

# Peer Review Portfolio

English 315, Seventeenth-Century Literature

Donald R. Dickson, Texas A&M University

## I. Overview and Summary

## II. Course Design

- A. Description of English 315
- B. Students
- C. Course Goals
- D. Syllabus and Other Course Materials

## III. Teaching Methods

- A. Discussion of In-Class Activities
- B. Examinations
- C. Writing Assignments

## IV. Analysis of Student Learning

- A. In-Class Activities: “Minute papers”
- B. Examinations
- C. Writing Assignments

## V. Reflection and Assessment

Results of changes in class activities

Future changes in class activities

## **I. Overview and Summary.**

I undertook this Peer Review project to examine my teaching strategies and the assumptions underling them to teach more effectively in all my classes, but especially in the advanced class for English majors in my specialty. I have taught this course for more than twenty years at Teas A&M University.

My portfolio is for English 315, Seventeenth-century Non-dramatic Literature, a course that is paradigmatic for me: the course covers some great literature and spans a crucial time from the standpoint of intellectual history (i.e., the end of the medieval worldview and the rise of the modern one) but also a course that offers good opportunities for sharpening critical reading skills and analytical abilities.

I have tried to transform what was at one time a coverage-centered course into one in which the class was more interactive for my students, who were made more responsible for learning. By having to perform orally in class and post their results on the web, students were obliged to make more significant contributions to the class. By giving “minute papers” as in-class diagnostics, I was able to help detect my deficiencies (and theirs). By having two “research” assignments, students had greater opportunities to hone their research skills. By encouraging students to revise and re-submit one of these assignments for a chance at improving their grades, I gave feedback and offered a reward for them to show their improved understanding.

I believe my changes to English 315 are helping me meet my goals of providing an introduction to the literature and literary history of the seventeenth century and of improving the reading and writing skills of my students.

## II. The Course Design:

### A. *Description of English 315.*

This course covers seventeenth-century non-dramatic literature, which means primarily lyric poetry. No other major requires this course specifically, but a few non-majors venture in to fulfill their residency requirement (A&M obliges its students to take a certain number of upper level courses at A&M, not all of which can be in the major) or out of interest in the poetry. Since the seventeenth century is celebrated for the quality of its lyric poems (short, often introspective poems) that feature complicated, extended metaphors (the so-called “metaphysical conceit”), students find learning to read these poems a challenge.

Some faculty choose to teach this course with the primary goal of providing a sophisticated overview of the literary history of the seventeenth century, as if this were essential knowledge for all English majors. In the past I too conceived of my mission in English 315 in terms of covering all the major writers and major styles of the period, usually at breakneck speed. But I have developed different goals for my course and students, who do not continue on with graduate studies in English literature by and large.

### B. *Students.*

Students are chiefly junior and senior English majors, who are required to take at least one course that focuses on literature from an early period in history (i.e., before 1800) to fulfill a “distribution” requirement. At my university, less than ten percent of our English majors apply for graduate programs according to our Director of Undergraduate Studies, Dr. Claude Gibson. All of our majors are obliged to take three hours of course work in literature before 1800 to meet so-called “distribution” requirements (as well as a Shakespeare course). Most of my students are thus fulfilling their distribution requirement by taking this class in poetry of the seventeenth century. In making adjustments to the syllabus over the years, I have moved increasingly away from an emphasis on coverage to an emphasis on students learning to read and write more critically using the literature of the seventeenth century as our focus. In the long run, for the vast majority of them, it matters far more for their general education that they can read carefully and communicate what they understand, than that they once could identify the different “schools” of literary affiliation in the early seventeenth century, in my judgment.

### C. *Course Goals.*

I have two sets of goals. The goals stated formally on the syllabus are as follows:

This course will explore some of the major writers of the early modern period, beginning with the greatest lyric poet of the age, John Donne, who charted a new direction by turning the Petrarchan tradition upside down. We will then read from a long religious poem by a woman writer, Aemilia Lanyer and the religious poetry of George Herbert. After midterm, we will focus on a key event, the English Civil War and Interregnum (1642-1660), by examining the effects of war through a poet in “meditative retreat” (i.e., Henry Vaughan) and through the Cavalier poets.

These might be termed my overt or literary goals, for they describe what the course will cover in terms of content. On the other hand, I have another set of goals that I allow to remain implicit; these concern the communications skills that will be developed. I believe strongly that any good liberal arts course ought to strengthen a student's ability to think critically and solve intellectual problems. Thus, I expect students a) to learn how these literary works are part of the cultural contexts of the seventeenth century; b) to learn to read these texts critically—that is, to detect basic literary structures in the works they read and so to reinforce basic principles of communication; c) to develop or hone research skills; and d) to become better writers.

#### ***D. Syllabus and Other Course Materials.***

See [Syllabus](#). I use textbooks from the Norton Critical Editions series, which contain both literary texts, background material, and critical essays. I assign some readings to all students and use others as ancillary resources for a few. The critical essays provide a common background for discussions, papers, and test preparation.

*John Donne's Poetry*. Arthur L. Clements, ed. 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1992).

*The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*. Susanne Woods, ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).

*George Herbert and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Poets*. Mario Di Cesare, ed. (New York: Norton, 1978).

*Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets*, Hugh MacLean, ed. (New York: Norton, 1974).

I also use a class website to warehouse student papers that can be used to study for exams or as models for interpretive strategies.

