

Form and Theory of Poetry

English 4953/6953, R. West
Spring 2020, MWF 9:00-9:50

The course will offer an advanced introduction to prosody—that is, the nuts and bolts of versification—and figurative language. You’ll learn a considerable amount of terminology, but I’m at least as concerned with helping you to recognize on your own the features that such terminology describes. For example, you’ll learn how to explain the difference between blank verse and free verse, but you’ll also learn to *hear* that difference. (You’ll also learn about the history of both.) The course should give you a sharper appreciation of poetic craft in general, and it should also help you feel better prepared to write and speak about the relationship between what we often call “form” and “content.”

We’ll make good use of the many poems available at no cost from three reputable, well-edited websites: poetryfoundation.org, poets.org, and poetryarchive.org. After examining work from the sixteenth century to the present, we’ll turn to focusing on three books by recent poets adept at the techniques we’ll have studied.

REQUIREMENTS:

Regular attendance, reading as scheduled, constructive participation in discussion, two papers, and three exams.

BOOKS:

Ciaran Carson, *From There to Here: Selected Poems and Translations*

Robert Morgan, *Dark Energy*

Natasha Trethewey, *Monument: Poems New and Selected*

Optional: Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem*