



The Values of Verse: Sacred and Secular Perspectives

ENG 4930 • Fall 2024

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T/Th, 6:45 pm – 8:00 pm in Belfer Hall, B203
Office Hours: By appointment via Calendly in Belfer 507

Course Description

What makes a good poem? What good are poems? For Aristotle, poetry played a crucial role in civic stability. Roman statesman-turned-satirist Horace declared that poets should aim to “delight” and “profit” their audiences. 14th-century Catholic and Italian humanist Francesco Petrarch struggled to justify the joy he found in the aureate language of antiquity and prove that the arts serve a spiritual purpose; though he confessed to loving Homer and Virgil, he later resolved, “my poet [shall be] David... I want to have his Psalter always at hand [and] beneath my pillow when I sleep and when I come to die.” During the Renaissance, the Psalms served as a touchstone for poets exploring the texture, edges, and impediments of human experience, which infused their art with the lyricism and wisdom of ancient Israel that has profoundly shaped Western literature and culture to this day. This course will explore the virtuosity of verse and by what means poetry yields sacred insight and secular wisdom. For Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, who taught English literature at Stern College after completing his Ph.D. in English at Harvard in the late 1950s, “[q]uite apart from the precision, economy, suggestiveness, and force, great poetry may be imaginative and passionate– and, as such, inspiring, exhilarating, and ennobling.” In seeking to understand the value(s) of verse, we will study a variety of English poets (including a selection of early foreign-language influences) of the Anglophone tradition from the 16th century up to the 20th century. Taught under the auspices of the English department and the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought, this course will feature occasional guest lectures by affiliated humanities faculty.

Course Materials

- “The Values of Verse: Sacred and Secular Perspectives” [Course Reader](#)
- All other required readings, scholarly articles, excerpted chapters, and viewings will be shared on Canvas, and hard copies will be provided in class.

Learning Objectives

What should students know or be able to do after taking this course?

- Demonstrate familiarity with significant works as well as the historical and cultural contexts that shaped the development of Western poetry.
- Apply multiple interpretive frameworks to analyze and compare different poetic traditions within the Western canon, as well as their connections to other artistic and intellectual movements.
- Identify, describe, and analyze the formal, stylistic, thematic, and rhetorical devices in the assigned texts
- Understand (and appreciate) the aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual power of poetry, as well as its ongoing relevance to the world we live in today.

Which program student learning goals and objectives does this course address?

- Students will critically evaluate texts, problems, arguments, and evidence. Students will demonstrate attainment of this goal by being able to (a) interpret and assess primary and secondary sources within a discipline, (b) evaluate competing arguments for logical cogency and evidentiary quality, (c) critically analyze their own assumptions and views in light of the perspectives of others.
- Students will effectively communicate their learned knowledge and own perspectives on various subjects, both orally and in writing. Students will demonstrate attainment of this goal by being

able to (a) clearly analyze an issue or problem orally and/or in writing, (b) present relevant information and ideas in an organized fashion orally and/or in writing, (c) develop and express their own informed perspectives on various topics within a discipline in various modalities.

Course Requirements & Grading

It is English Department policy that grades on student written work are based not on effort but rather on the quality of the work produced by the student. Although we tend to think of writing as an expression of self, please keep in mind that grades on essays are not evaluations of you as a person or even as a writer and are not based on effort, personal investment, or degree of improvement; they simply reflect the quality of the writing and the degree to which a given submission does or does not achieve the assignment objectives and meet rubric criteria (which are not negotiable). Grades serve you best when they initiate self-reflection and conversation with your instructor and your craft, and I am always happy to discuss ways to strengthen your skills at any point throughout the course.

Below is a breakdown of your final grade for this class:

Attendance and Active Participation: 10%

Commonplace Book: 15%

Close-Reading Essay: 20%

Poetry-in-Practice Presentation/Reflection: 25%

Critical Essay: 30%

Specific guidelines and grading criteria will be available throughout the course and posted to Canvas. All essays and drafts must be completed using Google Docs collaborations and submitted to Canvas/Turnitin.com. Late assignments will be penalized at a reduction of 1/3 letter grade for each day late. After one week past the due date, papers will not be accepted and receive 0%. Along with prior notification of missing a due date, you may be asked to provide medical/legal documentation. Make-ups for missed in-class work are granted at the instructor's discretion. It is your responsibility, and a good idea, to back up your work and keep a copy of all drafts.