### III. Teaching Methods

My course remains, to some extent, coverage-centered, because it focuses on a few key figures in this period of literary history (though fewer than previously). When I first began teaching this course, I tried to teach it as if every student needed to know all of the nuances of this literary history (as if all were headed to graduate school); consequently, I taught more writers and tried to force feed as many poems as possible. The course was popular among some students because of the literature we read, but it was daunting for those who weren't headed to graduate school or those who didn't want to struggle with so many of these "ancient" literary works. My lectures typically focused on readings of selected, representative poems, which helped them to "see" what was contained within the poems. I was the professor with the key to the knowledge of the period.

I have shifted (or am in process of shifting) towards a more student learning-centered course, both in terms of teaching methods and course content. Over the years I have decreased the amount of material assigned and the number of authors studied. Instead, I have given more time to authors that students typically enjoy more, so that in terms of content my course is truly an introduction instead of a comprehensive survey.

#### ***A. Discussion of In-Class Activities.***

I try to make students more responsible for teaching and thus for their own learning. Typically, about half of our weekly class time is spent in a "question and answer" format, whereby I try to ask questions of my students to drive them towards a conventional, pre-determined "content" I want to cover. This method "models" the reading strategies I am trying to teach; that is, by showing them how I read and understand complicated literary works, I teach them how to do so. While my discussion questions are really designed to move us to a designated point, I do try to adapt what students say to increase their sense of participation in the learning process. Still, I am always trying to "cover" certain portions of the whole each class so that my exams are "fair" and basic materials are covered. The other half of class is given over to the students, who deliver oral response papers in class (usually about five minutes long) on a given literary work and are responsible for answering questions about it (usually for about ten minutes). Students seem to take this responsibility seriously enough to do some background readings and meet with me (usually for about 30-45 minutes in my office). These papers are also posted on a class website, as discussed below.

I also use "minute" papers, or short in-class writing assignments, to assess how well students are assimilating material. Several days after I have covered a concept, I will ask students at the beginning of the hour to take a minute to define and illustrate the concept. This ungraded assignment plays an important diagnostic role and helps to emphasize important concepts. For example, in the class period following a discussion of the concept of "creative imitation" in the Renaissance, I asked students to define and illustrate the term in a few minutes, a task only a few of whom could do satisfactorily. However, knowing that the concept was important meant that they paid careful attention when I discussed its appearance in other works or authors; and on the

midterm exam, many were able to incorporate this concept into works they had not seen before (demonstrating higher order cognitive skills). I also use these “minute” papers to gauge how well students are learning to read new poems for themselves. These short, in-class papers also reinforce the need to come to class prepared.

### **B. Examinations.**

I also assess student learning through essay exams. See [sample exam](#). The questions are of three types. 1) Some are relatively straightforward definitions of basic terms from lectures, such as the first short answer question (75 words) that asks for a definition and example of a key term (“metaphysical conceit”) or the fourth that asks for simple factual information. 2) A second kind of question involves analysis of passages covered thoroughly in class, which are designed to assess how well students can read critically. I give them a passage or an entire poem, and ask for a short essay (75 words) that identifies the author and discusses features of the author’s style, as in short answer two, three, five and six. This kind of question tests whether students understand class lectures and discussion. 3) A third kind involves higher order analysis that demonstrates whether they are developing critical thinking skills. I give them a poem we have not discussed fully and ask them to discuss the author’s chief characteristics by discussing this new poem, e.g., the long essay question in Part II of the sample exam). This shows whether they can think independently and apply principles to new material.

### **C. Writing Assignments.**

I require students to write two papers: the first is a written response (500-750 words) to one of the readings that they also present **orally**. These responses are used to generate class discussion, so most find it necessary to do some research to help in their understanding of the poem. On the day they are scheduled, they read their paper aloud. Since these papers are too short to support the discussion of more than a single, focused, and well-conceived argument, they are instructed to concentrate on a specific topic or issue. Most focus on the structure of the poem by explicating its “metaphysical conceit” or extended metaphor, particularly for Donne’s *Songs and Sonnets*, Herbert’s *Temple* or Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans*. (That is, they analyze the poem to determine its central conceit and then write a short paper arguing how this conceit organizes and explains the poem’s meaning). They are obliged to post their papers on the class website at <http://www.turnitin.com>. I have found that students will consult the papers of others, when particularly insightful comments have been made in class or when they are confused about a poem’s meaning. This assignment has made class more interactive for many students.

Students who sign up for an oral response in the first half of the semester may revise their papers for a higher grade.

The second paper (2500 words minimum) is a **research paper** analyzing a poem or series of poems by one of the writers we are studying. This paper requires significant research: they must consult **at least ten sources** and list them on works cited page. They are free to choose a topic,

though it must be approved by turning in a one-page **prospectus with annotated bibliography** that is due several weeks before the paper is due. This prospectus constitutes an agreement between us about what the paper will cover and what sources will be used. Students must turn in at least one rough draft of the research paper, outlines and copies of articles used, as well as an electronic version of the paper (as an e-mail attachment). Papers are routinely screened using the resources of <http://www.turnitin.com>. This web resource not only guards against academic dishonesty, but it also helps educate students about what constitutes academic dishonesty and so helps guide them towards more responsible behavior.

