When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,
For all the day they view things unrespected;
But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
And, darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.

(From: Shakespeare, Sonnet 43)

Published four hundred years ago, Shakespeare’s Sonnets have a contradictory standing in contemporary culture. On the one hand, this extensive cycle of poems is regarded as a complexly coded and deeply historical artefact that can be appreciated only on the basis of arcane expert knowledge. On the other hand, the Sonnets are among the most frequently referred-to texts in the contemporary world. They hold an eminent place not only in the arts and in scholarship but also in popular culture, where Shakespeare’s terse exercises in the form of the lyric are usually regarded as “the greatest love poems of all time.” This seminar will investigate these contradictions – and it will make use of them to inspire a fresh reading of the old poems.

We will discuss (in detail) a broad selection of famous as well as less well-known sonnets. At the same time, we will try to engage these poems by looking at their contemporary reception not only in scholarship but also in various arts and media.
Preparing for the seminar:

- The seminar concentrates on the sonnets and their reception. It does not feature a general introduction to Shakespeare’s life and works. Students who have not previously worked on Shakespeare might want to consider PROF. LILGE’S SURVEY LECTURE ON “SHAKESPEARE AND THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD” (TUE, 16-18), which also takes place during the current semester.

Moreover, I’d recommend reading STEPHEN GREENBLATT’S "GENERAL INTRODUCTION" to The Norton Shakespeare, ed. Greenblatt et al. (Norton, 1997) 1-76, in preparation for the seminar. This might still be the best short introduction to Shakespeare, featuring not only information on his life and works but also on contemporary English culture and politics. The text is available on WueCampus.

- Our STANDARD EDITION for this seminar is Shakespeare’s Sonnets, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, The Arden Shakespeare (rev. ed., 2010). Please get hold of a private copy of this edition (ca. € 10,-). Apart from thorough annotations to the poems, Duncan-Jones provides a detailed INTRODUCTION (1-106), considering the publishing history of the sonnets, their literary contexts and their reception over time (recommended reading).

- Please see the SEMINAR PROGRAMME and COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY below for further reading suggestions, including various introductions to Shakespeare’s sonnets.

- Most importantly: Please read as many of Shakespeare’s sonnets as possible (see the task set for the first meeting) and do some preparatory research on manifestations and adaptations of the Sonnets in theatre, film, music, the arts, and other domains of contemporary culture.

PROGRAMME

[AR = assigned reading // FR = further/optional reading]

20/10 Introduction

Dedication to Shakespeare’s Sonnets and various sonnets individually suggested by the members of the seminar ...

Preparatory tasks:

(1) Based on their general introductory reading, all participants should be oriented about the gestation, character and status of Shakespeare’s Sonnets.

(2) Try to decide on your one or two absolute ‘favourite’ poems from Shakespeare’s Sonnets; be ready to explain your decision.

27/10 POETRY – LYRIC – SONNET

(‘Found Poem’ by Ronald Gross // Archibald MacLeish, “Ars Poetica” // samples of ‘visual’ sonnets …)

Sonnet 1

[Please see assigned reading on the following page.]

1 In preparation for the seminar, participants will always be expected to carefully prepare at least the sonnets and the AR texts listed for the meeting.
READING and ANALYSING POETRY – Attitudes / techniques / terms


Sonnet 43

AR:


FR:

- See course bibliography, section on “Poetry Analysis” (esp. Culler, Eagleton, and Strachan).

10/11

The Sonnets and/as NARRATIVE // BIOGRAPHICAL interpretations

Sonnets 20 & 53

AR:


FR:

- Rebecca Laroche, “The Sonnets on Trial: Reconsidering *The Portrait of Mr. W.*
The problem of context & ‘meaning’ I: SUBJECTIVITY & VOICE

Sonnets 17 & 76

AR:

The problem of context & ‘meaning’ II: ‘GENDER’ & ‘COLOUR’

Sonnets 57, 136, 144

AR:

FR:

THEATRICAL RECEPTION: Robert Wilson’s 2009 production

Sonnets and extracts from Wilson’s production selected by the experts for this meeting.²

AR:
- See relevant section on Robert Wilson’s website [LINK].

² Here and in the following: Please announce your choice of sonnets in the previous meeting! It’s good to refer back to sonnets already discussed so far, but please try to feature at least one new poem from the collection.
Acknowledgement


15/12

**MUSICAL RECESSION (focus on popular music)**

Sonnets and songs selected by the experts for this meeting.

AR:


FR:


22/12

**VISUAL RECESSION: Illustrations and book covers**

Sonnets and visual samples selected by the experts for this meeting. [Please announce your choice of sonnets in the previous meeting!]

AR:


FR:

- See material featured on the DVD accompanying Pfister/Gutsch, eds., *Shakespeare’s Sonnets: For the First Time Globally Reprinted* (2009). [The DVD can be borrowed from ZA.]

[Christmas break]

12/01  CROSSLINGUISTIC RECEPTION: Translations into / Rewritings in German

Sonnet 18

AR:


FR:


19/01  POETIC RECEPTION / Poetic responses

Sample sonnet and one or two poetic responses selected by the experts for this meeting. [Please announce your choice in the previous meeting and make the respective poetic responses available through WueCampus!]