Policies for Attendance and Active Participation

Although *attendance and participation* count for 10% of your grade in the course, active and collective engagement is essential for a successful learning experience. Understandably, life happens, and should you need to miss class you are responsible for making up what you miss by obtaining any materials and notes generated in your absence. Zoom will not be an option. Up to two unexcused absences are allowed, but after that, you must have documentation (i.e., medical emergency) to avoid your participation grade being lowered by one letter grade. In the event of an emergency of some kind, I will do my best to support your continued progress in our class. Please keep in mind that attendance and participation are not the same thing. Students are expected to come to class prepared, having read and reflected on the assigned materials, and explicitly draw on that preparation to propel conversations by posing and responding to questions and stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. Because much of our course information will be communicated during class discussions, demos, and workshops rather than lectures, students sometimes mistakenly believe that this knowledge is not "important." Indeed, you will likely find it difficult to get caught up or succeed without active class participation. Ultimately, your participation will make our sessions more productive and ensure that you develop a "habit" of thinking and communicating creatively and critically at an educated level. For *scheduled remote instruction* classes over Zoom per the academic calendar, keep your camera on to make our learning environment as rich and engaging as possible (and not be marked absent).

Failure to complete work assigned for a particular class should not prevent you from attending that class; while it is always best to turn in your assignments on time, it is better to have you without your assignment than neither you nor your assignment. You are responsible for keeping track of assignment due dates as they appear on the syllabus and posted on Canvas. Though some modifications to the syllabus might be made during the term to match our progress through the material, these changes will be announced at the beginning of class and posted on Canvas.

Lastly, we all need to tend carefully to keeping lines of communication open. I will work to challenge you as much as I can without overwhelming you. To support your progress throughout the course, I plan to check in throughout the semester, not only to make sure you're keeping up with the reading and writing but to make sure that you are doing well. And when you're not, to help you find the support you need. Patience— with oneself and with others— is critical for a successful learning experience.

Classroom Standards and Expectations

In addition to compliance with Yeshiva University's Code of Conduct, in this course, students will be expected to:

- **Come to discussions prepared**, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
- **Initiate and participate effectively** in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with your peers, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- **Tech-Free Learning Environment.** Cell phones, mobile devices, or laptops may not be used during class. If you have an accommodation letter, please make a meeting to discuss during the first week of class. You will need to have hard copies of the reading materials in class and take notes by hand. All course materials, slides, and handouts will be available on Canvas and copies will be distributed.
- **Demonstrate considerate classroom conduct** to enhance your academic experience and that of your colleagues. In particular, you are asked to contribute to the learning environment by being prompt and courteous, not eating during class, and not walking in and out or talking inappropriately or out of turn.
- **Respect our time together.** At a research university such as YU, instructors have many responsibilities and demands on their time in addition to teaching, and they are not available to students at all times. Here are some methods of respecting your instructor's time (and yours) outside of class:
 - Bring focused questions when you attend office hours and be sure to contact your instructor in a timely fashion if you will not be able to keep a scheduled appointment.
 - When writing an email, be succinct and present your questions as clearly as possible; always use an appropriate tone, sign your name, and proofread your emails.
 - Avoid emailing your instructor about matters that can be addressed in person before or after class.

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty is unacceptable and will not be tolerated at Yeshiva University. Cheating, forgery, dishonest conduct, and plagiarism erode YU's educational, research, and social standards. They devalue the learning experience and its legitimacy not only for the perpetrators but for the entire community. It is imperative that you familiarize yourself with YU's [Academic Integrity Statement](#) along with this syllabus. It is essential that all members of our academic community subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and accept individual responsibility for their work. Since plagiarism is a serious transgression of ethics, any instances of plagiarism will be pursued through the appropriate disciplinary channels; all instances of plagiarism are reported to the Dean and may become a part of your permanent file. Penalties for plagiarism range from receiving a failing grade on the essay to receiving a failing grade for the course, loss of honors, suspension, or even expulsion from school.

Plagiarism means misrepresenting someone else's words or ideas (or the words or ideas produced by A.I. like GPT) as your own. Plagiarism can be an act of deliberate fraud, such as turning in work wholly or partially cut-and-pasted from the internet as your own, misuse of artificial intelligence (A.I.) technology like ChatGPT (details below), or it may be an inadvertent error, such as forgetting to cite a source whose ideas you paraphrased or meant to quote. Although all instances may not receive the same penalty, these are all forms of plagiarism, and you are expected to know and take responsibility for your writing and use of outside sources.

