in discussions.** Offer your comments and insights to the group. Answers are fine if you have some, but it is just as important to bring up the question or problem that bothers you.

The course grade will be computed approximately as follows:

3 FORMAL PAPERS = total of 60%

EXERCISES, QUIZZES, ACTIVE PARTICIPATION = 15%

HOUR EXAM = 10%

FINAL EXAM = 15%

For students who need special accommodation in the course: reasonable accommodation will be provided to students with documented disabilities on a case-by-case basis. Students must register with the Office of Academic Support Services and provide appropriate documentation to the College before any academic adjustment will be provided.

A few final points of **classroom etiquette**, all quite obvious: be in the classroom at the top of the hour and plan to leave at 51 minutes after; turn off your electronic communication devices; don’t leave and re-enter the classroom once the class has begun (it’s only 50 minutes!); stay awake; chat with your neighbors and/or pass notes before or after class, not during; take notes, at least occasionally; be polite and respectful of others in the class, even if you seriously disagree with them.

### **PLAGIARISM:**

Plagiarism, the use of another’s words or ideas without giving credit to the source, is a serious academic offense and will not be tolerated in this course. See (online) Volume 7 of the Ithaca College Policy Manual on standards of academic conduct.

If you do research for a paper, document your sources carefully. If you get help from a friend, give that friend credit in a Preface. If you have any questions at all about how to cite sources or to set up a bibliography, work with someone at the Writing Center in Smiddy Hall.

If I catch anyone plagiarizing, at the very least the assignment will receive an F and the case will be submitted to the Judicial Administrator. It is likely, however, that the penalty will be worse than that, that a plagiarist will receive an F as a course grade.

---

### **REQUIRED TEXT:**

Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Shorter Fifth Edition.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE:**

- Aug. 26 Introduction. What is a poem and how does one read it?  
28 Poems of altered perspective: Smart, from *Jubilate Agno* (pages 417-19); Raine, “A Martian Sends a Postcard Home” (pages 1207-08); Armitage, from “Killing Time” (pages 1247-49).
- Aug. 31 Poems telling stories: the ballad tradition. Read pages 86-98 of the anthology, with special attention to “Lord Randal” (89-90), “Sir Patrick Spens” (91-

92), and “Bonny Barbara Allan” (93-94).

Sept. 2 A modern ballad: Auden, “As I Walked Out One Evening” (937-38).

**Speaker and situation (and the matter of “tone”)—**

4 Hardy, “The Ruined Maid” (747); Soyinka, “Telephone Conversation” (1159-60).

7 LABOR DAY. No class.

9 Browning, “My Last Duchess” (643-44). **Paper #1 due.**

11 Mew, “The Farmer’s Bride” (790-91); Jarrell, “Next Day” (982-83).

14 Poems (TBA) by Distinguished Visiting Writer Philip Schultz.

**[Sept 15 Reading by Philip Schultz, 7:30 pm, Clark Lounge, Egbert Hall.]**

16 Frost, “Mending Wall” (795-96), “The Road Not Taken” (801).

18 Swift, “The Lady’s Dressing Room” (336-39).

**Sound, rhythm, form—**

21 Discussion of rhythm (1252-60). Caedmon’s “Hymn” (1); Toomer, “Reapers” (898); Tennyson, “Break, Break, Break” (631), Brooks, “We Real Cool” (999-1000).

23 Dickinson, poem 359 (724); Whitman, from “Song of Myself,” section 24 (682-83).

25 Two villanelles (see 1269): Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (991); Bishop, “One Art” (966).

28 [Yom Kippur] A sestina (see 1269-70): Hecht, “The Book of Yolek” (1042-43). And a pantoum (see 1270): Justice, “Pantoum of the Great Depression” (1047-48).

30 Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur” (755), “The Windhover” (755-56).

Oct. 2 (Think about rhyme, 1260-63.) Plath, “Daddy” (1145-47).

**Sonnets, in particular—**

5 Sonnet form (see 1263-69); Hardy, “Hap” (744); Frost, “Design” (805); Millay, “I, Being Born . . .” (887-88); Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 71 (160-61).

7 Shakespeare’s sonnets 12, 73, 130 (170-77). **Paper #2 due.**

9 Shakespeare’s sonnets 20, 129, 138 (171-78).

12 Playing with the “turn”: Milton, “When I Consider How My Light Is Spent” (274-75), “On the Late Massacre in Piedmont” (275), “Methought I Saw” (275-76). Wordsworth, “Surprised by Joy” (485). Shelley, “Ozymandias” (541).

14 HOUR (MIDTERM) EXAM. [Attendance absolutely mandatory]

16 FALL BREAK. No class.

**Poems in relationships—**

Oct. 19 Poems of childhood: Roethke, “My Papa’s Waltz” (955); Hayden, “Those Winter Sundays” (968-69).

- 21 Poems of childhood, continued. Komunyakaa, "Sunday Afternoons" (1210-11); Thomas, "Fern Hill" (989-90).
- 23 Poems of seduction: Donne, "The Flea" (202); Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress" (293-94).
- Oct. 26 One poem answering another: Howard, "Nikolaus Mardruz. . ." (1105-10); reread Browning, "My Last Duchess" (643-44).
- Poems by Elizabeth Bishop—**
- 28 "The Fish" (960-62); "Filling Station" (962-63).
- 30 "At the Fishhouses" (handout).
- Nov. 2 "Sestina" (963-64).
- 4 "First Death in Nova Scotia" (handout).
- 6 "In the Waiting Room" (964-66).
- 9 "The Moose" (handout).
- 11 The making of "One Art" (966 and handouts).
- 13 "Pink Dog" (handout).
- Student presentations on recently published poems—**
- 16 TBA.
- 18 TBA.
- 20 TBA. **Paper #3 due.**

---

THANKSGIVING RECESS, November 22 – 27

---

- A few last paired poems—**
- Nov. 30 Blake, "The Lamb" (441-42), "The Tyger" (446-47).
- Dec. 2 Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 31 (158-59); Larkin, "Sad Steps" (1032).
- 4 Arnold, "Dover Beach" (711-12); Hecht, "The Dover Bitch" (handout).
- 7 Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale" (582-84).
- 9 Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (585-86).
- 11 Preparing for the final exam.

**FINAL EXAMINATIONS: Sec. 04 (1:00) – Mon., Dec. 14, 10:30 am – 1:00 pm**  
**Sec. 05 (2:00) – Wed., Dec. 16, 7:30 am – 10:00 am**  
**Plan accordingly!**