

English 485: Senior Seminar

The Sonnet in Theory and Practice

Professor Newstok

Spring 2012
Tu 2:00-4:30pm
Clough 100

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Office hours: Th 11am-2pm, or by appointment (please *email*)

And then there it was, suddenly entire; she held it in her hands, beautiful and reasonable, clear and complete, the essence sucked out of life and held rounded here—the sonnet.

—Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*

Course description

A critical investigation the sonnet, which has proven to be one of the most durable yet flexible lyric forms in the English language, accommodating a surprisingly wide range of poets and modes. This senior seminar will survey major practitioners of the sonnet, with Shakespeare and his Renaissance peers as central figures, yet stretching back to Petrarch and forward to contemporary Anglophone writers, including a novel written as linked sonnets, Vikram Seth's *Golden Gate*. We will explore translation and cultural autonomy; gender and voice; tension between isolated lyric poems and their development in sequences; the dynamics of revisionary dialogues between poets; and more abstract principles about literary form and its evolution. Selected poets will include Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser, Sidney, Wroth, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Smith, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Browning, Meredith, Rosetti, Wharton, Lazarus, Hopkins, Yeats, Moore, Bogan, Frost, Lowell, Bishop, Walcott, Hill, Merrill, Brooks, and Heaney, among many.

As the capstone seminar in the English department, students will be expected to evaluate scholarly resources on a regular basis; write brief but regular critical reflections on primary and secondary reading; and complete a lengthy (25-page) final research project that argues for their own interpretation in dialogue with the critical tradition within this field. While the topics for each section of the senior seminar diverge, they all have in common an in-depth analysis of a particular issue or question during the first half of the term, followed by intensive independent research in the second half of the term, culminating in a final essay.

Required Texts

- Burt and Mikics, *The Art of the Sonnet*
- Boland and Hirsch, *The Making of the Sonnet*
- Cousins and Howarth, *Cambridge Companion*
- Petrarch, trans. David Young
- Seth, *Golden Gate*
- Handouts and independent research

Recommended bookmarks on your computer

- *The Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*: <http://www.oed.com/>
- *Early English Books Online (EEBO)*: <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home>
- *Lexicons of Early Modern English (LEME)*: <http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/>
- *Sonnet Central*: <http://www.sonnets.org/>
- *Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award*: <http://theformalist.evansville.edu/nemerovwinners.htm>
- Pertinent **concordances** you discover

Schedule—subject to revision, per seminar interest and instructor’s discretion

Jan. 17	<u>Introductions</u>	<i>Autobibliography</i>
Jan. 24	<u>Petrarch</u> (<i>Young trans.</i> ; <i>Art 26–29</i> ; <i>Making 79–81</i> ; <i>CC 5</i>)	<i>Translation comparison</i>
Jan. 31	<u>Tudor</u> (<i>Art 30–60</i> ; <i>Making 82–91</i> ; <i>CC 6</i>)	<i>Sequence presentation</i>
Feb. 7	<u>Shakespeare</u> (<i>OWN COPY</i> ; <i>Art 61–71</i> ; <i>Making 92</i> ; <i>CC 7</i>)	<i>Annotation</i>
Feb. 14	<u>17th & 18th century</u> (<i>Art 72–108</i> ; <i>Making 101–128</i> ; <i>CC 8 & 9</i>)	<i>Religion, gender, & occasion</i>
Feb. 21	<u>Romanticism</u> (<i>Art 109–154</i> ; <i>Making 129–153</i> ; <i>CC 10</i>)	<i>Critical dialogue</i>
Feb. 28	<u>Victorian</u> (<i>Art 155–222</i> ; <i>Making 154–178</i> ; <i>CC 11</i>)	<i>Five potential proposals</i>
Mar. 6	<u>Modernism</u> (<i>Art 223–293</i> ; <i>Making 179–211</i> ; <i>CC 12</i>)	<i>Revise and expand two proposals</i>
Mar. 13	SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS	
Mar. 20	<u>Contemporary</u> (<i>Art 294–426</i> ; <i>Making 212–292</i> ; <i>CC 13</i>)	<i>Mini-anthology with introduction</i>
Mar. 27	<u>Golden Gate</u> (<i>Pushkin</i> ; <i>Galef</i>)	<i>Draft of 5 pages</i>
Apr. 3	<i>Library research session</i>	<i>Annotated bibliography</i>
Apr. 10	<i>Consultation with Professor Newstok</i>	<i>Draft of 10 pages</i>
Apr. 17	<i>Peer review</i>	<i>First FULL Draft</i>
Apr. 24	<i>In-class presentations</i>	<i>Handout with primary & critical passages</i>
May 1	<i>Revised final paper due</i>	

Requirements

Engagement (25%) is mandatory, and is broadly conceived to include active **participation** (*listening and responding* to your peers as well as the professor), consistent **preparation** of course readings, **enthusiasm** for assignments, **collaboration** with your peers, and **respect** for the course.

I presume that seniors will read and re-read assignments thoroughly in advance of discussion, arrive on time to class, and participate thoughtfully every day of the semester. As we meet only once a week, and are devoting approximately half of the term to common readings, it is particularly important that you dedicate yourself to attending every class session.

Assignments (25%) involve weekly exercises designed to help prepare you for your final paper. Unless otherwise indicated, please **submit these via email on Sundays by 5pm. No late work**—there is not enough time in the semester to fall behind with your writing. We will discuss requirements for these assignments in further detail as they approach:

- *Autobiography reflecting upon reading thus far*
- *Comparison of two Tudor translation of Petrarch*
- *Presentation of Elizabeth sonnets within context of sequence*
- *Critical annotation of a single Shakespeare sonnet*
- *Essay exploring the interplay of religion, gender, and occasion*
- *Critical dialogue with a selected scholar*
- *5 potential proposals (200 words each)*
- *Revise & expand 2 proposals (500 words each)*
- *Full final proposal (1000 words)*
- *Mini-anthology of twelve sonnets, with critical introduction*
- *Annotated bibliography*—single-spaced, exploring approximately a dozen sources that you might conceivably use in your final paper. Each entry should offer a brief (4-5 sentence) overview of the piece, and evaluate its possible use for your fellow students.
- *Draft of 10 pages*
- *First FULL Draft (25 pages)*
- *Detailed handout for in-class presentations (20 minutes)*

Senior papers (50%) involve engaging in a **critical dialogue** with other readers (critics) in the history of philology, leading to a **25-page** research paper on a topic of your own choice. You are encouraged to ground at least part of your paper in pre-1800 materials.

Grading: A ‘C’ represents satisfactory work; a ‘B’ represents good work; a ‘B+’ represent very good work; and an ‘A-’ (and the occasional ‘A’) represent extraordinary achievement. This holds true for all of your assignments in the course.

Policies: As always, please observe and respect Rhodes guidelines regarding the **Honor Code**; academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and an Honor Code violation (including plagiarism) will be grounds for **failure in the course**. Your essay for this course must consist of **original work** not previously submitted to another course. Respect the integrity of the course: please turn off **cell phones** and **remove hats** before entering the classroom; please **do not eat during class**. Treat email exchanges with one another and with the professor as **formally composed correspondence**. As ever, please observe the standard policies which apply to all courses in the English Department.