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ENG 4300-002: Lyric Poetry and the Self

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Michael Leddy / English 4300 / Lyric Poetry and the Self / Spring 2003

Office: Coleman 3741 (aka 330, west hallway), MWF 8:30-10:00, 11:00-12:00, other times by appointment
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The course will focus on poetry of the "I," poems that express or enact some sense of poetic selfhood. The reading will range quite widely, from the ancient lyric voices of Sappho and Catullus to writers still beyond typical academic definitions of the contemporary canon.

The course has a number of objectives. Its focus is meant to allow for discussion of the varying ways in which poets have addressed the question of self-representation in poetry. That discussion can bring in numerous matters: language and self-representation, the relation of poetry to autobiography, nuances of tone and voice, different ways in which “the self” has been understood (or rejected) as an organizing principle for poems. In a broader way, the course is meant to help you become a more perceptive reader of poetry. We will read poems slowly and closely, with maximum attention to their art, intelligence, and integrity. Doing the work of the course will help you to develop a keen eye for the features of poems and ways to talk about what you see—thus making poetry alive, accessible, and rewarding. In conceiving this course, I’m well aware that for many English majors, poetry is difficult. This seminar might be an ideal setting in which to begin to feel at home in the possibilities of poetry.

Texts
Margaret Ferguson et al., eds., Norton Anthology of Poetry, 4th ed.
Paul Hoover, ed., Postmodern Poetry: A Norton Anthology
Kenneth Koch, Making Your Own Days: The Pleasures of Reading and Writing Poetry
Sappho, Poems and Fragments, trans. Stanley Lombardo

Requirements
Dedicated participation in the daily work of the course (reading, thinking, talking), quizzes, a number of short writing assignments, a longer individual writing project, a final examination.

Policies
Attendance
Attendance is essential: you should attend class as often as I do. You are responsible for all assignments, whether or not you are in class when they are announced. If you must miss a class, you should get in touch with me beforehand to find out what you will miss. (You’re welcome to call me at home if you need to: I don’t have voice mail for my office number.)
Late Work and Make-Up Work
Late writing assignments are acceptable only if you have my approval in advance. Missed quizzes cannot be made up. If you have a properly verified absence (illness, emergency, participation in an official University activity), I will record a blank for a missed quiz, not a zero.

Disabilities
If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, contact the coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Office Hours
Coming in to talk can be a great way to engage in genuine intellectual dialogue. It can also be a great way to clear up questions and dissolve anxieties and get expert help with poems and writing problems. Feel free to come in to talk—about a question that you didn’t get to ask in class, an idea that you want to discuss, punctuation marks, an assignment, a grade, etc. If office hours aren’t workable for you, talk to me and we can figure out another time. And when you come in, you needn’t apologize for taking up my time. Having office hours is part of what a college prof does.

Decorum
Our purposes here are serious—not grim or morbid, but genuinely intellectual. No eating, talking, doing work for other classes, or other private business. Anyone who interrupts the work of the class on a continuing basis will be asked to leave.

Some Words About Discussion
I like to ask questions that make people think. I also like it when people ask me such questions. So I think of discussion as a matter of asking questions to get at the substance of what we’re reading. Consider what the writer Thomas Merton says about a teacher he admired:

Most of the time he asked questions. His questions were very good, and if you tried to answer them intelligently, you found yourself saying excellent things that you did not know you knew, and that you had not, in fact, known before. He had “educed” them from you by his question. His classes were literally “education”—they brought things out of you, they made your mind produce its own explicit ideas (The Seven Storey Mountain).

When I was a student I always felt patronized when someone replied to my contributions by saying something like “Very good” or “That’s interesting,” so when we talk as a class, I try not to give those rote non-responses. Instead I try to engage what someone is saying. Sometimes a student’s comment will make me think of something I hadn’t
thought to say before. Or I might ask a question—sometimes for the sake of debate, sometimes to look for a lengthier explanation (for instance, “What makes you see it that way?”). So if you say something and I then ask you a question, I’m doing so in the spirit of dialogue. (You should be asking questions too, of me and of one another.)

