This course is a general introduction to reading, discussing and writing about poetry, both lyric and narrative. Our focus will be on the Romantics, experimentalists writing amidst a time of political upheaval and radical social change: William Blake, William Wordsworth & Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Anna Barbauld, Charlotte Smith, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, John Keats and John Clare. We will also read poets who influenced them (Shakespeare, Milton), poets they influenced (Emily Dickinson, TS Eliot) and a few poets writing right now (Monica Youn, Terrance Hayes). At the beginning of the term each student will also pick a poet we’re not reading in class to work on throughout the course.

Textbooks can be purchased new or used at the Harvard Coop. The following are required texts:
- Milton, Selected Poems, ed. Christopher Ricks (Penguin, 2007)
- Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume D: The Romantic Era - 10th Ed
- Monica Youn, Blackacre (Graywolf, 2016)
- Terrance Hayes, American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin (Penguin, 2018)
Schedule: (subject, of course, to change); readings are to be completed by the dates listed below.

**Week 0**
M, 1/28: Introducing Lyric & Narrative Poetry
W, 1/30: Sonnets from William Shakespeare, John Milton, Charlotte Smith, John Keats, Percy Shelley, & Terrance Hayes

**Part I. Lyric - Sonnets**

**Week 1: Early Modern Sonnets** – line, volta
M, 2/4: Shakespeare’s sonnets & Vendler’s commentaries: #s
W, 2/6: Milton’s sonnets in the *Selected Poetry*
Monica Youn, *Blackacre* (2016), 67-82

F, 2/8: small-group meetings to discuss Dickinson’s 340: “I felt a Funeral in my Brain” (1862); 591: “I heard a Fly buzz” (1863); 764: “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun” (1863)

**Week 2: Romantic Sonnets** – scansion, Romanticism
bring to class a Youn-style rendering of four words from one of the poems listed in green
M, 2/11: Smith, *Elegiac Sonnets* (1784-97, 55-60), “Written in the Church-Yard” (1797)
Clare, “Mouse’s Nest,” “The Badger” (1832-37)
Meet with me or Amanda to discuss & confirm Your Poet; bring sample poem to section

**Week 3: end stop, enjambment**
M, 2/18: no class, President’s Day

EXPLICATION OF A SONNET due Friday 2/22

**Part II. Lyric – Odes**

**Week 4: ode, organic form**
W, 2/27: Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey” (LB, 1798; count the Wordsworths!), “Ode: Intimations of Immortality” (1802), Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*
Coleridge: “The Eolian Harp,” (1795), “Dejection, an Ode” (1802)

**Week 5: simile, ekphrasis**
Sections: translate the content of one ode into the style of another
Friday, 3/8: Meeting w/TF to discuss two-page draft of Close Reading of Your Poet

Part III. Narrative – Epic & Mock Epic

**Week 6: epic, Miltonic simile**
M, 3/11—Milton: *Paradise Lost* (1667), Books I & II  
W, 3/13—Milton: *Paradise Lost*, Books IV & IX - *memorize a couple lines & listen to one book*

CLOSE READING OF YOUR POET due Friday, 3/15

**Week 7: no class – spring break**

**Week 8: fragment, satire**
W, 3/27: Byron, from *Don Juan*, Cantos I & II (1819), Canto VIII (1821)

Part IV. Lyrical Ballads

**Week 9: ballad, conversation poem**
W, 4/3: Barbauld, “An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestly’s Study,” (1771), “A Summer Evening’s Mediation” (1773)  

**Week 10: romance, heroic couplet**
M, 4/8 — Coleridge, *Christabel* (1799ish)  

Part V. Autobiographical Narrative

**Week 11: blank verse, georgic**
M, 4/15—Wordsworth, selections from the *Prelude* (1805), pp. 356-402  
W, 4/17—Smith, *Beachy Head* (1806)

CLOSE READING OF LINES FROM AN ODE OR NARRATIVE POEM due Friday, 4/19

Part VI. Lyric - Elegy

**Week 12: Romantic irony, elegy**
M, 4/22—Shelley, *Alastor* (1816)  
Shelley, *Adonais* (1821)

Part VII. Elegy, Ode, Epic, Satire, Elegy—Squashed Together

**Week 13: modernism, free verse**
Th, 11/18—*The Waste Land, III-V*—memorize a couple lines

**TBD—FINAL PAPER (Comparison) DUE**  **TBD—In-Class FINAL EXAM**

**Assignments:**
- An Explication¹ of a sonnet (2pp): A careful reading of what a poem says and how it says it; 10%
- Two Close Readings (4pp): the first is of Your Poet, the second is from poetry in the course 30%
- Final Paper (7-8pp): A comparative analysis of different poems or versions of a poem (drafts, manuscript changes, &c) from the second half of the course; 20%
- Final Exam: a significant part of the exam is tied to the lyric assignment (see p. 6); 20%
- Attendance and Sections Participation / Assignments: please note the importance give to this 20%

**Reading Tips:**
- Poetry has lines. It looks different than prose, and should sound and feel different too. You therefore need to read it differently: more slowly; for sound and rhythm as much as for meaning.
- You should read each poem more than once – even the narrative ones. Your first time through, just try to get a feel for rhythm, imagery, ideas, voice. Try reading it out loud.
- Poetry makes different demands on you than the rest of the world typically does. It will take a while to adjust to reading it in the term, and each time you sit down with a poem it will take you a little while get into it. Reading for longer periods without any distraction is almost always more productive than reading in short, distracted bursts.
- Read with a pen in your hand – mark down anything you notice. It helps you think, and later on it can help you remember what you were thinking.
- No one can take in and “understand” a poem in its entirety, even a short lyric. Break it up into digestible chunks.
- When you’re *writing* about a poem, you should read it fifteen to twenty times—until it has dissolved into the deep tissues of your consciousness.
- All readings, aside from *Paradise Lost, Our Andromeda*, and *Lighthead*, are in the *Norton Anthology of Poetry*. Having the text before you in class is paramount—a day w/o the textbook counts as an absence.

**The Fine Print**

*Academic Honesty:* Plagiarism is the use of another person’s ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. It is extremely naughty. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on the paper to dismissal from the course to even more serious actions. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with Harvard FAS’s policies on Academic Honesty, available here:

[http://webdocs.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/ugrad_handbook/current/chapter2/academic_dishonesty.html](http://webdocs.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/ugrad_handbook/current/chapter2/academic_dishonesty.html)

*Collaboration:* You are absolutely encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each others’ work. In individual assignments (which may include midterm or term papers, short writing assignments, homework or reading questions and responses, or take-home exams), academic collaboration and external sources should be cited.

*Attendance:* Your attendance in class and in sections is vital to your own success as well as to the success of the class as a whole. I will allow each student a “free” absence to be used in case of sickness, travel, etc: no explanation necessary. Missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade, and excessive absence could result

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¹ Here’s a pretty good explanation of an explication: [http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/poetry-explications/](http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/poetry-explications/)
in failing the course. Also, being late really disrupts the class: 2 lates = 1 absence. If you have attenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to deal with it.

Computers, Tablets, Phones: No, no and no. No Google Glass or iWatches or Experimental US Military Augmented Reality Contact Lenses either. At least not in class.

Email: I'll use our course listserv to distribute important info throughout the semester—from emailing you handouts to adjusting assignments and deadlines. You are responsible for checking your email on a daily basis. If you have a question that you need to ask me by email, be sure to give me at least 24 hours, or you may not get a response until it's too late. Also, please let me know if you'd like to use a non-Harvard email address.

Accommodations for students with disabilities: “Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”