



**Reading List—Bob Shoenberg
Moods of Poetry
LLI 743**

Letter from Professor Shoenberg

This is not your average reading list. I thought it important to give you a more extensive explanation of what I hope we can accomplish in these six weeks. I know that many people find poetry difficult, especially modern poetry. You may be surprised to find that older poetry is just as puzzling, although for different reasons. So I figured if you had some idea of what I was up to in laying out this syllabus it might be a little easier.

The poems I have chosen for each class illustrate a particular emotional response of the poet, though those common responses are often to different kinds of people, objects and circumstances. Within a group reflecting a particular “mood,” the poems will differ in both the way the poets express that emotion and the formal structure of the poem. Thus we will be looking at both the particular “tone” of the poem and its formal aspects, considering the way form and meaning interact. To put it more simply, this class will be about the enormous emotional range of poetry and the many formal strategies that poets use to express their feeling.

I have listed the poems for each class in approximately the order in which they were written, but we will not often follow that chronology in discussing the poems. However, by the time the course is over I hope to give you some sense of the historical sweep of poetry in English and of the various forms and preoccupations that characterize the poetry of different historical periods.

I have listed more poems for each class than we are likely to discuss in any detail, though we may want to make reference to more works than we examine closely. So just read through the poems before you come to class to familiarize yourself a bit with the smorgasbord I’ve laid out. Any poems we discuss in detail we will read aloud first. I hope class members will do much of that reading aloud.

In general, I’ve confined the selections to comparatively short poems, but a few are 100 lines or more. These are poems “you ought to know,” but if you find some of them a bit too much (I suspect Milton’s “Lycidas” may be in this category), don’t torture yourself. You aren’t required to like all the poems, though I hope you will and that you will find some that move you.

The great majority of these poems can be found in the *Norton Anthology of Poetry*. You MAY want to get hold of this book, new, used or borrowed, any edition after the fourth, complete or abridged. All the rest can be readily downloaded: they aren’t obscure.

This is a preliminary list. I will edit it down somewhat, but probably not a lot.

Lifelong Learning Institute, Literature Reading List.
Questions? Please email Natasha.Sacks@montgomerycollege.edu and
Tracy.Ritenour@montgomerycollege.edu

September 28: Poems of Sadness

I've narrowed this category to include only elegies, i.e., poems lamenting a death. It is most often the death of a particular person, but not always. It may be a close friend whose passing the poet is lamenting, an admired person, or someone the poet barely knows. An elegy can even be comic.

When literary folks think about elegiac poems, there are three landmarks: Milton's "Lycidas," Grey's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. I have not included Grey's "Elegy" because it is long and many of you have encountered it in another course. I've given you only excerpts from *In Memoriam*, which is a much longer series of individual poems.

Ben Jonson, "On My First Son"

John Milton, "Lycidas"

John Dryden, "To the Memory of Mr. Oldham"

Matthew Prior, "Epitaph"

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, Sections 1, 7, 50, 93, 119, 130

Walt Whitman, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (Verses 1-6)

Rudyard Kipling, "Gunga Din"

A.E. Houseman, "To an Athlete Dying Young"

John Crowe Ransom, "Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter"

Kenneth Fearing, "Dirge"

Theodore Roethke, "Elegy for Jane"

Elizabeth Bishop, "Sestina"

Frank O'Hara, "The Day Lady Died"

October 5: Poems of Joy

Poets can get happy about a lot of different things: wine, women and song; the natural world; memories; or just being alive. All of these motivations for a joyous outpouring are represented here in a variety of forms from the formality of sonnets to the complete openness of free verse.

Anonymous, "The Cuckoo Song"

John Lyly, "O, For a Bowl of Fat Canary"

Phillip Sidney, "Oh Joy, too high for my low style to show"

Ben Jonson, "Inviting a Friend to Supper"

John Dryden, "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day"

William Wordsworth, "It is a Beauteous Evening"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Frost at Midnight"

John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, Sections 1, 24

Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur"

Dylan Thomas, "Fern Hill"

James Dickey, "Cherrylog Road"

October 12: Poems of Fear and Depression

Poets have recorded not only their highs but their lows as well, fear of death being the most dominant subject in this category. At the far end of this spectrum there are some remarkable poems about what we would consider clinical depression.

Fear

Anonymous, "Timor Mortis"

Thomas Nashe, "Adieu, Farewell, Earth's Bliss" ("A Litany in Time of Plague")

John Keats, "When I have fears that I may cease to be"

Emily Dickinson, "A narrow fellow in the grass"

Depression

William Cowper, "Lines Written in a Period of Insanity"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Dejection: An Ode"

John Keats, "Ode on Melancholy"

Emily Dickinson, "There's a certain slant of light"

Emily Dickinson, "I felt a funeral in my brain"

Sylvia Plath, "Lady Lazarus"

October 19: Poems of Acceptance and Defiance

Faced with frustrations or inevitable outcomes, poets have chosen to accept them or in some cases defy the odds. Here, even Satan has his day.

Acceptance

Thomas Wyatt, "They flee from me"

Michael Drayton, "Since there's no hope"

Queen Elizabeth I, "When I was fair and young"

William Shakespeare, "When my love swears that she is made of truth"

John Milton, "When I consider how my light is spent" ("Sonnet on His Blindness")

George Herbert, "The Collar"

John Keats, "To Autumn"

Anthony Hecht, "Still Life"

Donald Justice, "Pantoum of the Great Depression"

Defiance

John Donne, "Death be not proud"

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 242-270 ("Is this the region . . .")

William Blake, "And did those feet" ("Jerusalem")

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

Emily Dickinson, "The shut me up in prose"

Gwendolyn Brooks, "First Fight, Then Fiddle"

October 26: Poems of Anger

Poets have used their talents to express disgust or outrage directed at individuals or social and political circumstances. A number of these poems reflect anger about issues of our time: the Viet Nam war, the situation of women, racial prejudice.

Anonymous, "Sir Patrick Spens"
William Shakespeare, "Farewell, thou art too dear for my possessing"
Ben Jonson, "Still to be neat"
William Blake, "London"
Percy Bysshe Shelley, "England in 1819"
Robert Browning, "Soliloquy of a Spanish Cloister"
Wilfred Owen, "Dulce et Decorum Est"
Robert Frost, "Range Finding"
Countee Cullen, "Yet do I Marvel"
Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise"
Anne Sexton, "Her Kind"
Keith Douglas, "Vergissmeinnicht"
Denise Levertov, "Tenebrae"
Margaret Atwood, "At the Tourist Center in Boston"

November 2: Poems of Love

Love poems form an endless treasury: heterosexual love, homosexual love, love of children and parents, thwarted love. This collection contains a little of each, from medieval times to the end of the last century.

Anonymous, "Western Wind"
Edmund Spenser, "Ye tradeful merchants"
William Shakespeare, "My mistress' eyes"
William Shakespeare, "A woman's face with nature's own hand painted"
John Donne, "The Good Morrow"
Katherine Phillips, "To My Excellent Lucasia, On Our Friendship"
Charlotte Mew, "The Farmer's Bride"
Theodore Roethke, "I Knew a Woman"
Theodore Roethke, "My Papa's Waltz"
Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art"
Robert Hayden, "Those Winter Sundays"
Phillip Larkin, "An Arundel Tomb"
Anthony Hecht, "The Ghost in the Martini"
Galway Kinnell, "After Making Love We Hear Footsteps"
Louise Gluck, "The Garden"
Carol Ann Duffy, "Warming Her Pearls"