## IV. Analysis of Student Learning

### A. *In-Class Activities: “Minute papers”*

Evaluating in-class activities is difficult, since so much of what happens in the classroom occurs spontaneously in response to their questions and to our discussion of literary texts. Since I hope that my students learn both basic concepts and basic reading skills and then are able to transfer those skills to new works (higher order analysis that demonstrates the development of critical thinking skills), I gave some “minute paper” assignments that tested whether they were mastering basic concepts. What I found was that a number of students had no idea how to define a basic concept, though some could offer a reasonable example. [“Creative imitation,” as I define it, is a central principle of Renaissance aesthetics: it describes how artists respond to literary tradition by imitating but transforming what they receive.] As one can see from the examples, there was significant variance; in fact, only about twenty percent of the class had very good answers. Of greater interest to me was the response in class once their weaknesses had been demonstrated. I was asked several different times to redefine the concept. As will be discussed below, a number of the students could transfer this knowledge to new situations, thus demonstrating higher order thinking skills. Of course, my in-class “minute paper” also had the effect of emphasizing an important concept in a meaningful and dramatic way for those with shortcomings.

In response to the question, “Define the idea of “creative imitation” in the Renaissance using a brief example,” about one month into the semester and after it had been discussed in class several times, students wrote:

1. **(very good definition; very good example):** Creative imitation is taking some poetic trope that’s already been used and recreating it in a new light—e.g., the idea of faith being marriage to Christ the bridegroom in “Batter My Heart” is transformed into holy rape.
2. **(very good definition; very good example):** Donne often adopts Petrarchanisms to some extent (i.e., he imitates Petrarch, or other poets such as Ovid for that matter), but changes the Petrarchan trope for a new purpose that is unconventional and/or shocking. That is, he changes it “creatively.” An example of this is “The Canonization” where Donne makes the extraordinary quality of the lovers’ sexuality that reason they are canonized for love.
3. **(good definition; very good example):** Creative imitation is when an author mimics a form of writing but does so in a way that makes it his own. For example, most of Donne’s poems are anti-Petrarchan. He makes them his own by mimicking and transforming Petrarch but by not slavishly copying him.
4. **(good definition; good example):** Creative imitation—using old ideas and using wit to make it new, as in the sighs and tears of “Valediction: Of Weeping.”

**5. (weak definition; good example):** Creative imitation is a poetic style that Donne uses to engage the reader in his thought process. An example would be the last line of “Batter my heart” in which Donne says “Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.” A “holy rape” as such is an example of creative imitation.

**6. (weak definition; weak example):** Creative imitation is when you take a certain style and just change it a bit. An example would be Holy Sonnet V, or Elegy: The Comparison.”

**7. (weak definition; weak example):** Creative Imitation: a writing technique where a writer uses a different situation to describe another. I would say that a Donne uses this technique in Holy Sonnet XIV.

The first two responses define the concept clearly enough, especially the idea of creative transformation, and offer good examples, especially number 2. The middle three responses (numbers 3, 4 and 5) define the concept less clearly but offer telling examples. The final two responses can offer only vague definitions and not wholly appropriate examples. On balance these responses indicated to me that I needed to spend more time with this concept, but students took more responsibility for their own learning by asking repeatedly about the concept. The result of some of the exams below show the results.

## ***B. Examinations***

In response to a longer essay question on the major poet we considered before midterm, students wrote about the distinctive style of John Donne. One goal of the exam was to test how well students could think independently and apply principles to new material. I give them a poem we have not discussed fully and ask them to illustrate the author’s distinctive literary characteristics by discussing this poem.

While not all the students could make this transference, a number of them could. What is especially interesting to me is the intellectual development shown by students 3, 4, and 5, all of whom had middling responses to the “minute paper” on creative imitation, but who had learned the concept and could apply it precisely for the examination. This demonstrates real progress on their part and good evidence that emphasizing student learning can work.

\*\*\*\*\*

Essay Prompt: Using “The Apparition” as a point of reference [ext of the poem was supplied], write a developed essay (350 words at least) **defining Donne’s distinctive characteristics as a poet**. Use details from the poem to illustrate Donne’s characteristics; **but your essay should focus on what makes Donne so distinctive. [40 points]**

**Student 3 (from above).** Donne may be characterized as a witty poet. His wit along

with other distinctive characteristics sets him apart from other writers of his time. While other writers had written on women's virtue and beauty, Donne in his poetry did not see women this way. With the exception of a few poems, Donne showed women as "loose" and unloyal, while society of this time claimed women were dedicated to one man. Donne takes this view of women in many of his poems. He explores women's unfaithfulness and his own desires to be with many women. This view of the inconstancy of love and gruesomeness of love are distinctly Donne's own. Donne's poems usually are anti-Petrarchan in nature. They do not "idealize" or "idolize" women. This is true in the poem "The Apparition," in which Donne has been "killed" by a woman's scorn. He does not put this woman on a pedestal and beg for her love, rather he calls her a "feigned vestal" and shows her as unpure. Instead of hoping to someday be loved in return by her, he had rather have revenge on her.