This course follows Yeshiva University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) on artificial intelligence (AI). The use of *generative* artificial intelligence or any platform with generative artificial intelligence capabilities is

prohibited in this course. The use of *assistive* artificial intelligence—including grammar checkers, spell checkers, and digital thesauruses—is allowed. Pre-approved assistive AI platforms include spell checkers and grammar checkers in Microsoft Word and Google Documents, Grammarly, and Hemmingway. Any platform not listed above is not approved for use. If you are unsure whether a platform or technology is allowed, please ask me, and see <https://www.yu.edu/academic-integrity> for further information.

In addition to being careful to properly attribute proprietary ideas, be aware of the difference between proofreading and plagiarism: a proofreader points out mistakes and typographical errors that you are capable of detecting but have missed through carelessness. It becomes plagiarism when your reader rewrites your essay or corrects your mistakes for you. Since this course will require research work and the use of secondary material, you must be aware of your intellectual obligations and take care to document your work diligently. We will discuss the problem of plagiarism and how and why to avoid it in class. If you are unclear in any way about what constitutes plagiarism, please do not hesitate to ask me. In general, one good rule to follow is "when in doubt, cite your source."

Special accommodations: Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should make an appointment with the Office of Disability Services, akelsen@yu.edu, during the first week of class. The office is located in Furst Hall, Suite 412. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

Writing Center: Free Help with Your Writing! The Wilf Campus Writing Center offers individualized tutoring that can support your projects for this course. All writers need feedback, even strong ones. Find out more and make an appointment at <https://yu.mywconline.net/>

Learning Success Center: Any undergraduate Sy Syms or Yeshiva College student interested in improving his study skills and academic performance is welcome and encouraged to visit the Learning Success Center office for academic support. A learning specialist helps you develop the reading, writing and study skills necessary for academic success. For more information, or to schedule an appointment, please email learningsuccesscenter@yu.edu.

Libraries: Need help with your research? The [Yeshiva University Libraries](#) offer individualized consultations that will help you locate and cite journal articles, books, and other credible sources for solid papers, presentations, and reports. Stop into the libraries or [make an appointment](#) with a librarian. You can also [email us](#) any time or contact us via [Live Chat](#). Librarians are always happy to help you!

Out of Class Assistance

I am happy to meet with you to discuss your progress in the course and address any individual questions/concerns you might have. You are always welcome to email me to set up an appointment.

Syllabus

This class schedule is a "living" document that will be modified as needs dictate throughout the semester. Readings and due dates will be available on Canvas, and any alterations will be posted and announced in class. Exact readings will be posted to Canvas and announced in class.

Dates	Course Materials
Week 1: Tuesday, 8/27 & Thursday, 8/29	Course Introduction. Homer, Virgil, Horace, Ovid
Week 2: Tuesday, 9/3 & Thursday, 9/5	Dante, Petrarch
Week 3: Tuesday, 9/10 & Thursday, 9/12	Beowulf, Chaucer, Wyatt

Week 4: Tuesday, 9/17 & Thursday, 9/19	Raleigh, Herbert, Spenser Commonplace Submission #1
Week 5: Tuesday, 9/24 & Thursday, 9/26	Shakespeare, Jonson, Donne
Week 6: Tuesday, 10/1 - No Class, 10/3 (Rosh Hashana)	Herrick, Herbert Close-Reading Essay Due
Week 7: Tuesday, 10/8 - No Class, 10/10 (Friday schedule)	Bradstreet, Marvell, Cavendish, Finch
Week 8: Monday, 10/14 (<i>Remote</i> , Thursday schedule)	Pope, Johnson
- No Class, 10/16 – 10/27 (Sukkot)	
Week 9: Tuesday, 10/29 & Thursday, 10/31	Milton Student Presentations Commonplace Submission #2
Week 10: Tuesday, 11/5 & Thursday, 11/7	Wheatley, Blake, Wordsworth Student Presentations
Week 11: Tuesday, 11/12 & Thursday, 11/14	Coleridge, Byron, Shelley Student Presentations
Week 12: Tuesday, 11/19 & Thursday, 11/21	Keats, Browning, Emerson, Bronte Student Presentations Commonplace Submission #3
Week 13: Tuesday 11/26 - No Class, 11/28 (Thanksgiving)	Whitman, Arnold
Week 14: Tuesday, 12/3 & Thursday, 12/5	Dickinson, Rossetti, Coolidge, Lazarus
Week 15: Tuesday, 12/10 & Thursday, 12/12	Kipling, Yeats, Frost, Dunbar
Week 16: Tuesday, 12/17 & Thursday, 12/19	Course Wrap Up. Course Evaluation. Commonplace Submission #4 Critical Essay due to Canvas 12/23