

Hello and welcome. This is the graduate poetry workshop at UF. At the unlegislateable heart of it is something unknown to me, and possibly still to be thought of by you: the poems you will write and bring to class week after week. I do not intend to set you many assignments; I am fortunate in having colleagues who like to do that, and are much better at it than I am. If you need the security and imperative of a prompt, I will see what I can do (or help yourself from the individual proposals over). But broadly, the philosophy of this class (from your never-MFA'd professor) is the scriptural (and responsibly libertarian) 'do as thou wouldst be done unto'. In other words, I want you to write the poems you want to write, that you perhaps always wanted to write, the poems you have it in you to write, the poems that come to you to be written. These are what we will talk about in class.

As a fallback or supplement or safety net or scaffold or set of references – I don't know what figure is most appropriate, or most true – we will talk about (and I hope *you* will talk about!) 3 agreeably sprightly sets of Collected Poems: those of Weldon Kees, Philip Larkin, and Rosemary Tonks; an American (from Nebraska, no less), an Englishman and an Englishwoman. Larkin a mainstay of English schoolmasters and syllabuses everywhere, the other two somewhat obscure, even cultish figures, with an aura of sinister and derisive gloom. (Perhaps this is an afterbirth of last term's 'Depressing Poetry'.) Still, I think you will find both Tonks and Kees as the French say, '*scriptible*' – i.e., they can and will and perhaps even should have an impact on your writing, with their respective dandyishness and electricity. With Larkin, I'm not so confident. It seems unfair to set 'Aubade' or 'Church Going' or 'The Whitsun Weddings' in front of you, and say 'do likewise' or 'make like this.' Still, that's no reason not to read him (and he is at least unquestionably the other thing, which is '*lisible*', or readable. 'Larkinesque' has entered the language; it is as much there as 'Keatsian' or 'Miltonic'.) He is such a major figure, behind everything in contemporary British poetry, whether it be Armitage, Duffy, Fenton, Hamilton, Motion, Maxwell or Paterson; that miracle of proper sentences that scan and rhyme; really well-made and characterful modern poems. I've not taught him here before, and I'm curious how it'll go over.

Four or five weeks per author. If you don't know the poets, I would hope at least some of you will come away with new favorite poets. (And if you do, I hope they're firm favorites already.)

Poems identified for discussion, and as possible models (NB: please don't confine your reading to these, especially with the Larkin, who – note to self – is someone to read and re-read!):

Kees: "For H.V.", "Homage to Arthur Waley" ["'Chinese' poem"], "Eight Variations", "The Conversation in the Drawing Room" ["exercise in the macabre/ some other atmosphere"], "Robinson", "Five Villanelles", "Abstracts of Dissertations" ["list or chronology poem"], "The Lives", "The Testimony of James Apthorp", "Round" ["poem involving repetition"], "A Pastiche for Eve", "1926", "The Upstairs Room", "Travels in North America", "The Beach in August", "Aspects of Robinson", "Robinson at Home", "Relating to Robinson" ["poem/ sequence around a fictional hero/ anti-hero/ alter ego"], "The Umbrella" ["essay-poem"].

Larkin: "Wedding-Wind" [monologue], "The local snivels through the fields", "Arrivals, Departures", "Days" ["short metaphysical poem of lift-off"], "Negative Indicative" ["an approach to take to autobiography"], "I Remember, I Remember" ["poem on your birthplace"], "Church Going", "Myxomatosis" ["a condition, an implicit metaphor"], "Mr. Bleaney", "The Whitsun Weddings", "Home is so Sad", "A Study of Reading Habits", "Broadcast", "Breadfruit", "Dockery and Son", "Friday Night in the Royal Station Hotel", "Homage to a Government" ["a 'political' poem"], "How", "This Be the Verse", "I have started to say", "Going, Going" ["*Kulturkrise*, fear of change"], "The Life with a Hole in it", "Aubade", "The Winter Palace", "Schoolmaster" ["poem on the implications of a profession, anatomy of a profession"], "Femmes Damnées" ["makeover of a poem in another language"].

Tonks: "Love Territory", "Bedroom in an Old City" ["narrative/ outlook"], "Rome" ["a foreign city"], "Bedouin of the London Evening", "Bedouin of the London Morning", "The Sofas, Fogs and Cinemas" ["cultural critique..."], "The Sash Window" [home is so sad], "Students in Bertorelli's", "The Ice-Cream Boom Towns", "Addiction to an Old Mattress", "Done for" ["attempt to write a foreign poem in English – the poem of a sneer, Corbiere, say"], "Farewell to Kurdistan".

Perhaps 4, 6, and 4 weeks on the poets, respectively?

Other things don't change: a paucity (as identified above) of narrowly drawn assignments and corresponding freedom for you to write the poems you want to write; illegible comments; expressive squiggles; sibylline remarks; an unhelpfully Luddite stance that insists all poems be circulated on paper, one spare copy for me to keep. (It would give us a big boost if you would bring poems to our first class, so that we can begin prepared workshopping in the second... Also, copies of Kees.)

Anyway, I look forward to a lively and fast-moving term.

Class will be in the Suite. My office hours are Monday before class, and other mutually convenient times.

Michael Hofmann      [mhofmann@ufl.edu](mailto:mhofmann@ufl.edu)

(office number 294 2879)