

Fall 2006 ENG 455 Sec. 401 & 410  
T 6-8:50 LY 207

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Hours: T 3-6, W 1-3

## ***MAJOR MODERN POETS***

### **Course Objectives**

This is a graduate and advanced undergraduate course in modern American poetry focusing on the work of major American poets who revolutionized poetry during the first half of the twentieth century. Our concern is with the “modern” as a historical period, as well as with the movement of “Modernism” as an aesthetic and cultural mode between 1910 and 1945. Its main practitioners included Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, H.D., Langston Hughes, Marianne Moore, and Wallace Stevens. This course offers an occasion to read these poets in depth over the course of their careers. Besides in-depth reading and study of the primary material—the poetry—we will read a variety of essays and critical analyses by the poets themselves and by contemporary literary critics. Reading the criticism will broaden your understanding of the poems and their context, enable us to have lively critical debates in class, and enrich your own critical dialogue in writing about poetry. Reading poetry and writing about it will sharpen your critical thinking and enlarge your capacity for reflective judgment and creative expression. I also hope to reinforce the value of poetry not as a mere reflection of the culture that produces it, but as a maker of that culture. Just as poetry enabled the Modernists to confront and transcend their own time and experience, this broadening of perspective is essential to sustaining a fully human spirit in our own time and world.

### **Focus and Context**

Beginning around 1910, as technological breakthroughs, social change, and global violence accelerated the pace of human endeavors and destroyed old ways of life, poets rejected traditional literary modes and diction as outworn and too genteel for the times. Not only did the airplane, automobile, telegraph and telephone change our notions of space and time; Einstein’s ideas about relativity were transforming our perception of the universe, while Freud and Darwin overthrew conventional beliefs about the human mind, body, and origins. Nietzsche declared God dead, while new work in anthropology altered basic conventions about culture, religion, and myth. World War I (1914-18) with its unprecedented scale of death and destruction, the Russian Revolution, and the fall of European monarchies forced poets to question the values of western civilization. New freedoms for women were changing the fabric of American society. African Americans, achieving a cultural renaissance, struggled to gain in life the freedoms they’d been granted by law. European immigrants streamed through New York’s Ellis Island. Poets felt called to articulate the effects of modernity’s relentless change, loss, and destabilization. Among the major poets at work were Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), T.S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, Marianne Moore, and Wallace Stevens. They rejected the inflated diction, excess of personal feeling, and conventional forms of Victorian and Romantic poetry. Yet each produced a different kind of poem in the struggle to “make it new,” as Pound famously decreed. Their poetries constitute less a continuum than a series of ongoing dialogues and debates about language, influence, aesthetics, ideology, values, and the purpose of poetry as a source of private meaning and cultural capital. They strove to give poetry new value as an instrument of cultural diagnosis and spiritual fulfillment.

### **Required Books:**

William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems* (Charles Tomlinson, ed.)  
H.D., *Collected Poems 1912-44* (Louis Martz, ed.)  
T.S. Eliot, *Selected Poems*  
Langston Hughes, *Collected Poems*, (Arnold Rampersad, ed.)  
Marianne Moore, *Complete Poems*  
Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poems*

### **Essays/Criticism (E-reserve or online):**

For E-reserve: Go to library homepage, then click on E-reserve at left:

<http://www.kutztown.edu/library/information/articles.asp>

Introduction to *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (E-reserve)

Marjorie Perloff, "Pound or Stevens: Whose Era?" (E-reserve)

Marjorie Perloff, "The Aura of Modernism" (access from Perloff page on EPC site)

<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/>

**Modern American Poetry (MAPS):** An electronic anthology of critical essays and excerpts developed by Cary Nelson

<http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps>

### **Essays/Criticism (Books on library reserve):**

Costello, Bonnie, ed. *The Gender of Modernism*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990

Ramazani, Jahan, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair. *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. Vol. 1 Modern Poetry. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003. See "Poetics" section for the following:

W. B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900)

Blast (1914)

Amy Lowell, ed., Preface to *Some Imagist Poets* (1915)

Mina Loy, "Feminist Manifesto" (1914)

Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect" (1918), From "How To Read" (1929, 1931)

T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919)

William Carlos Williams, From Prologue, *Kora in Hell* (1919)

D. H. Lawrence, "The Poetry of the Present" (1919)

Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926)

Wallace Stevens, "Aphorisms" (1934-55)

From "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (1942)

Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes" (1939)

Gertrude Stein, From "A Transatlantic Interview" (1946)

Marianne Moore, "Humility, Concentration, and Gusto" (1949)

### **Attendance/Participation/Policies**

You are expected to read all assignments before class, to attend class, take notes, and participate actively in discussion. The wheel of the class turns around your presence and participation. Be prepared to explore, analyze, and debate everything we read. Preparation and participation count toward your grade. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get the notes from another

student. Please don't expect me to provide missed notes or answer voicemails about missed classes. That's what office hours are for. Do stop in or phone.

Please turn off all cellphones, beepers, iPods, and other gadgets before class.

Students with special needs should please notify the Office of Services to Students with Disabilities (SAB 220) so that we can make the necessary accommodations.

