2202234 Introduction to the Study of English Literature
Semester I, 2017
Wednesday, August 16, 2017
Weekly 1

Beauty That Meets the Eye and Other Faculties

1. What do you mean when you say something or someone is the best? How does the best become something that is most desired? The first three works in our course all look at this idea of being most desirable, but they are also three different types, or genres, of writing: drama, poetry, and short story. As you read, think about what aspects of desirability each addresses and questions. Also, notice the limitations and possibilities of each genre. It might easy for a play—being visual—to show beauty. But how does a visual performance show something internal or abstract like insecurity or jealousy? Fill in the chart below to show what language of the theater (ex. lights, props, action, line delivery, set) Martin uses to externalize which thought, emotion and concepts.

Thought, Emotion, Concept	Language of the Theater

2. What is reading? How do you read? How do your ideas about reading affect what and how you read? Take a look at the student responses below and examine your own act of reading. When you encountered Martin's *Beauty*, Armitage's "You're Beautiful" and Asimov's "Segregationist" in class, did you read each text or each part of the text the same way? Add some of your own mental processes to the list. Throughout this semester, we will be experimenting with different ways of reading and you will be able to add to a growing repertoire.

   Reading is

   - escaping
   - imagining
   - looking up words
   - looking up information
   - interpreting
   - asking questions
   - learning
   - skimming
   -
   -
   - thinking
   - comparing
   - filling in the gaps
   - remembering
   - evaluating
   - feeling
   - time traveling
   - skipping
   -
   -
   - believing
   - wondering
   - reading forward
   - reading backward
   - choosing, making decisions
   - rereading
   - listening
   -
   -

3. Read this poem by Spike Milligan **aloud**:

On the Ning Nang Nong[1]

On the Ning Nang Nong
Where the Cows go Bong!
And the monkeys all say Boo!
There's a Nong Nang Ning
Where the trees go Ping!
And the tea pots Jibber Jabber Joo.
On the Nong Ning Nang
All the mice go Clang!
And you just can't catch 'em when they do!
So it's Ning Nang Nong!
Cows go Bong!
Nong Nang Ning!
Trees go Ping!
Nong Ning Nang!
The mice go Clang!
What a noisy place to belong,
is the Ning Nang Ning Nang Nong!

4. Now, read this poem[2] by E. E. Cummings **aloud**.

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5. Read the student essay "One Is the Loneliest Number" by Ann Itical[3] included at the back of this weekly. List below elements of the poem that Itical pays attention to as she close reads. How does her paper respond to item 3 above?
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   -
   -
   -

[1] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1844078.stm
[2] E. E. Cummings, *Complete Poems 1904–1962*, edited by George J. Firmage, Liveright, 1991, p. 673.
[3] https://www.k-state.edu/english/nelp/engl.s00/sample_essay.cummings.html; reformatted to reflect the MLA style but without double-spacing

6. As you listen to Simon Armitage reading his poem "You're Beautiful" (https://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/youre-beautiful), note below the points at which his reading is different from yours when you were reading it on your own.
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   -
   -
   -

7. Add to the first column contrastive pairs you find in "You're Beautiful."

•	• think, act
•	• metaphor, simile
•	• match, mismatch
•	• connection, disconnection
•	• logical, illogical
•	• what you are, what you do
•	• cause, effect
•	• light, dark

8. Compare the language that Martin, Armitage and Asimov use to indicate ugliness, less desirability, or not as good with the language that they use to refer to beauty, things that are best or better. List below words or phrases that they use to describe these different qualities.

Authors	Less Desirable	More/Most Desirable
Martin		
Armitage		
Asimov		

9. What meanings of *patient* are used in "Segregationist"?

10. What meanings of *right* are used in the story?

Ann L. Itical
Dr. Philip Nel
English 102
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One Is the Loneliest Number:
The Structures of Solitude in E. E. Cummings' "l(a"

E. E. Cummings' "l(a" embodies the feeling of being alone. In every aspect—its form, the division of its stanzas, the imagery of the leaf—the poem concentrates its attention on solitude. But, channeling all of its energy into this single task leaves the poem as bereft of emotion as it is of company.

Literally embedded in "loneliness," the metaphor of "a leaf falls" absorbs the meaning of the word that surrounds it. That the poem's shape registers the pattern of a leaf falling strengthens the image's connection to the notion of being lonely. In other words, a poem that resembles a descending leaf actually contains the word "loneliness," which itself contains the words "a leaf falls." By containing the textual version of the dropping leaf within "loneliness" and this again within the shape of that same dropping leaf, the poem effectively fuses feelings of solitude to the image of the leaf.

In "l(a," "loneliness" and "a leaf falls" do not look as they appear in the above paragraph. By dividing them into "l(a // le / af / fa // ll / s) / one / l // iness," Cummings' poem emphasizes the separateness that a person feels when alone. The very word "loneliness" and phrase "a leaf falls" have been separated; no longer a group of letters joined together to form words, individual letters stand comparatively alone. Some, like "l" (8) are literally solitary; others, such as "le," "af," and "fa," cling together in apparently meaningless syllables. Shattering these words into their component parts creates the sensation that, like the leaf, these letters drift, lost and alone.

The deliberately fragmented structure creates other "lonely" resonances. For example, the recurrence of the number one emphasizes solitude. The "l" of the first line can be read as "one" and, as such, calls attention to the other "ones" in the poem: "ll" (5), "l" (8), and "one" (7). These "ones" reinforce the larger shape of the poem, which, if not a vertical line, comes as close to a vertical line as possible. In having not only the form of the poem but the very letters in the poem refer to "one," Cummings' "l(a" enhances the lonely imagery within that shape.

Inasmuch as noiselessness conveys the sensation of being alone, the poem's unpronounceable form works with its central image to draw us into solitude. Though almost all poetry must be read aloud to be fully understood, this poem defies the reader to speak it: "1(a" offers only the sounds of silence. Instead of tripping the tongue over "le," "af," and "fa" or stumbling into vowel-less clusters like "ll" and "s)," one lets the poem sit silently on the page. In collaboration with the image of a falling leaf, the poem's literally unspeakable structure strands the reader in a quiet, solitary stillness.

Though a clever way to represent loneliness, Cummings' poem remains as empty of feeling as it is of community. Every aspect of the poem tends towards its central meaning, but the minimal, disjointed form may leave the reader feeling not the loneliness of the leaf but the indifference of the tree. Put another way, the very cleverness of the poem works against the reader's ability to experience loneliness. Instead of bringing us emotionally nearer to the solitary leaf, this 22-character poem forces the reader to assemble its meaning, establishing a cool, analytical relationship between "l(a" and its audience. By distancing the reader from the pathos of the leaf falling, the poem's craftiness ultimately undermines its central metaphor. One may be the loneliest number, but, ironically, Cummings' "1(a" prevents us from truly feeling alone.