

Exploring English Culture Through Poetry & Song
Professor: Gord Sellar

Spring 2007

Class Description:

This course is designed not as a literature course, but rather as a course through which students can examine, in poetry and song, aspects of Western Culture of interest to students of English Language & Culture. Students will engage with the content critically in discussions, in written work, and in presentations. Students will also be expected to make attempts to use some of the forms studied to write their own poems (or, occasionally, the option of translating Korean poems on the relevant subject of the week). Student work *will* occasionally be read to the class.

Course Objectives:

To familiarize students with the historical and current role of poetry and song Western culture, and with its range of concerns and topics

To familiarize students with some the basics of structure in Western poetry and song, and their historical roots

To give students a place to experiment with expressing their own ideas and values within the framework of poetical or song forms

To equip students with the critical ability to discuss in interesting ways the implicit assumptions and ideas that they encounter in both pop culture and high art

Class Activities

Listening to songs and readings of poems; discussions of poems and songs in their historical and cultural context; student presentations; and student creative work in writing their own songs and/or poems. More information about the midterm and final projects will be shared during the Introductory class in Week 1.

Assessment:

Participation in class discussions: 20%

Homework & Preparations: 25%

Readings & Presentation(s): 15%

Midterm Project: 15%

Final Project: 25%

A note of reassurance on grading: students will be expected to experiment with poetical forms or themes from time to time. However, creative work will not be graded in terms of quality of creativity. As long as the work reflects apparent effort, it will receive full credit. Other work, however, such as appreciations or other written assignments will be evaluated for a mark, though not quite as stringently as in a writing course.

Textbook: A readings package (and possibly a listening package) will be made available through the university.

My contact information:

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Course Outline:

Monday's class sessions will focus on lectures, assignments, discussions, and other group work. Wednesday class sessions will, for the bulk of semester, be taken up by student presentations and readings of creative work by students.

The following is a tentative theme being submitted several months before the beginning of semester. As such, it is subject to change, in the light of student level, interests, presentation scheduling, and/or other concerns.

Week 1: Introduction & Preparations

Week 2: Nothing Like the Sun: Beauty and Form

Week 3: Love and Broken Hearts: From the Troubadours to Tori Amos

Week 4: Womanhood & Femininity: Reclaiming Voice & Body

Week 5: Family: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Week 6: Boys Will Be Boys: Manhood & Masculinity

Week 7: War Stories: The Road from Glory to Horror

Week 8: Midterm project due

Week 9: Gotta Right to Sing the Blues: Race in Poetry and Song

Week 10: Feminism: A Woman's Got a Right to...

Week 11: Self-Referential: Speaking of Language

Week 12: The Creation of Nation: Myth and Emblem in National Identity

Week 13: A Generation Ago: Not-So-Long Forgotten Popular Poetry and Song

Week 14: Talking 'bout a Revolution: Political Poems and Songs

Week 15: Review

Week 16: Final Project due