

English 2311

Introduction to Poetry

June 2012
Time??
Room TBA
Southern Methodist University
SMU-in-Taos

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Required Text (available at the SMU bookstore)

An Introduction to Poetry, ed. Kennedy and Gioia, 12th ed. (Pearson Longman, 2007—I'm using this edition to save you 80-95% on book costs by getting it on [Amazon](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0205307851). Don't worry, the basic principles of poetry haven't changed much in the past five years!)

Course Description

What is poetry? Why write it? Why read it? The aim of this course is to teach you how to better analyze, understand, and enjoy poetry in English. These are complicated activities—as reflected in the American poet Elizabeth Bishop's description of poetry as “hundreds of things coming together at the right moment”—so we'll be working all semester on *how* to read poetry well. Each week we will focus primarily on a particular aspect of poetic form or technique, and think about how it works. After working through ten or twelve of those, we'll turn deliberately to the sheer pleasures of reading poetry with thoughtfulness, complexity, and depth. By the end of the course, you will have become a better reader of, and writer about, poetry: you will be able to analyze and interpret the effects of form and language on meaning, and you will, I hope, take considerable pleasure in it.

ENGL 2311 is a requirement for the English major, an elective requirement for the English minor, and a Perspectives Literature course.

Course Policy

1. *Attendance.* Regular attendance and participation are essential in this course, and this means you've got to be mentally as well as physically present. Poor attendance (i.e., more than one absence; I don't bother with excused and unexcused absences, so everybody gets a freebie) and/or participation will directly affect your course grade—not to mention making you bored and generally useless. **{Note: your freebie includes generally excused absences such as religious holidays, so *plan ahead*; if you anticipate needing more than one university-excused absence, come see me immediately.}** More than three absences (i.e., 15% of our meetings) will qualify you for either a course grade of F or an involuntary administrative drop, at my discretion. Post-roll arrivals will be treated as absence; so will a failed reading quiz or any other clear evidence of unpreparedness (like coming to class without books, or not having a written assignment done when due, or having

nothing to say when called on); so will midclass bathroom breaks or other disruptions, like ringing cellphones, which will also be thrown out the window—or, this being Taos, off a mountain or cliff or canyon rim.

2. *Participation and preparation.* This course will primarily proceed via discussion, not lecture; its success depends on how much and how well each individual participates. So you are expected and required to come to class thoroughly prepared to discuss the works assigned for the day. This means carefully reading the material (for more than just plot!—and more than once if necessary), giving it serious and substantial thought, and having something interesting and thoughtful to say about it no matter which direction the discussion takes; you should also come to class with specific questions and issues you'd like to discuss. If everyone is clearly doing this, we'll all have a good time and learn a lot; if anyone isn't, more draconian enforcement measures will be instituted. This includes reading quizzes, which I will give whenever I feel people are coming to class inadequately prepared, and which will be failed by anyone who is. I will often begin our discussion by randomly (or pointedly) asking several people to speak thoughtfully and specifically for a minute or two on something interesting in the day's reading, so be prepared to do this each day.

3. *Deadlines.* All work—readings and assignments—is due on the date under which it appears on the syllabus. For example, chapter 1 of our textbook must be carefully read by classtime on June 4, and your first writing assignment is due at the same time. Late papers lose a full grade per calendar day; individual extensions are given very rarely, and only under circumstances that are both catastrophic and unforeseeable.

4. *Academic honesty.* All work for which you receive credit is expected to be (1) original and (2) newly written (3) by [only] you (4) for this course; anything else constitutes academic dishonesty and will be mercilessly prosecuted. Cheating is the worst thing you can do academically; it is a corrupt, self-defeating choice made, for the most part, by people who are dishonest and lazy and/or stupid, and who probably should not be in college. Don't even consider doing it, and don't ask for mercy if you do and get caught, because you won't get any.

5. *Written work.* All handed-in assignments must be neat and correct and readable, typed or word-processed, in a reasonable font and size, and turned in as hard copy—as well as turned in via Blackboard—by classtime. (Your essay will only be considered “in” when you've done both; and turning in different paper and electronic versions will result in an automatic grade of F.)

You'll be writing six short (2-3pg, meaning no less than 1½ and no more than 3 pages) papers in this course; of the eight starred (*) assignments, you may pick the six that are most interesting to you and/or best fit with your schedule. Another way of putting this is you can skip two of the starred assignments without penalty. Because of the fast pace of the term, my written comments on these will be somewhat minimal, but you are strongly encouraged to come discuss them further with me during office hours.

6. *Presentations.* You'll be giving a short presentation toward the end of the term. These count for 10% of your final grade—that is, enough to change it significantly—and are worth taking seriously and investing real work into. I'll certainly be grading them seriously, based on the quality of their content, organization, and presentation.