He describes her in bed with another man and continues to explore her unfaithfulness and lack of virtue. While the idea of death by woman's scorn can be Petrarchan in nature, it is the twist Donne puts on it that transforms a Petrarchan idea into Donne's own. Donne's use of **creative imitation** comes into play in many of his poems. By taking another's ideas and changing it, Donne created many imitations of older works. His imitations brought forth new ideas on old topics. So while Donne is talking about dying because of a woman's rejecting him, he also is poking fun at the idea of a woman not getting away with doing such a thing. Finally, Donne is known best for his metaphysical conceits. Donne was famous for comparing two seemingly unlike things to one another. In "The Apparition" it is apparent that Donne is comparing himself to a ghost. He gives himself ghost-like characteristics and actions by "haunting" the woman and her new lover.

Donne's metaphysical conceits are found in many of his poems, and truly distinguish him as distinctive. While Donne is known for "writing best when there is little truth involved," he still created poems that challenged the imagination of the reader. By being different and challenging norms of his time, Donne was able to set himself apart from the rest and find a style all his own.

***My comments:** What you say about the poem and Donne's creative imitation of Petrarchan ideals is good, but you should also mention Donne's other distinctive stylistic features: such as his use of dramatic setting, his reliance on a non-poetic diction to achieve a more casual kind of speaking voice, and his irreverence in general as he shocked his audience. See the Redpath essay for a thorough treatment of Donne's style.*

**Grade: 35/40.**

**Student 4 (from above).** When Donne came along, he greatly differed from other poets

before him. At the time, everyone was writing love sonnets, but when Donne came along, he went against the norm with his own style of love poem. Donne is clearly anti-Petrarchan. This can be seen in just about every poem he wrote. Petrarchan poems idolized the woman and idealized love. Often, Petrarch suffered from unrequited love in his poems. Donne went against this norm of the time, and instead was a follower of Ovid. Donne **creatively imitated** Ovid in that while he imitated the basic form of his poems, he put his own creativity to it. “The Apparition” is an example of Donne’s creativity and remarkable wit, as well as of his anti-Petrarchanism. For example, in most Petrarchan poems, when he is scorned by a woman, the sonneteer is despondent over it and pities himself. We see this in the poem above [refers to Petrarch’s Sonnet 3] when he says “whence woe to me.” Donne comes nowhere near this idea; he instead says that since the woman killed him with her scorn, he will haunt her. Donne does not sit around and mourn; he gets even.

Another distinctive characteristic is his use of extended metaphor. A conceit is an extended metaphor. Metaphysical conceits represents the use of two very dissimilar things to make a comparison. The metaphysical conceit is like a trademark of Donne’s. His use of such violently different comparisons sets him apart from the others.

I also find that the way Donne uses sex to represent death sometimes is strikingly distinctive. An example of this is in “The Damp.” This is just another example of Donne’s ability to make a dissimilar comparison.

Donne also uses other techniques in his poems that distinguishes him from Petrarch and others. One such is memento mori. Although Shakespeare also uses this in “Hamlet,” it still contributes to Donne’s distinctive characteristic as a poet.

There are many things that set Donne apart from the rest. But I believe that it can be concluded that it is his ability to pun and make metaphysical conceits, the ingenious pun and make metaphysical conceits, the ingeniousness of his poems, his anti-Petrarchan attitude, and his great wit that make him so distinctive.

*My comments: What you have here is good, just not complete. You could also mention how his wit ties into his use of creative imitation. What you say about the poem itself is good—especially Donne’s practice of creative imitation of Petrarchan ideals, but you should also generalize more about his use of dramatic setting and reliance on a non-poetic diction to achieve a more casual kind of speaking voice, his gritty realism and general irreverence in general as he shocked his audience. See the Redpath essay for a thorough treatment of Donne’s style.*

**Grade: 35/40.**

**Student 5 (from above).** Jonson said, “For want of being understood, Donne will be forgotten.” Certainly John Donne’s poetry is difficult to grasp upon initial reading; however, through his distinctive style, John Donne enthralls the reader by his metaphysical conceits, creative imitation, and breaking of the mold.

A metaphysical conceit is an extended comparison of two very unlike entities. John Donne is best known for his outrageous yoking of things that jolt the reader into a different state of mind. For example, in Donne’s “The Apparition” the conceit is that after the woman kills Donne with her scorn, he will come to her as a ghost and cause her husband (or lover) to think that she is called for more sexual engagements. The speaker will haunt his mistress—preventing her rest. An extreme example is that in one of Donne’s famous poems, “The Flea” in which he compares the bite of a flea to their marriage bed and says that his woman’s unwillingness to lie with him causes three deaths. Likewise in “The Sun Rising,” Donne compares the lover’s bed to the center of the universe—the sun. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of Donne is by far his use of extended conceits causing the reader to appreciate his originality.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Donne is **his use of creative imitation**. Creative imitation is a literary tool made famous in the Renaissance era in which the writer imitates a style or theme of another, creatively, using his rules of literary decorum. One instance occurs in one of his holy sonnets referred to as “Since she whom,” in which Donne takes the Petrarchan idea of idealized love and transforms it into a secular love. He often refers to God as a lover, merging the two ideas together. Therefore creative imitation becomes a tool that tactfully imitates the authorship of another with an original twist that makes it one’s own. In “The Apparition” Donne uses this tool by pushing the idea of “dying for love” as far as it can go by having the scorned lover vow to haunt the living forever. Though Donne is not the only practitioner of **creative imitation**, he certainly makes great use of this stylistic feature.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Donne is his “breaking the mold.” In his time, the sonnets were a craze in England. Everyone, nearly, began writing sonnets following the style of Petrarch and Sidney. However, Donne rejected the Petrarchan ideals and set a new course for literature. His intellectual genius dripped from every manuscript that he wrote. The very idea of changing the status quo was taboo itself; however, Donne, using his extreme style, brought new light into the literary world.

