

COURSE OUTLINE

POETRY

Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously said that prose was “*words in their best order*” but that poetry was “*the best words in their best order*”. This course looks at some of the most influential English poets from the last 1300 years. Students examine the origins of the poetic form and the traditions of oral poetry, which began in the eighth century with *Beowulf*; the influence of Petrarch on the sonnets of Donne and Shakespeare; the Metaphysical and Romantic poets; the confessional style of Plath and Duffy, and the primitive energy behind the verse of Hughes and Heaney. Attention is paid to the development of form and style and the poets’ treatment of language, themes and ideas. We will be examining the concept of poetry, the role of the poet and the evolution of the poetic form over time, stopping off at major landmarks along the way. Skills of close textual analysis and critical interpretation will be developed throughout the course.

1. **Introduction:** The origins of English poetry, from *Beowulf* to the Renaissance.
2. **Donne and Marvell:** rhetoric and conceit from the masters of metaphysical manipulation.
3. **Swift and Pope:** satire and subversion in the Restoration.
4. **Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth:** the early Romantics.
5. **Byron, Shelley and Keats:** the later Romantics.
6. **War poetry:** representations of World War One from the trench poets.
7. **Hughes and Heaney:** beauty in violence and the un-romantic tradition.
8. **Plath and Duffy:** women in poetry – talking back.
9. **Larkin and Betjeman:** post-war Britain and the changing face of society.
10. **Projects**

For each unit, students will read a selection of material from the poets listed for discussion and analysis in class. Students may study other poets if they wish; this should be discussed with the tutor.

Course Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

There is no single or common aim, objective or outcome in the study of poetry. The course aims to provide an overview of the significant points in the development of English poetry, and a framework by which key texts may be analysed. The course is primarily based on close textual analysis, understanding of contextual and, in places, biographical material. Individual projects may be selected by the student and need not be confined to a single or conventional academic approach.

The following is a guide to the type of questions which might be chosen for some of the poets listed above:

- How far does your reading of the poems lead you to agree that 'both indignation and compassion lie at the heart of Blake's poetry'?
- Through a detailed comparison of *Ode to a Nightingale* with *Ode on Melancholy*, write about Keats' presentation of the themes of beauty and death. You may also refer to other poems and/or his letters where appropriate.
- "There is no sophistry in my body: / My manners are tearing off heads –" (*Hawk Roosting*) Discuss the ways in which Hughes presents the violence of the natural world in three poems of your choice.
- Consider the ways in which Duffy creates a sense of menace in the poems *Disgrace* and *Stuffed*. In your answer, you should pay particular attention to language, imagery and tone.

Assessment Process

Students will be awarded a final grade based on classroom contribution and attendance, satisfactory completion of reading and research-based homework, and on the submission of at least two written papers on topics of their choice. Critical material may be incorporated into essays by those students who wish.

Written work is assessed on the understanding that there is no right or wrong answer in literature, but each point made should be well-substantiated with textual evidence.

Essays which score highly will be those which include a coherent and logical argument, detailed textual analysis and an understanding of the conventions of poetic form and structure.

Assessment criteria

DISTINCTION Grade A	Excellent knowledge, understanding and application of appropriate literary terminology and a clear sense of the ways in which language shapes meaning. Independent judgement and original thinking, together with an ability to make new and convincing connections. Excellent organisation and detailed use of textual evidence. An emerging personal style.
CREDIT Grade B	Good knowledge and understanding, showing ability to analyse and use evidence. Beginnings of independent judgement. Mostly relevant, but some minor lapses and lack of clarity. Good organisation of material and effective sequencing of ideas. Good range of appropriate analysis of relevant sections from the text. Use of appropriate academic language.
MERIT Grade C	Satisfactory knowledge and understanding. Some ability to analyse and use evidence. Attempts to evaluate but treatment often too superficial. Satisfactory organisation of material. Limited range of appropriate analysis or use of relevant terminology.
PASS Grade D	Some knowledge and understanding but significant omissions. Shows limited ability to analyse and use evidence. Some attempt to construct an argument, however lacks ability to argue meaningfully or make significant connections.
FAIL	None of the criteria listed above met.

Recommended Introductory Reading and Textbooks

Primary texts may be read in any edition, but some useful anthologies of poetry

The Oxford Book of English Verse – Christopher Ricks (OUP: 1999)
ISBN:9780192141828

Great Modern Poets: The Best Poetry Of Our Times – Michael Schmidt (Quercus: 2006)
ISBN: 9781905204700

Useful reference books include:

Mastering Poetry – Sara Thorne (Palgrave Macmillan: 2006)
ISBN: 9780333698754

An Introduction to English Poetry – James Fenton (Penguin: 2003)
ISBN:9780141004396

If you are unable to obtain books locally, they may be ordered from

<http://www.bookshop.blackwell.co.uk> or www.Amazon.co.uk