7. *Email.* I may communicate with you at any time via your SMU email account, and receiving emails I send you is your responsibility, so check this account frequently. When emailing me, please observe the rules of proper English and decorum; don't address them to "Hey," or say things like "i sent my ppr 2 u" or "what R you're office hrs again?"; and allow at least 24 hours for a response (48 on weekends) before sending anxious where-are-you followups.

8. *Office Hours*...are held for your benefit. Make use of them. It can't hurt, and it often helps.

9. *Laptops*...tend for various reasons to draw people out of discussion, and are not allowed in my classroom unless you have a medically documented need for one. Same goes for cellphones, which may not ring or even be looked at during class.

10. *Grading.* The tentative grade breakdown is as follows:

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|---|------------|
| Essays, total | 40% |
| Midterm Exam | 10% |
| Final Exam | 20% |
| Presentation | 10% |
| Attendance, participation, <u>quizzes, etc.</u> | <u>20%</u> |
| | 100% |



Miscellaneous University Policies:

- **Disability Accommodations:** Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Ms. Rebecca Marin, Coordinator, Services for Students with Disabilities (214-768-4557) to verify the disability and establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with the professor to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4.) Please do this as early as possible in the semester; last-minute or ad hoc accommodations may not be possible.
- **Religious Observance:** Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify their professors in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with them, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.)
- **Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the instructor prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue)

This statement of University policy applies for all students. In order to minimize the difficulties caused for both student-athletes and their instructors by excused absences due to University-sanctioned athletic activities or related travel, the Athletic Department shall: 1) Make available to all student-athletes and their academic advisers prior to registration a copy of the student's activity and travel schedule for the upcoming semester, so as to facilitate the student's enrollment in class sections that will minimize activity and travel conflicts; and 2) Require all student-athletes to provide a copy of that semester's activity and travel schedule, and a copy of this Statement of University Policy, to each of their instructors at the first class meeting of the term.



Schedule of Assignments

Important Note: These may (and likely will) be changed or supplemented as the semester progresses.

Important Note #2: Our readings are pretty short, but they should take some time. Read the poetry and commentary carefully; then think about the commentary and go back and read the poetry again, and think about how illuminating (or not) the commentary is. Then study the poem yet again and see what you can add to the editors' questions, observations, and insights. Look up and learn the meaning[s] of any words you don't know. And you are expected to not only look up but *memorize* the meaning of any words in **boldface**.

June 1 – Introduction: What (and why) is poetry?

4 – Some Basics

Read Kennedy & Gioia, *An Introduction to Poetry* (ItP), ch. 1

Write and bring a 1-page paraphrase of Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" (427)

5 – Voice, Tone, Irony

Read ItP ch. 2, and Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (395)

*Using the guidance on pp 44-45, write a 2-page essay on a specific aspect of voice, tone, and/or irony in Eliot

6 – discussion

7 – Attending to Words

Read ItP ch. 3

*Write a 2-page analysis of the diction and word choice in either Donne's "Batter my Heart" (53) or Hopkins' "The Windhover" (467)

8 – discussion

11 – Denotation and Connotation

Read ItP ch. 4

*Write a 2-page essay on how a poem (TBA) says certain things that imply others

12 – Imagery and Symbol

Read ItP ch. 5 & 12

*Write a 2-page interpretive analysis of a particular image or symbol from a poem (TBA)

13 – discussion

14 – Tropes

Read ItP ch. 6

*Write a 2-page essay analyzing, and interpreting, figures of speech in a poem (TBA)

15 – discussion

18 – MIDTERM EXAM (1 hour)

Also, read ItP ch. 8 for hour 2

19 – Sound and Rhythm

Read ItP ch. 9 and Thomas' "Fern Hill" (520)

*Using what we learn in ch. 8-9, write a focused 2-page analysis of how sound generates meaning in Hopkins' "God's Grandeur" (164)

20 – Form: Closed

Read ItP ch. 10; vocabulary quiz likely

*Using the guidance on p. 215, write a 2-pg analysis of how the closed form of the sonnet helps to produce and complicate meaning in one of ItP's sonnets by Keats, Milton, or Shakespeare—OR write an original sonnet and a short explanation of how you used form to deepen meaning

21 – Form: Open

Read ItP ch. 11 and Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California" (454)

*Write a 2-page essay on the possibilities created by the opening-up of form in cummings' "in Just-," Whitman's "Cavalry Crossing a Ford," or Ginsberg's "Supermarket"

22 – Quality

Read ItP ch. 17

Decide which is the "best" (and which the "worst") poem in this chapter, and think carefully about exactly what you mean by that

25 – **Sampler:** readings TBA

26 – discussion

27 – Presentations and Conclusion

28 – FINAL EXAM

29 – you don't have to go home, but you can't stay here!