John Donne certainly broke literary molds, but it was his distinctive style and use of extended conceits, imitation, and new ideas that makes him a case for scholarly study. Donne’s contribution to the literary world is steadily being discovered and is forever seen in that of his pupils, successors, and the style that is all his own.

***My comments:** Excellent essay, well developed. You could also mention his use of dramatic setting and reliance on a non-poetic diction to achieve a more casual kind of speaking voice. See the Redpath essay for a*

*thorough treatment of Donne's style.*

**Grade: 38/40.**

All three of these students were able to demonstrate mastery of the concept and could recognize its application, unprompted, in a new work.

### **C. Writing Assignments**

Students who delivered oral responses in the first half of the semester could revise their papers, and the higher of the two grades is counted. Twenty-four students wrote papers before midterm; of these six received A's. But of the eighteen who could have revised their papers only seven chose to do so. As I suspected when I began this practice, some students will improve substantially when given the chance to revise and re-submit. That is, some students respond very well when they get feedback and have a chance to show their improved understanding. However, others made very little effort to improve their papers other than correcting the mechanical errors I had identified. Four of the seven turned in virtually the same paper with only minor corrections. Three papers had marked improvement: substantially more accurate analyses of the poems, clearer focus on the poem's central conceit, and more cogent analysis of how this conceit organizes and explains the poem's meaning. On balance these three students raised their scores one full letter grade.

Included below is a set of papers for a student in both the original and revised versions [See Original](#) and [see Revised](#), along with my final comments. In the margins of the original I used proof readers marks to indicate a spelling or punctuation error (without correcting it) or where a passage was awkward and needed revision.

## **V. Reflection and Assessment**

### ***A. Results of Changes in Class Activities:***

I have tried to transform what was at one time a coverage-centered course into one in which the class was more interactive for my students, who were made more responsible for their own learning. By having to perform orally in class and post their results on the web, students were obliged to make more significant contributions to the class. By giving “minute papers” as in-class diagnostics, I was able to help detect my deficiencies (and theirs). By having two “research” assignments, students had greater opportunities to hone their research skills. By encouraging students to revise and re-submit one of these assignments for a chance at improving their grades, I gave feedback and offered a reward for them to show their improved understanding. I was also very gratified by the number of students who sought my help in researching their first papers and grappling with the nuances of their assigned poems. Nearly every student spent at least forty-five minute or longer with me in an office visit.

I believe my changes to English 315 are helping me meet my goals of providing an introduction to the literature and literary history of the seventeenth century and of improving the reading and writing skills of my students.

### ***B. Future Changes in Class Activities***

Having given up control of about half of regular class time to student activities, I intend to give these changes more time before attempting further innovations. Not all of our class time was productive in my estimation, but it seemed difficult to change tack once we had set out on this course (and potentially disruptive to the atmosphere of trust already established). In future semesters I may have students write the short paper, post it on the class website, but not read it in class. Instead the student could serve as the “resource” for the particular poem on the assigned day. This would allow me more leeway in directing the inquiry. I found it difficult at times to respond quickly to a line of reasoning that was headed in a very different direction from the norm. Still, I hope to preserve what I believe was a higher degree of enthusiasm for English 315 this semester (Spring 2004). When students are engaged, I find they learn despite whatever preconceptions about this “ancient” literature they may have entertained before setting foot in my classroom.

**Syllabus**  
**ENGLISH 315.500 SPRING 2004**  
**SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY NON-DRAMATIC**

**LITERATURE**

Prof. Donald Dickson (d-dickson@tamu.edu)  
237 Blocker (5-8340)

Hours: MWF 10:30-11:30  
& by appointment

**AIMS:**

This course will explore some of the major writers of the early modern period, beginning with the greatest lyric poet of the age, John Donne, who charted a new direction by turning the Petrarchan tradition upside down. We will then read from a long religious poem by a woman writer, Aemilia Lanyer and the religious poetry of George Herbert. After midterm, we will focus on a key event, the English Civil War and Interregnum (1642-1660), by examining the effects of war through a poet in "meditative retreat" (i.e., Henry Vaughan) and through the Cavalier poets.

**TEXTS:**

*John Donne's Poetry*. Arthur L. Clements, ed. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Norton, 1992).  
*The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*. Susanne Woods, ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).  
*George Herbert and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Poets*. Mario Di Cesare, ed. (New York: Norton, 1978).  
*Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets*, Hugh MacLean, ed. (New York: Norton, 1974).

**REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Attend class and participate actively. You will not be penalized (on participation) for comments "off the mark," but you will be penalized for not participating--and you can't contribute if you are not in class. I take roll daily.
2. If necessary, read background material to help you develop a sense of the historical, cultural, and literary context for the works we will read. See the bibliographic note below for suggestions.
3. Ask questions freely in class about what interests you or about what requires further clarification. The exams will test your ability to discuss the works we read at least on the level of sophistication we achieve in class discussion.

