

THE ART OF THE SONNET

This course of six sessions will discuss the sonnet poetic form in all its varieties, and study by way of many examples what gives the sonnet its enduring power over a long history of hundreds of years.

Session 1: The Structure of the Sonnet

This session analyzes the basic form(s) of the sonnet and the priority of its elements – number of lines, meter, rhyming. The tension between content and structure is a key feature. There are also many varieties within this structure: dialogue sonnets, echo sonnets, picture sonnets, sonnet sequences and more. “How to write a sonnet” will be explained for anyone who wants to try.

Session 2: Shakespeare’s Sonnets – the mysteries

These remain the greatest sequence of love poems in the literature, but there are many questions about them. When exactly were they written, to whom were they addressed, are they in the right sequence? The many mysteries surrounding these will be reviewed, and a plausible explanation will be proposed.

Session 3: Shakespeare’s Sonnets – the content

W.H. Auden judged that of the 154 sonnets by Shakespeare, some 49 were excellent. (He didn’t tell us which ones.) Taking a selection of the greater sonnets (hopefully from those 49), there will be class discussion into their language and meaning.

Session 4: The History of the Sonnet – Early to Elizabethan

Some of the best sonnets written within the historic tradition will be discussed in this Session, from the early Italian masters (Dante and Petrarch) through the flourishing of the sonnet in the Elizabethan era (Spenser, Donne) and Milton.

Session 5: The History of the Sonnet – Romantic to Modern

Continuing with the romantics (Wordsworth, Browning) through to the moderns (Millay, Yeats), there will be a survey of current sonnet writing.

Session 6: Review

Finally, to summarize the sessions, the class can share some of their favorites, or their own originals in the format (no pressure).

No preparation is required. The emphasis will be on class interaction and participation with most of the material available on the internet. There is a huge literature on the subject. Two recommended books are *THE PENGUIN BOOK OF THE SONNET*, ed. Levin, 2001 and *THE BOOK KNOWN AS Q* by Robert Giroux, 1983. These can be readily found on Amazon as used books at low cost. Other books will be recommended during the sessions.

Leader: Dr. Peter M. Smith (retired from IT and Pharma) has been studying sonnets for many years and has written over 100.

Fridays: 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., 6 weeks: September 25 through October 30

Maximum: 18 seats