FR:

- Hannah Jane Crawforth and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, eds., *On Shakespeare’s Sonnets: A Poets’ Celebration* (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016). [Not held by UBW; contact ZA to borrow the book.]

26/01  Reception in the NEW MEDIA & in the GLOBAL CITY: The NYSX Sonnet Project

Sample sonnets and clips selected by the experts for this meeting. [Please announce your choice in the previous meeting.]

AR:

Browse the following website: New York Shakespeare Exchange, *the sonnet project* (2013-present), web [LINK.]

02/02  Concluding meeting

Including the discussion of participants’ ESSAY TOPICS.
CONTRIBUTIONS

The amount of contributions asked for depends on the number of credit points attached to your chosen module:

3 ECTS:
- 3 reading responses (of c. 2 pp.)

5 ECTS:
- 2 reading responses
- Acting as an expert for one specific meeting
- Short research essay (c. 10-15 pp.)

10 ECTS:
- Please see me in my office hours.

Reading responses:

These are short (c. 2 pp.) essay-like academic texts responding to the material that is on the agenda for the specific meeting. A reading response needs to consider both the ‘primary’ text/s (i.e. the sonnets etc.) that are to be analysed in the meeting and the ‘secondary’ texts set up as assigned reading. Of course, participants can also choose to feature further reading texts. 'Responding to' means to contextualize and discuss the material in light of the seminar's agenda and progress.

Reading responses are due three days before the respective meeting (= by Sunday evening). Please upload your RR to WueCampus. In preparation for individual meetings, participants are strongly encouraged to read the reading responses for that meeting posted by other participants. Thus, all reading responses will be made available to everybody by Tuesday.

Experts:

Experts are teams of two participants that do special preparatory work for one seminar meeting. Acting as a specialist includes:

- a short (!) introductory statement (not a presentation!) that opens the meeting by situating it within the wider contexts of the seminar, in particular linking it to the previous meeting;
- heading the meeting in collaboration with me;
- discussing your ideas with me at least one week before the respective meeting (my office hours usually take place on Thursdays, 12.30 to 2 p.m).

Use the respective tool on WueCampus to sign up as an expert. Please do so during the first three weeks of the seminar.

Research essays:

Generally, these essays (c. 10-15 pp.) will evolve from your work as an expert. They should zoom in on a particular problem or phenomenon connected to the topic or material of the respective meeting. Of course, each research essay ought to focus on an individual topic.

Portfolio:

Please collect your written contributions into a portfolio of c. 18-20 pp. This should be handed in by 15/03 (as a file uploaded to WueCampus).
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Editions of Shakespeare’s Sonnets:

This is our standard edition for the seminar. Please get hold of a private copy (ca. € 10,-).
However, some of Duncan-Jones’s assumptions about the gestation of the sonnets are still
being hotly debated; cf. the introductions offered in the editions prepared by Burrow and Kerrigan!

Booth, Stephen, ed. Shakespeare’s Sonnets. Yale UP, 1977. [UBW 450]
The most renowned, ambitious and extensive of editions ... This is how Booth, in the preface,
defends the complexity of his “analytical” notes: “All of us were brought up on the idea that
what poets say is sublime – takes us beyond reason; my commentary tries to describe the
physics by which we get there” (x). Booth reproduces a facsimile of the Quarto text alongside
a modernized version of the poems.

Oxford UP, 2008. [Accessible online through UBW.]

Kerrigan, John, ed. The Sonnets and a Lover’s Complaint. The New Penguin Shakespeare. Penguin,
1986.


Various other editions are available at UBW (some of them online). The WueCampus course room
will also feature the sonnets as reprinted in The Oxford Shakespeare (both in original and modernized
spelling).

General study aids (esp. concerning poetry & poetry analysis):

through UBW and/or through Oxford Reference.]


editions.]


JSTOR. Web. [Digital library of academic journals, books, and primary sources. Accessible through the
university’s intranet.]

online through UBW.]
See esp. the section on “Poetry” (21-64).


cessible online through UBW.]

UBW.]
On Shakespeare’s sonnets / Shakespeare’s Sonnets and their contexts:


Contains not only essays by important scholars but also useful commentaries on a large number of Shakespeare’s sonnets.


Cousins, A. D. *Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Narrative Poems*. Routledge, 2000. [Accessible online through UBW.]


This section of the website of the British Library features various articles on Shakespeare’s Sonnets. It’s most interesting feature is a complete photographic online edition of the 1609 Quarto.

Fish’s Sonnet 18

U – U – U – U – U – ?
U – U – U – U – U – :
U – U – U – U – U – ,
U – U – U – U – U – :
U – U – U – U – U – ,
U – U – U – U – U – ,
U – U – U – U – U – ,
U – U – U – U – U – ,
U – U – U – U – U – ,
U – U – U – U – U – ,
U – U – U – U – U – ,

*The punctuation of the 1609 Quarto has been left unchanged.*