**GRADES:**

oral response paper (500 words)	10%	
midterm exam	20%	27 February
prospectus & bibliography		7 April
research paper (2500 words)	30%	3 May
final exam (comprehensive)	30%	10 May 10, 8-10 a.m.
class participation	10%	

**PAPERS:**

You will have two papers: the first will be a written response (500-750 words) to one of the readings that you will also present **orally**. Your paper should be typed and titled appropriately. These responses will be used to generate class discussion, so you will find it necessary to do some research to help you with your understanding of the poem. On the day you are scheduled, you will read your paper aloud. Since these papers are too short to support the discussion of more than a single, focused, and well-conceived argument, you should concentrate on a specific topic or issue. Or you may find it useful to examine the structure of the poem by explicating its “metaphysical conceit” or extended metaphor, particularly for Donne’s *Songs and Sonnets*, Herbert’s *Temple* or Vaughan’s *Silex Scintillans*. (That is, you will analyze the poem to determine its central conceit and then write a short paper arguing how this conceit organizes and explains the poem’s meaning). You will turn in your paper after class that day for evaluation.

The other paper (2500 words minimum) will be a **research paper** analyzing a poem or series of poems by one of the writers we are studying. Writing a research paper means that you do much the same thing as with the first paper (i.e., formulate a topic, study various aspects of the work), but then you supplement your ideas with the wisdom of others. This paper requires significant research: you must consult **at least ten sources** and list them among your works cited--though you need not quote from them all. You should use the MLA format for citations. You are free to choose a topic, though it must be approved by turning in a one-page **prospectus with annotated bibliography** that is due on 9 April (in class). This prospectus constitutes an agreement between us about what your paper will cover and what sources you will use. Late papers will not be accepted without prior approval. The research paper is due (in class) on 3 May.

You must also turn in at least one rough draft of your research paper, your outline and copies of articles used, as well as an electronic version of your paper (as an e-mail attachment). Papers will be routinely screened using the resources of [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com).

**DISABILITIES:**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation, please contact the Office of Support Services for Students with Disabilities in room 216 of the Koldus Building. The phone number is 845-1637.

**BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE:**

The three volumes of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (vols. 121, 126 & 131) of the *Seventeenth-Century British Nondramatic Poets*, ed. M. Thomas Hester (Gale, 1992-1993), offer very good introductions. Some basic studies include Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (Scribner's, 1965, 1971), Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Scribner's, 1971), and David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage & Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997). Other good introductions include: C. A. Patrides and R. Waddington, *The Age of Milton: Backgrounds to Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Manchester UP, 1980); Graham Parry, *The Seventeenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature* (Longman, 1989) and George Parfitt, *English Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (Longman, 1985). At the Evans Library web-site, you can access the MLA Bibliography on-line for the latest bibliographies: <http://library.tamu.edu/resources/>. In the box, "Find E-Resource" enter MLA.

**READING SCHEDULE:**

January 19. Introduction. Elizabethan sonnets

January 26. John Donne, *Elegies* (49-63); and *Satire III*.

**[also read the critical essays on pp. 139-47]**

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ ("The Anagram")

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ ("The Comparison")

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ ("Mistress going to bed")

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ ("Satire III")

February 2. Donne, *Songs and Sonnets*. Read all of pages 3-48, but esp. 3-4, 6, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14, 23-24, 24-25, 25, 26, 30, 31-32, 32-34, 37-38, 40, 41 **[also read the critical essays on pp. 179-227]**

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ ("The Apparition")

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ ("The Damp ")

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ ("The Sun Rising")

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ ("Valediction...Weeping")

February 9. Donne, *Songs and Sonnets* (cont.); *Holy Sonnets*: 109-120.

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Air and Angels”)

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Love’s Alchemy”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Valediction ...Mourning”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Canonization”)

February 16. divine poems: 120-29 **[also read the critical essays on pp. 283-301]**

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Sonnet: Since she whom”)

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Sonnet: Batter my heart”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Good Friday”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Hymn: ... my  
Sickness”)

February 23. Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*: read xv-xxxix, 62-84, 84-107.

**MIDTERM: Friday, 27 February.**

March 1. George Herbert, *The Temple*: read all of 4-70, but esp. pp. 4, 16-17, 20-21, 24-26, 27, 29, 30, 39, 42-43, 49-50, 53-56, 59-60, 63-64, 69. **[also the critical essays on pp. 255-70]**

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Easter-Wings”)

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Affliction I”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Jordan I & II”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Church Monuments”)

March 8. Herbert (cont.)

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Bunch of Grapes”)

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Love III”)

March 22. Henry Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans*: Read all of *GH&SRP* 139-65, esp. 139-44, 147-51, 155-56, 161-62. **[also the critical essays on pp. 343-53]**

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Vanity of Spirit”)

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Search”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Retreat”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Morning Watch”)

March 29. Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans*: 165-80, esp. pp. 166-69, 173-74, 176-79. **[also the critical essays on pp. 354-64]**

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Night”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Water-fall”)

April 5. Andrew Marvell. Read all of *GH&SRP* 93-127, esp. 95-96, 99-100, 104-5, 105-6, 107-11, 112-14, and 117-37.

**Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography due: 7 April.**

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Bermudas”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“The Garden”)

April 12. Ben Jonson. Read *BJ&CP* 5-41, 59-79, 85-89.  
**[also read the critical essays on pp. 465-79].**

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“To Penshurst”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“To ... Shakespeare”)

April 19. Robert Herrick. Read *BJ&CP* 104-55.

