Understanding World Poetry

Reading poetry is for everyone! This course is an introduction to the study of poetry, providing both the technical knowledge and tools useful for appreciating poetry, as well as an overview of the history of world poetry. We will read and discuss some of the finest and most memorable poems ever written. These will include examples of classical, medieval and modern European poetry in Latin, Greek, English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Czech, by some of the most famous European poets (such as Horace, Petrarch, Spenser, Goethe, Schiller, Coleridge, Pushkin, Baudelaire, Rilke, Garcilaso de la Vega, and Mácha), but also examples from non-European languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Sanskrit and Tamil. The temporal range will be from ancient Indian poems composed about 1500 BCE to poems about the civil war in Sri Lanka written in 2015. All explanations and discussions will of course be in English, but for most poems we will look at the original language text as well as English translations by ourselves and others (which will provide us with the opportunity to discuss issues of translations as well). The course is intended for anyone interested in exploring poetry in a less familiar language, and no language skills will be a prerequisite. But we will also be glad to welcome students (or speakers) of any of the above languages who would like to share their specific language skills with us and who might benefit from an opportunity to see how poetic texts function in their respective languages. Participants with little or no prior experience of reading poetry will be introduced to the various possibilities of examining a poetic text, while more advanced readers may profit from the wide comparative perspective adopted in this course.

Course Readings

Required Book
Please purchase a copy of the following book (available for purchase on Amazon, etc.):


Other Course Readings
All other primary texts will be provided in a reader that can be downloaded from the CHALK page for this class. Please study the texts carefully in advance for discussion in class. For each
class, **print out the poem(s)** to be discussed that day, so that you can refer to them, take notes, etc.

Additionally, students are required to familiarize themselves with basic technical terms used to analyze poetry by reading *A Guide to the Theory of Poetry* by Manfred Jahn which is available online at [http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppp.htm](http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppp.htm).

Finally, I recommend the following reference work:

**Course Calendar**

**Week 1 – 27 September**
**Introduction: How to read poetry**

Some of the guiding questions for our first session are:
What is poetry?
What is gained from reading poetry; why should we do it?
What technical knowledge may be useful for reading and appreciating poetry?
How can we find a way into the vast corpus of “world literature”?

Students read:
- Eagleton, How to read poetry (extracts on CHALK)
- Manfred Jahn, Guide to the Theory of Poetry (available online at http://www.uni-koeln.de/~ame02/pppp.htm, or as a pdf file on CHALK)

**Week 2 – 4 October**
**Ancient Worlds**

India (Poetry in Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, Tamil):
Vedic (Hymns to Ratri, Ushas, Creation)
Bhartrhari, Amaru
Sangam poems

China:
Tang Poems

Latin and Greek Poetry:
incl. Horace, Catullus, Sappho

**Week 3 – 11 October**
Medieval Worlds

Carmina Burana (Medieval Latin)
The Poetry of the Troubadors (Old Occitan)
Tamil poetry of South India: Tirukkovaiyar, Periyapuranam (verses 1, 2, and Nandan episode)
Japanese Haiku

Week 4 – 18 October
Renaissance and Baroque
Petrarch
Gryphius
Ronsard
Spenser
Garcilaso

Week 5 – 25 October
The Eighteenth Century: Enlightenment and Early Romanticisms
Schiller
Goethe
Pushkin
Coleridge
Leopardi

Week 6 – 1 November
The Nineteenth Century: Romanticisms and “Decadence”
Mácha
Byron
Tennyson
Baudelaire
Verlaine/Rimbaud

Week 7 – 8 November
Early Twentieth-Century to World War II
Dada, German Expressionism
Rainer Maria Rilke
Guillaume Apollinaire
Endre Ady
Georg Trakl,
Joan Salvat-Papasseit
Federico García Lorca
Juan Ramón Jiménez
Poems of the Great War
Paul Celan
Week 8 – 15 November
Love Poetry of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries
Rilke
Pablo Neruda
Pedro Salinas
Reiner Kunze
Erich Fried
Andri Peer
Jaroslav Seifert
(and others TBA)

Week 9 – 22 November
Contemporary Political Poetry: Tamil Poems about Sri Lanka’s War

Read the Introduction and all poems in the book *Lost Evenings, Lost Lives*.

Week 10 – 29 November
Final Discussion
Final Paper due

Course Requirements and Expectations
Please study the poems assigned for each week carefully in advance for discussion in class. For each class, remember to print out the poem(s) to be discussed that day, so that you can refer to them in class.

Attendance at every class, careful preparation of the readings, and active participation are expected of all students and will count for 40% of the grade.

An 8 to 10-page final paper will count for 60% of the course grade (see due dates for draft and final paper above). The paper will be written in response to one of the essay prompts announced at the beginning of the course. Instead of a final paper, students may also complete some other form of response to the readings and themes of the course, such as a piece of creative writing (e.g. short story or short play), a video, musical composition or other type of art project. For this alternative response students should spend at least 6 hours of dedicated work, and the precise nature of the project has to be approved by the instructor.

Additionally, depending on the size of the class and on how the discussion evolves, every student might be asked to give an oral presentation in class, e.g. on the life and works of a particular poet or on a particular period of literary history.