

Department of English & Writing Studies

**English 4320F (001)**

**Seminar in Renaissance Literature: Songs and Sonnets**

Fall 2024

**Instructor:** John Leonard

**Prerequisites:** 1.0 from English 1000-1 Course

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A study of the sonnet, with primary emphasis on early modern poets (especially Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton) but with reference also to later poets who have used the sonnet form (Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Derek Walcott, Tyehimba Jess). Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* will also be brought in for comparison, even though that posthumously published collection does not include any traditional sonnets. The course will focus on close reading and practical criticism, but will also examine the historical development of the sonnet form.

**Objectives:**

By the end of the course, successful students will be able to:

- Instantly recognize a sonnet whenever they see one;
- Distinguish between sonnet forms (Italian, English, various hybrids and experimental reinventions);
- Understand the sonnet 'from the inside' by attempting their own poetic composition(s) in the form;
- Understand the history and development of the sonnet form and sonnet cycles

Course Materials

We shall use the following three required texts, to be purchased from the bookstore:

1. Shakespeare, *Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford)
2. Sir Philip Sidney, *The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford)
3. John Donne, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose*, ed. Charles Coffin (Modern Library)

In addition to the above, we shall read selected sonnets by Wyatt, Surrey, Spenser, Lady Mary Wroth, Herbert, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Derek Walcott, Tyehimba Jess, *et. al.* For the most part, these will be made available via OWL as pdfs or powerpoints, sometimes as sight poems or posted on OWL only shortly before the class. The additional material introduced for comparison with the primary texts, to show how a later poet engages with his or her predecessors, sometimes in an adversarial way or for political ends (as when Tyehimba Jess alludes to Milton when writing a

Methods of Evaluation

The grade for the course will be arrived at as follows:

**Seminar presentation** (approx. 20 minutes). You may present on the same topic as one of your essays. **Weighting: 25%**. Due date: to be arranged with instructor. Presentations will be spaced so that there will be one or at most two per class. Once set, this date **cannot be changed without supporting documentation**. See below, "Academic Consideration."





**Plagiarism**

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

**Plagiarism Checking**

October 16. READING WEEK.

**ESSAY #1 due. Flexible deadline (accommodation built in!): 11-18 October. Submit by OWL, not hard copy!**