SEMINAR IN LITERARY STUDY: SLOW READING

Texts:

William Shakespeare, Sonnets (Arden Shakespeare, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones)

William Carlos Williams, Spring and All (facsimile ed.)

Bashō, The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches (Penguin)

Elizabeth Bishop, Geography III (FSG classics)

many shorter texts—literary, historical, critical, theoretical—available on Canvas

Requirements:

—three papers, from three to five pages in length

—many short assignments, written or oral, sometimes announced on short notice

—a take-home final essay exam

—possibly a mid-term exam and/or short easy quizzes

—definitely constant attendance and active participation in the discussion

Description:

This course introduces new and prospective English majors to the practice of literary study at the university level. At the center of our discussion will be a large number of short poems, and a small number of books made out of those poems.

Short poems can seem timeless—we know they take time to read, but they take so little time, compared to novels and plays. Usually we have the whole poem in front of our eyes at once, like a painting or a photograph. Reading the poem, we don’t hit pause halfway through or insert a bookmark, planning to come back later. Often short poems are timeless in another way as well:
they seem to capture an instant in someone’s life, to preserve it forever. To say it more elegantly, “A sonnet is a moment’s monument” (D. G. Rossetti). Yet some short poems—like some paintings and photographs—repay all the time we have to give them. This is a course in all the ways we might read slowly.

We will spend a lot of class time looking together at individual poems (sometimes unassigned poems I hand out in class). And, because this is a 3850, a “seminar in literary study,” our analysis of primary texts will share the stage with a kind of meta-analysis: a discussion about the kinds of discussion it’s possible to have about poems and books of poems. Almost every class meeting, we’ll explicitly focus on one particular aspect of what literary critics and scholars do. Sometimes our focus will be specific and concrete: “how to use the OED”; “how to quote verse correctly.” Sometimes it will be big and hard to pin down: “history and literature”; “what is an author?” Mostly it will be somewhere in between. When we talk about iambic pentameter, for example, we’ll both develop simple methods for spotting the stuff and talk about what the meter, itself, might mean.

Some days, our meta-topic will be about critical writing; your individual papers will be subject to the same collective scrutiny as our discussion of texts. There will be workshops. I may ask you to bring in a draft of a first sentence, or a first paragraph, well before the paper itself is due; this would be an example of the “many short assignments” mentioned above. (Other short assignments might be: use the OED to become an instant expert on a word; come to class prepared to identify one claim made in a critical essay; write four lines of iambic pentameter.)

As we start the semester, I have a general idea of the schedule. I am picturing four main blocks:

1. Shakespeare’s Sonnets;

2. the history and meaning of the sonnet as a form (there is no assigned book for this; you will be spending even more time than usual downloading from Canvas);

3. two very different books that combine short poems with prose: Williams’ Spring and All (American, early 20th century) and Bashō’s Narrow Road to the Deep North (Japanese, late 17th century);

4. Elizabeth Bishop’s Geography III.

But I also plan for the class to be not entirely planned. We will see how things go, and adjust (or swerve) accordingly; you can have a real share in choosing our path just by speaking up.

Some course policies:

1. Regular attendance and active participation in the discussion are essential. If you must miss class, or arrive late or leave early, it’s a courtesy to let me know ahead of time, but there are no “excused absences”: if you’re not there, you’re missing part of the course, no matter the cause. I do understand that emergencies sometimes detain students elsewhere. If you miss class excessively, though, it will hurt your chances of doing well in the course, both because it will
hurt your performance on the papers and tests, and because attendance is itself part of the course. If you’re there every time, it will count in your favor.

2. Attendance, part two. Showing up is just the beginning. You also need to do the reading and think about it before coming to class. Bring questions and comments! This is very much a discussion class: the more energy, imagination, and intelligence you can contribute, the better it will be. And do please come on time and stay till the end. Traffic through the door disrupts discussions.

3. No screens in the classroom. Computers, tablets, and phones may not be used in class except with special permission of the instructor. This means you will need to bring books and pdf printouts to class; it’s part of attendance.

4. Come see me. I will announce regular office hours, and I can arrange a conference at many other times of the week as well. Let me quote my colleague Richard Preiss on this subject: “The correlation between getting help from your professor and improving your grade is 100%. Most of college (and a large measure of the content of this course) is about learning how to be a college student, and taking advantage of every educational opportunity available to you; developing a one-on-one relationship with me before then will dramatically change your relationship with the course, and let me get to know you better too.”

The fine print

Prohibition on Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct
“Plagiarism” means the intentional unacknowledged use or incorporation of any other person’s work in, or as a basis for, one’s own work offered for academic consideration or credit for public presentation. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, representing as one’s own without attribution, any individual’s words, phrasing, ideas, sequence of ideas, information or any other mode or content of expression (Student Code, p. 3 at http://www.admin.utah.edu/ppmanual/8/8-10.html#SECTIONV)

Plagiarism, using others’ work without proper citation, is a serious offense. Plagiarism cases will be reported to the relevant authorities and may result in severe consequences; including, but not limited to, taking a grade reduction, receiving a failing grade for the course, suspension or dismissal from the program. You need to refer to any source even if it is an internet source.

In accordance with University policy (as articulated in the Student Code), academic misconduct—including creating, fabrication of information and plagiarism—is not acceptable. A student found engaging in this behavior may receive a failing grade. If at any time you are unsure whether your actions constitute academic misconduct, please see me in order to clarify the matter. See the following link for more information: http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html.

Sexual Assault and Harassment
Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender (which includes sexual orientation and gender identity/expression) is a Civil Rights offense subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, color, religion, age, status as a person with a disability, veteran’s status or genetic information. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, 135 Park Building, 801-581-8365, or the Office of the Dean of Students, 270 Union Building, 801-581-7066. For support and confidential consultation, contact the Center for Student Wellness, 426 SSB, 801-581-7776. To report to the police, contact the Department of Public Safety, 801-585-2677 (COPS).
**Wellness Statement**

Personal concerns such as stress, anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, cross-cultural differences, etc., can interfere with a student’s ability to succeed and thrive at the University of Utah. For helpful resources contact the Center for Student Wellness - www.wellness.utah.edu; 801-581-7776.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Statement**

The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities. If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD). CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

**Veterans Center**

If you are a student veteran, you should know that the U of Utah has a Veterans Support Center on campus. They are located in Room 161 in the Olpin Union Building. Hours: M-F 8-5 pm. Please visit their website for more information about what support they offer, a list of ongoing events and links to outside resources: http://veteranscenter.utah.edu/. Please also let me know if you need any additional support in this class for any reason.

**LGBT Resource Center**

If you are a member of the LGBTQ community, I want you to know that my classroom is a safe zone. Additionally, please know that the U of Utah has an LGBT Resource Center on campus. They are located in Room 409 in the Oplin Union Building. Hours: M-F 8-5pm. You can visit their website to find more information about the support they can offer, a list of events through the center and links to additional resources: http://lgbt.utah.edu/. Please also let me know if there is any additional support you need in this class.

**Learners of English as an Additional/Second Language**

If you are an English language learner, please be aware of several resources on campus that will support you with your language development and writing. These resources include: the Department of Linguistics ESL Program (http://linguistics.utah.edu/esl-program/); the Writing Center (http://writingcenter.utah.edu/); the Writing Program (http://writing-program.utah.edu/); the English Language Institute (http://continue.utah.edu/eli/). Please let me know if there is any additional support you would like to discuss for this class.