

English 302: Forms of Poetry  
Spring, 2012  
MWF 1:30-2:20  
Oddfellows 203  
Quinn

Office: 233 Oddfellows  
Phone: 332-4337  
lquinn@allegheny.edu  
Office Hours: MWF 12:30-  
1:30, TTh 1:30-3:00

## Poeming the Dead: The Elegy and its Heirs

Although the elegy as a song of mourning or a lament for the dead is not, strictly speaking, a “form” of poetry, it is a distinct “mode” of structuring loss and grief with a complex set of thematic conventions and formal patterning. In this course we will study “classic” English language literary elegies (*Lycidas*, *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, *Adonais*, *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, *In Memory of W.B. Yeats*) for the ways in which they structure the occasion of loss. We will then look at a wide range of more informal treatments of loss and death in poems that might be called “elegiac,” exploring the way these honor, loot, and skew their famous precedents. Though elegy is not a “form,” we will study form in elegy, examining the ways in which (to loot Seamus Heaney)

Trochee, trochee, falling: thus  
Grief and meter order us.

We will read, analyze, and discuss a wide range of elegiac poems, as well as do some memorization and recital of poems. Students will write four papers during the semester and complete a take-home comprehensive final exam. Class participation will be a major part of the final grade.

Your required books for this course consist of a Printshop Packet and a Supplement to the Packet, available in our bookstore. Students must buy the packets and must bring them to every class. Attending without the packet will be considered an absence.

### Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| January 18 | Introduction to course: Examination of Robert Bly’s “Mourning Pablo Neruda” (handout)                  |
| January 20 | Read D.A. Powell, “The Elegy’s Structures” and accompanying poems (pages 3-11 in Printshop Packet--PP) |
| January 23 | Read “Lycidas” (pages 15-18 in PP)   |
| January 25 | Continued discussion of “Lycidas”; read Virgil, Eclogues IV and V and                                  |

- Theocritus, Idyll I (Printshop Packet Supplement-PPS)  
 January 27 Continued discussion of "Lycidas," Eclogues and Idyll; first paper assigned
- January 30 Read Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (19-20 in PP)  
 February 1 Gray's Elegy continued  
 February 3 Read Charlotte Smith elegies (34-38 in PP); "Tichborne's Elegy" (PPS)
- February 6 Read Shelley's "Adonais" (40-48 in PP)  
 February 8 "Adonais" continued  
 February 10 "Adonais" continued; read Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (21-22 in PP); first paper due
- February 13 Read Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (50-54 in PP); second paper assigned  
 February 15 "Lilacs" continued; read "O Captain! My Captain!"  
 February 17 Read Emily Dickinson poems (57-60 in PP)
- February 20 Read Thomas Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush" (PP 61); "Drummer Hodge" and "God's Funeral" (PPS)  
 February 22 Read Wilfred Owen's "Futility" (PP 62); "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "Mental Cases," "Miners" (PPS)  
 February 24 Discussion of Hardy and Owen continued; read Edna St. Vincent Millay's "Justice Denied in Massachusetts" (PP 67) and "Elegy Before Death" (PPS)
- February 27 Read Wallace Steven's "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" (PP 63-66) and "The Emperor of Ice Cream," "To An Old Philosopher in Rome" (PPS); second paper due  
 February 29 Read W.H. Auden "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" (PP 23-24); third paper assigned
- March 2 Continued discussion of Auden; read Seamus Heaney's "Aduenesque" (PPS)
- March 5 Read Robinson Jeffers' "Inscription for a Gravestone" (PP 74) and "I Have Been Warned" (PPS); E.A. Robinson's "Why He Was There" (PPS)
- March 7 Read William Carlos Williams' "An Elegy for D.H. Lawrence" (PP 91) and "Tract" (PP 113); read handout of D.H. Lawrence's "Snake"  
 March 9 Read Elizabeth Bishop's "First Death in Nova Scotia" and "North Haven" (PP 70-72)
- March 12 Read Allen Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and Robert Lowell's "For the Union Dead" (PPS)  
 March 14 Read Dylan Thomas's "A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London" (PP 111); John Berryman (PP 9, 102-107)

March 16 Continued discussion of Berryman; read William Dickey's "The Death of John Berryman" (PP 176) and Lowell's "For John Berryman" and "For John Berryman 2" (PP 79-84); third paper due

### Spring Break March 17-25

- March 26 Anne Sexton's "Sylvia's Death" (PP 121); Anne Stevenson's "Letter Sylvia Plath" (PP 154-156); Robert Bly's "When William Stafford Died" (PP 144)
- March 28 Read Larkin's "The Explosion" (PP 75); Frank O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died" (PP 118); fourth paper assigned
- March 30 Read Seamus Heaney (PP 130-138)
- April 2 Read Countee Cullen's "To John Keats, Poet, At Springtime" (PP169); Robert Hayden's "Mourning Poem for the Queen of Sunday" (PP 171); Langston Hughes (PP 163-64)
- April 4 Read Gwendolyn Brooks (PP 159) and "of De Witt Williams on his way To Lincoln Cemetery" (PPS); Read Lucille Clifton's "Here Rests" and Jasper Texas, 1998" (PPS); Quan Barry's "Emmett Till's Open Casket as *La Pieta*" (PPS—very end)
- April 6 Read Etheridge Knight's "A Poem of Attrition" (PP 160); Patricia Smith's "Undertaker" (PP 179); Yusef Komunakaa's "Elegy for Thelonious" (PP 165); Michael Harper's "We Assume on the Death of Our Son, Reuben Masai Harper" (PP 98)
- April 9 Read Richard Hugo (PP 145-152)
- April 11 Read James Dickey's "The Sheep Child" (97) and "Buckdancer's Choice" (PP 112)
- April 13 Read James Wright (PP 85-90); fourth paper due
- April 16 Read Maxine Kumin's "How It Is" (PP 117); Bob Hicok's "In Michael Robin's Class Minus One" (PP 196); Leo Dangel's "Closing in on the Harvest" (PP 198)
- April 18 Read William Matthews' "My Father's Body" (PPS) and "Mingus in Shadow" (PP 194); Angela Sorby's "Mountain of Names" (PPS) and Sherman Alexie's "The Exaggeration of Despair" (PPS)
- April 20 Read Denise Levertov's "The Change" (PPS); Andrew Hudgins' "The Funeral Sermon" (PPS); Billy Collins (PP 201-204); Denver Butson's "My Brother" (PP 181); hand out take home final exam
- April 23 Dead Dog Poems: read James Wright's "On the Skeleton of a Hound" (PP 89-90); Robinson Jeffers' "The House Dog's Grave" (PPS); Pablo Neruda's "A Dog Has Died" (PP 10-11); Derek Walcott's "Oddjob, a Bull Terrior" (PP 140)
- April 25 Roadkill Poems: read William Stafford's "Travelling Through the Dark"

