

Midterm Recitation Project (It's fun — *I promise*)

For this assignment, you will choose a poem and spend the next 2 weeks getting to know it intimately. I will ask you to commune with the poem on three different levels, using the skills we have learned thus far in class. We will also add a new component to your experience of a piece of literature, which is that of *performance* — including memorization, practice, and oral delivery. Don't worry; even if you are naturally shy or introverted, you can become great at this. As a final product, you will recite and record the poem of your choice, submit it on the Recited Verse website, and then compose a written reflection of the whole experience. The steps are outlined on the next page.



First, take some time to consider your options. Choose a poem from the list below. You may have always wanted to learn more about a particular Romantic poet, or perhaps something about the way the poem sounds has hooked you in:

Dorothy Wordsworth, “Thoughts on My Sickbed”
Phyllis Wheatley, “On Imagination”
Felicia Hemans, “Casabianca”
Letitia Elizabeth Landon, “Sappho’s Song”
Anna Letitia Barbauld, “The Mouse’s Petition”
William Blake, “The Chimney Sweeper”
Charlotte Smith, Sonnets I, II, or III from *Elegiac Sonnets*
John Keats, “When I Have Fears That I May Cease To Be”
Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Ozymandias”

Some poems are longer and plot-driven (narrative ballads). Some are shorter but more emotionally intense (lyrics). Some have a clear and specific speaker. Some have a vague voice. Choose a poem that suits your personality and seems meaningful to you, since you’ll have to spend the next two weeks living with the words of this author. This poem will also take up considerable space in your commonplace book as you work with it.

The Steps to Success

Week 1 -> (1) ***Background & Context***

Read about the author and learn about the biographical and historical context surrounding this poem. Use resources such as the author introductions at the beginning of anthology sections to help you. You may also use the British Library or Smithsonian websites, as well as author profiles from museums and libraries to help you. Take notes in your commonplace book.

(2) ***Learn the poem.***

Copy it over afresh in your commonplace book. Take some notes. What is it about? Who is the speaker? What is the tone? What vocabulary or phrases stand out? Jot down your ideas. Now, make an informal pre-recording of yourself. What do you notice and hear about the lines? What sounds or words do you wish to emphasize?

(3) ***Close read the poem.***

Just as we did in class, circle and mark up parts of the poem that stand out to you. What literary devices has the poet used? What do you notice about the form of the poem? What about its content and message? Can you link form and content together? Are they working in concert, or working against one another, in tension? Leave a track of close reading points in your commonplace book. Use critical footnotes to help you parse meaning of any difficult references.

Week 2 -> (4) ***Recitation & Recording.***

Search up and study some recordings of poetry readers you admire. Listen to a few samples of other recitations, whether by celebrities, actors, or other readers on the Recited Verse platform. Who do you like? Why are they effective? Note pauses, rhythms intonations, and other techniques used. Practice reciting your poem multiple times over the course of a week. Mark up places you want to emphasize. Are you able to memorize the poem? Now that you've spent at least two weeks with the poem, it should become a part of you. The poet's voice has merged with your own. Log into Recited Verse and record your poem. (Watch the tutorial video to learn how to do this.) Make sure it is uploaded correctly and that you tag it with the terms #Lehman #RomanticPoetry #ENG300 #K-SAA #[author's last name]

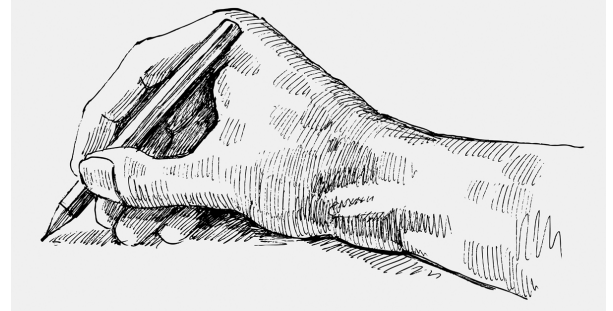
(5) ***Write it up! Reflection***

Reflect: how has your perception and understanding of this poem changed? Write up a 2 to 3-page reflection on your process of spending time with this poem. It should follow the rubric below. Make sure you include all three sections. Proofread you write up and submit it via Dropbox as a PDF. Finally, copy the poem again one final time in your commonplace book. Does it feel different this time around? How has its meaning for you evolved?

Reflection Rubric

2-3 pages, typed, submitted in your Dropbox as a PDF.

As with the field report, I'm offering a roadmap for your recitation write-up. Feel free to play with the structure, but please be sure to cover the following:



- (A) **Biographical & Historical Context.** Offer biographical and historical information about the author of the poem you've chosen. Make it clear that you understand who is writing this, what time period and social conditions they were living in, and what place this particular poem might have in the poet's oeuvre or career. Think about the rich background information that Devoney Looser provided in her lecture to give her audience a sense of who the Porter Sisters were. Provide only the most important information and be brief — you can't cover everything!
- (B) **Close reading.** Harness the skills we have been practicing together in class and create a paragraph of close reading on your own. This entails marking up your poem, jotting down the points, and then writing up your ideas in long-form sentences. Be sure to quote from the poem when necessary, just as I did in my examples, so that your reader can follow along.
- (C) **Recitation.** This is the new skill we are adding at this point in the semester. For your final paragraph, I'm asking you to reflect on the process of learning a poem "by heart," committing it to memory, and/or making it your own through stylistic choices and performance. How did you make this poem personal to you? What techniques did you use in your delivery to make the meaning more impactful or forceful? What tone or mood were you trying to set with your recitation? What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them? The more intentional you were about your recitation and recording, the more you will have to share in this final section.

The entire reflection should be about two to three pages, typed, single-spaced, and submitted in your Dropbox as a PDF.

