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**Midcoast Senior College syllabus for Spring Term I** (February 5 – April 1, 2024;  
no class on March 4)

### **Twenty-one Sonnets**

Our class will explore, *via close reading and discussion*, twenty-one sonnets by William Shakespeare, three each week. The goal is to have fun together unpacking what W.H. Auden calls “verbal contraptions.” Our first week will be a quick exploration of the sonnet form and its conventions; in subsequent weeks we’ll dig into how Shakespeare brilliantly manipulates language, form and content to create these verbal works of art. Most weeks, the chosen sonnets will have something thematic in common—lust and love, of course, but also time and mutability, immortality and the power of art.

### **Readings**

#### **Week 1: Introduction**

- The sonnet form & tradition
- Meter and rhyme schemes
- Common poetic devices
- Some considerations about Shakespeare’s sonnets

#### **Week 2**

- Sonnet 1
- Sonnet 2
- Sonnet 12

#### **Week 3**

- Sonnet 17
- Sonnet 18
- Sonnet 19

#### **Week 4**

- Sonnet 29
- Sonnet 30
- Sonnet 37

#### **Week 5**

- Sonnet 27
- Sonnet 43
- Sonnet 61

### Week 6

- Sonnet 63
- Sonnet 64
- Sonnet 73

### Week 7

- Sonnet 87
- Sonnet 116
- Sonnet 133

### Week 8

- Sonnet 129
- Sonnet 130
- Sonnet 138

**Principal Texts:** Any text of The Sonnets will do. They are also available in many forms online; here are a couple of sources:

- [Shakespeare's Sonnets](#)
- <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1041>
- A Sonnet a Day read by Patrick Stewart (YouTube)  
▶ Poetry: Sonnet 1 by William Shakespeare | Sir Patrick Stewart (2020.03.23) #ASo...

**Secondary Texts:** the sheer volume of scholarship on the Sonnets is overwhelming—knock yourself out if you are so inclined. Here are some works on my bookshelf:

- Vendler, Helen. *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Harvard, 1997)
- Evans, G. Blakemore. *The Sonnets* (Cambridge, 1996)
- Booth, Stephen. *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Yale, 1977)
- Duncan-Jones, Katherine. *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (The Arden Shakespeare, 1997)
- Partridge, Eric. *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (Routledge, 1947, 2001)
- Lovejoy, Arthur. *The Great Chain of Being* (Harvard, 1936, 1964)
- Tillyard, E.M.W. *The Elizabethan World Picture* (Vintage)