**Wednesday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“To the Virgins”)

**Friday: Oral Response** \_\_\_\_\_ (“Corinna’s Going A-Maying”)

April 26. Read Carew, Waller, Suckling, Lovelace in *BJ&CP* 157-75, 232-46, 253-72, 306-25.

May 3. Review. **research paper due in class**

**ENGLISH 315 -- MIDTERM EXAM**  
**Spring 2004**

**Part I.** Write short answers (75-100 words each) on **three** of the following. Identify the author and explain the conceit significance of these lines to demonstrate that you understand their significance. Any good essay (even a short essay on an exam) has a central point with evidence supporting it. **[twenty points each]**

1. metaphysical conceit (with example). Explain why Donne uses them.

2. It was on that day when the sun darkened, as God  
Himself vanished into death, when I was taken.  
I took myself in, Madam, bound by your looking at me.

It did not seem to me to a fit time to take shelter  
Against the stroke of Love; therefore I walked on,  
Without suspicion, vulnerable—whence woe to me  
Begins in our common sorrow.

Love found me altogether unarmed,  
My eyes, my heart's gates, opened by tears  
To give free passage toward the heart.

It was dishonorable of him to take me  
Unawares in my pity;  
Not to have tried his weapon on your armor.

3. My Lady's hair is threads of beaten gold,  
Her front the purest Chrystal eye hath seen:  
Her eyes the brightest stars the heavens hold,  
Her cheeks red roses such as seld have been:  
Her pretty lips of red vermilion dye,  
Her hands of ivory the purest white:  
Her blush Aurora, or the morning sky,  
Her breast displays two silver fountains bright,  
The Spheres her voice, her grace the Graces three,  
Her body is the Saint that I adore,  
Her smiles and favors sweet as honey be,  
Her feet fair Thetis praiseth evermore.  
But ah the worst and last is yet behind,  
For of a Gryphon she doth bear the mind.

4. Community of good women/Daughters of Jerusalem

5. ....

Call's what you will, we are made such by love ; Call her one, me another fly, We're  
tapers too, and at our own cost die, And we in us find th' eagle and the dove. The

phoenix riddle hath more wit By us ; we two being one, are it ;So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit. We die and rise the same, and prove Mysterious by this love. ...

- 6 . Batten my heart, three-person'd God ; for youAs yet but knock ; breathe, shine, and seek to mend ;That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bendYour force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,But am betroth'd unto your enemy ;Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,Take me to you, imprison me, for I,Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

**Part II:** Using "The Apparition" as a point of reference , write a developed essay (350 words at least) **defining Donne's distinctive characteristics as a poet.** Use details from the poem to illustrate Donne's characteristics; **but your essay should focus on what makes Donne so distinctive.** [40 points]

When by thy scorn, O murtheress, I am dead,  
And that thou think'st thee free  
From all solicitation from me,  
Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,  
And thee, feigned vestal, in worse arms shall see;  
Then thy sick taper will begin to wink,  
And he, whose thou art then, being tired before,  
Will, if thou stir, or pinch to wake him, think  
    Thou call'st for more,  
And in false sleep will from thee shrink,  
And then poor aspen wretch, neglected thou  
Bathed in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lie  
    A verier ghost than I;  
What I will say, I will not tell thee now,  
Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,  
I had rather thou should'st painfully repent,  
Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.

## Anti-Petrarchan Elements within Donne's "The Apparition"

Though recognized for his vague and sometimes difficult to comprehend style, Donne has preserved in history as one of the most famed and adored poets of all time. Donne, as we have mentioned time and again, utilizes anti-Petrarchan sentiment throughout most of his poetry, and undoubtedly entertains with incomparable wit. There exists no better exemplification of this than in "The Apparition".

Most scholars will attest that in "The Apparition" Donne again embraces the old motif of dying for love, but in his signature anti-Petrarchan style, twists and tortures it leaving an eerie shadow lingering amidst the poem. The speaker of "The Apparition" is a ghostly figure that is "reborn precisely because he died for love"(Watson, 158-159). Although poems addressing the harshness of rejection were by no means new, even in Donne's era, most conclude with the lover begging for affection from that unattainable being. However, it is Donne's style to evade the norm and instead gloats in the fact that he will be able to torment his mistress from beyond the grave when she is "a verier ghost than [he]", being imprisoned by either his haunting, or simply the haunting of his memory for so long.

In addition, though utilizing the Petrarchan element of dying for one's love, Donne adopts a highly melancholy tone as in the first line, for instance, he is slain by her scorn. He inverts the idea of begging, and by that begging dying. Instead, the speaker seems as though he is murdered by her cruelty.

Donne also establishes the inadequacy of the mistress as well as her new lover both emotionally and sexually. In Petrarchan poems, the speaker views the unattainable lover as an ethereal being that is above him or her. This proves not to be the case in Donne's poem as he obviously sees this woman as inferior, claiming her to be a "fained vestal" and "poor Aspen wretch". He then turns on the new lover accusing that if she "pinch to wake him, [he would] think [she] called for more, and in false sleep will from [her] shrink". Not only does Donne depict the mistress's new lover as sexually inept, but suggests that he is unwilling to be bothered by her troubles. Again Donne crosses the so-called Petrarchan standard of love poetry.