A few guidelines about discussion: Please raise your hand. If someone else gets recognized first and you still want to say something, just raise your hand again (don’t think that I’ve decided not to “call on” you). When I ask a question, I always try to look first for someone who hasn’t yet contributed before going to someone who’s already contributed.

If you have general qualms about participating in class discussion, please talk to me as soon as possible. If at any point you have qualms about how things are going in class, please talk to me.

**Grading**

Your grade will be based on your written work (40%), quizzes (30%), final examination (20%), and participation (10%).

Short writing assignments receive letter grades. Missing writing receives a zero. Quizzes receive numerical grades. A quiz average of, say, 103% counts as 103 and not as an A (95); a quiz average of, say, 40% counts as 40 and not as an F (55). Participation in the course receives one of five grades: 100 (consistent informed participation), 85 (frequent informed participation), 75 (less frequent participation or less informed participation), 50 (only occasional participation), 0 (little or no participation). You may check on quizzes and participation at any time. To calculate semester grades, I use the following numerical equivalents for letter grades:

A 95  A- 92  B+ 87  B 85  B- 82  C+ 77  C 75  C- 72  D+ 67  D 65  D- 62  F 55

Sometimes when I grade an essay I’ll make a “slashed” grade—e.g., B+/A-, which would count as 89.5. For semester grades, 90 or above is an A; 80 or above, a B; 70 or above, a C; 60 or above, a D; below 60, an F.

**Electronic Writing Portfolio**

If this requirement applies to you, you should know that the EWP must include an essay from the Senior Seminar. As of January 8, there was still no information on the EWP webpage as to the deadline for Spring 2003 submissions. I will review submissions through April 4 (I’m assuming that the deadline will fall later in the semester). Your portfolio is your responsibility; please make sure that you understand the requirements and fulfill them in a timely way. You can find more information about the EWP at [http://www.eiu.edu/~assess/](http://www.eiu.edu/~assess/).
English Department Statement on Plagiarism
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and the representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

Academic Integrity
Any breach of academic integrity—from cheating on a quiz to "getting ideas" from Cliffs Notes to cutting and pasting Internet material to working with another student on an essay—is a serious matter and will get you a serious penalty, up to and including an F for the course. You will also get a file in the Judicial Affairs office and be required to participate in an ethics workshop organized by Judicial Affairs. You should be familiar with Eastern's statement on academic integrity (posted in classrooms) and should ask if you have any questions about quoting from and/or documenting sources. But since the work of the course is to be an expression of your own ideas in your own words (aside from words and ideas derived from the works we're reading and from properly acknowledged sources), questions of plagiarism and collusion should never arise. Do not "borrow" work or have someone "go over" your work or give your work to anyone (allowing someone else to make use of your work is also a breach of academic integrity and will also get you a serious penalty, up to and including an F for the course).

Provisional Outline
I have not listed every poem, for several reasons. Any list is likely to change in the course of the semester, due to the ways in which our work adjusts our focus, and a list of fifty or sixty poems is likely to intimidate in advance, especially if many are unfamiliar. These are the poets we're likely to read, with a rough idea of when we'll read them.

The lyric "I": Robert Frost, William Stafford, Rae Armantrout (week 1)
The invention of love: Sappho and Catullus (weeks 2-3)
Love, continued: Arnaut Daniel, Dante, Petrarch, Thomas Wyatt (week 3)
Little worlds made cunningly: William Shakespeare, John Donne, George Herbert (weeks 4-6)
Romanticism's "I": William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (weeks 6-7)
American somebody, American nobody: Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson (weeks 7-8)
Modernism's "I": William Butler Yeats, Guillaume Apollinaire, T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, Langston Hughes, Lorine Niedecker, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Creeley (weeks 9-11)
Confessional poetry: Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath (week 12)
The "workshop" poem: assorted "workshop" poets (week 12)
Postmodernism's "I": Frank O'Hara, Ted Berrigan, Joe Brainard, Bernadette Mayer, Lyn Hejinian (weeks 12-14)
Short presentations of individual projects (week 15)