- (PP 77); Gerald Stern's "Burying an Animal on the Way to New York" (PP 77) and "Behaving Like a Jew" (PPS); Maxine Kumin's "Requiem on I-89" (127-128); Richard Wilbur's "The Death of a Toad" (PP 174)
- April 27 Read Christopher Bakken's "Ohio Elegy" (PP 188); Kirk Nisset's "Hum" And "Shrine" (PP 184-5); Maxine Kumin's "Noted in the *New York Times*" (PP 125-26); Robert Bernard Hass's "A Poem for Our Climate" (PP 200)
- April 30 Read Steven Kramer's "For the Bullies of West Morris High" (PP 191); Mark Doty's "Tiara" (PP 28-29; Michael Dumanis's "The Death of Elegy" (PP 212); W.S. Merwin's "Burning the Cat" (PPS)

Your Take Home Final Exam will be due in my office (hard copy only) on Monday, May 7 by noon.

#### Grade Distribution:

Paper One	15%
Paper Two	15%
Paper Three	15%
Paper Four	15%
Take Home Exam	20%
Participation	20%

#### Rules and Regulations:

#### **Rules and Regulations:**

1. You are expected to attend and to participate (with your packet of readings always in hand). Opportunities for participation will be structured into the course; in short, you will be assigned short memorization projects as well as short biographical presentations of our poets. Most importantly, you will be expected to read the assigned poems carefully in advance and to be prepared to discuss the poems assigned each day.
2. Late papers will only be accepted in negotiated circumstances.
3. All work for the course must be completed if you are to pass. This includes anyone taking the course credit/no-credit.

4. Paper assignments will be specific and detailed. All papers must be word-processed, spell-checked, and carefully polished and proofread.

5. Any lapses into plagiarism will be forwarded to the Honor Board automatically. Any papers plagiarized in whole or part will receive an automatic F with no rewrite option.

### **Criteria for Grading Class Participation:**

A participation is marked by its active nature, its consistency, and its quality. An **A** participant doesn't wait to respond to questions that the instructor poses but initiates discussion by coming prepared with questions, ideas, observations about the reading assigned that day. This participant will also be consistently engaged in class discussion, always letting me know that she/he has engaged the reading thoroughly and thoughtfully. Finally an **A** participant will not try to substitute **quantity** of participation for **quality** (being consistent is not the same thing as dominating a discussion). To earn the highest grade for your participation, you will want to make it possible for others to participate productively too (this is not a competition); thus, habits such as interrupting others and taking up too much conversational space will not enhance your grade. It will also do you no good to participate if you haven't done the reading. I expect participation to be firmly grounded in careful and thoughtful reading. As the **A** reader reads, she or he **prepares** to participate in a class discussion with other readers.

A **B** discussant is less consistent than an **A** in initiating discussion but is active in responding to questions or problems posed by the professor and other students. To get a **B** in participation, you will need to be in class and talk regularly--more, certainly, than once during a class session once a week or so. Regular means regular. This level of class participation will also communicate clearly to me that you have done **all** the reading for the day and that you have done it thoughtfully. This level will also include productive discussion habits, such as engaging the ideas of others, not dominating, listening carefully, etc.

A **C** grade for participation means that you have contributed in an **average** way to the discussion. Your contributions have been less frequent than those of the **B** participant or have let me know that you are not always keeping up with the reading or have, in some way, interfered with good discussion--for instance, a "dominator" would get credit for participating often but would get knocked down to a **C** for taking over and not engaging others in discussion. In short, you have not been silent or absent or altogether uninvolved, but your involvement did not work consistently to make the class a productive learning experience.

A **D** grade means that you were there physically most of the time and maybe even piped up three or four times during the semester but that's it. It's just the grade it should be--a minimal passing grade.

An **F** grade should need no explanation.

### **Criteria for Grading Papers:**

1. An **A** paper will be

- polished and error-free
  - insightful, going well beyond the obvious and well beyond what was said in class
  - thoroughly developed and logically structured
2. A **B** paper will be
- well-written overall, but with some minor lapses
  - above average in insight, but less original than the **A** paper
  - competently developed but a little less thorough than an **A** paper
3. A **C** paper will be
- competently written but with a number of minor or a few major lapses
  - average in insight and originality
  - readable in terms of organization and structure but in need of more coherence
4. A **D** paper will be
- error-ridden and un-proofread
  - below average in insight and originality
  - disorganized and hard to follow
5. An **F** paper will be
- unreadable because of writing errors
  - inaccurate and/or otherwise irresponsible in content
  - incoherent