

## Introduction to Poetry: Second Essay Assignment

*Due Thursday, October 31, by class time as a Microsoft Word document on WesternOnline. Length: approximately five double-spaced pages. Please speak to me, or email, if you have questions about document design (i.e., margins and other format issues), or about how to meet the length requirement without padding. I am always happy to help with scansion.*

### Assignment Description & Task

In the past several weeks, we've added meter to our study of poetic devices. This assignment asks you to do the same kind of interpretation that you performed with the First Essay Assignment, but it also requires that you *scan the poem and discuss how its metrical form contributes to its meaning*.

You should formulate a thesis whose claim you can demonstrate and elaborate throughout the paper. It should be a complex statement summarizing your overall interpretation of the poem, not what poetic devices the poem presents. In the essay, you need both to *analyze what the poem means as a whole and describe how its particulars work, including the meter*. The more of the details you can include in your analysis, and the more you can say about meter, the stronger and more interesting your reading will be.

Choose one of the four poems below: "Leap Before You Look," "The Definition of Love," "Sonnet VII," or "November Cotton Flower."

Always imagine an intelligent reader who may have no knowledge of our class and no special understanding of poetry; in other words, write for a general audience. Think of your goal for this assignment as twofold: to explain a poem to your reader and to offer your own particular insights. You are welcome to elaborate your own reactions to the poem, but keep in mind that personal opinions do not replace interpretation.

Again, I would rather that you *not* use outside sources to write this essay because you'll learn more if you do it all by yourself. (Of course, you should consult the dictionary.) But if you must consult an outside source—be it a website, a critical article, or something else—you must document it properly, in order to avoid plagiarism. I have not taught you how to do this; so if you don't know how, you need to speak with me directly.

Leap Before You Look, W.H. Auden, 1940

The sense of danger must not disappear:  
The way is certainly both short and steep,  
However gradual it looks from here;  
Look if you like, but you will have to leap.

Tough-minded men get mushy in their sleep  
And break the by-laws any fool can keep;  
It is not the convention but the fear  
That has a tendency to disappear.

The worried efforts of the busy heap,  
The dirt, the imprecision, and the beer  
Produce a few smart wisecracks every year;  
Laugh if you can, but you will have to leap.

The clothes that are considered right to wear  
Will not be either sensible or cheap,  
So long as we consent to live like sheep  
And never mention those who disappear.

Much can be said for social savoir-faire,  
But to rejoice when no one else is there  
Is even harder than it is to weep;  
No one is watching, but you have to leap.

A solitude ten thousand fathoms deep  
Sustains the bed on which we lie, my dear:  
Although I love you, you will have to leap;  
Our dream of safety has to disappear.

The Definition of Love, Andrew Marvell, 1681

My love is of a birth as rare  
As 'tis for object strange and high;  
It was begotten by Despair  
Upon Impossibility.

Magnanimous Despair alone  
Could show me so divine a thing  
Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown,  
But vainly flapp'd its tinsel wing.

And yet I quickly might arrive  
Where my extended soul is fixt,  
But Fate does iron wedges drive,  
And always crowds itself betwixt.

For Fate with jealous eye does see  
Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;  
Their union would her ruin be,  
And her tyrannic pow'r depose.

And therefore her decrees of steel  
Us as the distant poles have plac'd,  
(Though love's whole world on us doth wheel)  
Not by themselves to be embrac'd;

Unless the giddy heaven fall,  
And earth some new convulsion tear;  
And, us to join, the world should all  
Be cramp'd into a planisphere.

As lines, so loves oblique may well  
Themselves in every angle greet;  
But ours so truly parallel,  
Though infinite, can never meet.

Therefore the love which us doth bind,  
But Fate so enviously debars,  
Is the conjunction of the mind,  
And opposition of the stars.

Sonnet VII of *Fatal Interview*, Edna St. Vincent Millay, 1931

Night is my sister, and how deep in love,  
How drowned in love and weedily washed ashore,  
There to be fretted by the drag and shove  
At the tide's edge, I lie—these things and more:  
Whose arm alone between me and the sand,  
Whose voice alone, whose pitiful breath brought near,  
Could thaw these nostrils and unlock this hand,  
She could advise you, should you care to hear.  
Small chance, however, in a storm so black,  
A man will leave his friendly fire and snug  
For a drowned woman's sake, and bring her back  
To drip and scatter shells upon the rug.  
No one but Night, with tears on her dark face,  
Watches beside me in this windy place.

November Cotton Flower, Jean Toomer, 1923

Boll-weevil's coming, and the winter's cold,  
Made cotton-stalks look rusty, seasons old,  
And cotton, scarce as any southern snow,  
Was vanishing; the branch, so pinched and slow,  
Failed in its function as the autumn rake;  
Drouth fighting soil had caused the soil to take  
All water from the streams; dead birds were found  
In wells a hundred feet below the ground—  
Such was the season when the flower bloomed.  
Old folks were startled, and it soon assumed  
Significance. Superstition saw  
Something it had never seen before:  
Brown eyes that loved without a trace of fear,  
Beauty so sudden for that time of year.