In the concluding lines of "The Apparition", Donne yet again inverts the traditional "rejected lover" poem as he introduces an element of irony. He claims that his "love is spent" and that he would "rather [she] shouldst painfully repent than by [his] threatening rest still innocent". If this were truly the case, then he would not waste his time bothering her in ensuring that she and her new lover remained disturbed by his presence for the duration of their relationship. Instead, he has spent his time pondering over her and that very affection that he claims does not exist.

When used in conjunction with his wit and expertise of the English language, Donne's anti-Petrarchan style is able to shed new light on the amorous relationships of men and women, and no where is this style better displayed than in "The Apparition". In shedding this new light, Donne has endured as one of history's legacies in poetry.

## Works Cited:

Watson, Robert N. **The Rest Is Silence : Death As Annihilation in the English Renaissance.** Berkeley, Calif. University of California Press, 1999.

**Comments: While you do have a grasp of the main action of the poem, you don't focus clearly enough on Donne's strategy. What is the conceit here that shapes the whole? You also make some careless mistakes in punctuation and spelling. Grade: B-**

## Anti-Petrarchan Elements within Donne's "The Apparition"

(revised March 22, 2004)

Though recognized for his vague and sometimes difficult to comprehend style, Donne has preserved in history as one of the most famed and adored poets of all time. Donne, as we have mentioned time and again, utilizes anti-Petrarchan sentiment throughout most of his poetry, and undoubtedly entertains with incomparable wit. There exists no better exemplification of this than in "The Apparition," which A. J. Smith rightly calls a "hate poem of the very first class" (Smith 127).

Most scholars will attest that in "The Apparition" Donne again embraces the old motif of dying for love, but in his signature anti-Petrarchan style, twists and tortures it leaving an eerie shadow lingering amidst the poem. As Gosse states, "This is the culmination of the incident, the flames of hatred now quickly subsiding into a heap of the ashes of indifference and satiety" (Smith 127). The speaker of "The Apparition" is a ghostly figure that is "reborn precisely because he died for love" (Watson 158-159). Although poems addressing the harshness of rejection were by no means new, even in Donne's era, most conclude with the lover begging for affection from that unattainable being. However, it is Donne's style to evade the norm and instead to gloat in the fact that he will be able to torment his mistress from beyond the grave when she is "a verier ghost than [he]", being imprisoned by either his haunting, or simply the haunting of his memory for so long.

In addition, though utilizing the Petrarchan element of dying for one's love, Donne adopts a highly melancholy tone as in the first line, for instance, when he is slain

by her scorn. He inverts the idea of begging, and by that begging dying. Instead, the speaker seems as though he is murdered by her cruelty. In “The Apparition” the speaker “tosses between sleep and waking, the horror of his situation, the vileness of the woman he has loved, and whole squalor of the outworn liaison come upon him and overwhelm him” (Smith 127).

Donne also establishes the inadequacy of the mistress as well as her new lover both emotionally and sexually. While those such as Gosse have supposed that this woman depicted in the “The Apparition” is the same married woman that appears in some of Donne’s Elegies, other such as Leishman believe that this mistress is “to be sought for partly in Ovid’s *Amores* and partly Donne’s dramatic imagination” (Leishman 159). In Petrarchan Poems, the speaker views the unattainable lover as an ethereal being that is above him or her. This proves not to be the case in Donne’s poem as he obviously sees this woman as inferior, claiming her to be a “feigned vestal” and “poor aspen wretch”. He then turns on the new lover accusing that if she “pinch to wake him, [he would] think [she] called for more, and in false sleep will from [her] shrink”. Not only does Donne depict the mistress’ new lover as sexually inept, but suggests that he is unwilling to be bothered by her troubles. Again Donne crosses the so-called Petrarchan standard of love poetry.

In the concluding lines of “the Apparition” Donne yet again inverts the traditional “rejected lover” poem as he introduces an element of irony. He claims that his “love is spent” and that he would “rather [she] shouldst painfully repent than by [his] threatening rest still innocent”. If this were truly the case, then he would not waste his time bothering her in the duration of their relationship. Instead, he has spent his time pondering over her

and that very affection that he claims does not exist. If Donne's poem is to be read as though he is dead, as Le Comte argues, will he then spend eternity pondering over this lost love?

When used in conjunction with his wit and expertise of the English language, Donne's anti-Petrarchan style is able to shed new light on the amorous relationships of men and women, and nowhere is this style better displayed than in "The Apparition". While some scholars will argue that Donne is not making a satire of the Petrarchan cliché of dying from one's scorn, he is obviously, in the words of Ezra Pound, "Making It New."

#### Works Cited:

Le Comte, Edward. *Grace To a Witty Sinner: A Life of Donne*. New York: Walker, 1962.

Leishman, J. B. *The Monarch of Wit: A Critical and Analytical Study of the Poetry of John Donne*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Hutchinson, 1962.

Smith, A. J., ed. *John Donne: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge, 1975.

Watson, Robert N. *The Rest Is Silence : Death As Annihilation in the English Renaissance*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

**Comments** You show much more clearly what the conceit of this poem is. Donne is exposing the absurdities of the Petrarchan idea of "dying for love" (much as Shakespeare does in *As You Like It*). Donne dramatically creates a setting in which to stage his revenge by accepting the stale Petrarchan notion that she has slain him with her indifference/rejection. Your paper also shows evidence of how much you have benefited from the scholarship of others. And you've cleaned up the grammatical and punctuation errors. Good job.  
**Grade: A-**