### **Class Presentation**

You will be asked to lead one class meeting during the semester, either independently or in tandem with another student. Come prepared with material to focus discussion, provoke opinion, and engage the class through intriguing questions. Your presentation must include:

- Evidence that you have unpacked at least 2 poems on the week's reading list
  - Summary, analysis, synthesis of MAPS criticism on at least two poems from the week's reading.
- OR**
- Summary and analysis of a poet's manifesto or poetics essay in relation to the assigned reading (see selected list of essays and manifestos; consult *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* "Poetics" section and *The Gender of Modernism*—books on reserve in library)

### **Literary Research Paper or Alternative Project (12-14 pages)**

You are free to select your own topic, which should relate to the poets we have read but may study them in other contexts.

For example, you might study a specific issue, aspect, or problem of modern poetry and culture, which you discuss via exemplary works by one or more poets, such as the influence of Cubist art on Williams' poetry, or H.D.'s feminist revision of Greek myth. Broader topics such as Modernist poetry of war or of the machine age, or spiritual debates in Modernist poetry might draw on the work of several poets. You might explore the aesthetic and philosophical debates between two poets, or study one of the poets in relation to a precursor and to the poet's influence on a contemporary poet.

**All topics are subject to my approval.** I urge you to start early and meet often with me to discuss your ideas and your progress. You will be required to submit a tentative topic/thesis and bibliography as well as a progress report. Correct use of MLA documentation and citation guidelines is expected (See <http://www.kutztown.edu/library/reference/citation.asp>) Alternatives to a formal research paper are possible and are subject to my approval. However, if you are completely inexperienced in writing literary papers, you do not belong in this class. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in failure for the project and possible for the course.**

**Avoid plagiarism by acknowledging your sources and citing them correctly.**

(See <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml> )

### **Exams:**

Exams will be take-home essays with open book and notes. Depending on my perception of how engaged the class is in reading and discussion, the final exam may be optional. In this case, students who choose not to take the final will have the midterm grade counted as 30 percent of the course grade. Quizzes on weekly reading may be given at my discretion.

### **Evaluation/Grading Criteria:**

Class Presentation and Weekly Participation	35 %
Midterm Exam	15 %
Literary Research Paper	35%
Final Exam	15%

**Course Schedule** (This is a tentative schedule that is subject to change with one class period's notice.)

- Aug. 29 Course Introduction, Syllabus Review  
"What Is Modern, What Is American, What Is Poetic about Modern American Poetry"  
Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet"; Wallace Stevens, "Of Modern Poetry"  
Charles Baudelaire, "A une Mendiante rousse"  
William Carlos Williams, "Queen-Anne's-Lace"  
VIDEO: Voices and Visions: Ezra Pound
- Sept. 5 No class; follow Monday schedule  
Print, read, annotate Aug. 29 readings before next class; bring your questions.  
**For E-reserve:** Go to library homepage, then click on E-reserve at left:  
<http://www.kutztown.edu/library/information/articles.asp>
- Sept. 12 **Ezra Pound** Print poems below from E-reserve; MAPS means that critical essay on topic is at **Modern American Poetry website:** <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps>  
MAPS: Pound's Life and Career—by Clive Wilmer  
"A Pact"  
"In a Station of the Metro"  
"Portrait d'une Femme"  
From *The Cantos*  
Other: "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly"  
**William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems***  
Introduction, vii  
MAPS: Williams' Life and Career—by M.L. Rosenthal and Linda Wagner-Martin  
"The Widow's Lament in Springtime," 34  
"The Great Figure," 36  
"Spring and All," 39  
"To Elsie," 53  
"The Red Wheelbarrow," 56  
"Young Sycamore," 61  
"The Descent of Winter," 82  
"This Is Just to Say," 74  
"The Yachts," 101  
Other: "Pastoral," 17  
"Tract," 18  
"The Rose," 44  
"The Attic Which Is Desire," 73  
"Portrait of a Lady," (E-reserve)
- Sept. 19: **William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems***  
MAPS: "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," 226  
"Landscape with the Fall of Icarus," 238  
"Proletarian Portrait," 98  
From *Paterson*, 259-297  
Other: "The Last Words of My English Grandmother," 139  
"The Ivy Crown," 213  
"The Sparrow," 216  
"The Dance," 147  
"The Dance," 251  
"Sonnet in Search of an Author," 255

- “January Morning,” (E-reserve)  
 VIDEO: Voices and Visions: William Carlos Williams
- Sept. 26      **T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems***  
 MAPS:        T.S. Eliot’s Life and Career  
               “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” 3-7  
               “The Hollow Men,” 79-82  
               *The Waste Land*, 51-76  
 Other:        “Preludes,” 13-15  
               “Portrait of a Lady,” 8-12  
 VIDEO:        Voices and Visions: T.S. Eliot
- Oct.     3      **T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems***  
 MAPS:        “Gerontion,” 29-31  
               *Four Quartets*: “Burnt Norton,” 175-181 (MAPS), “East Coker,” 182  
               190, “The Dry Salvages,” 191-199, “Little Gidding,” 200-209  
 Weekend video watching: “Tom and Viv”
- Oct.     10      **H.D., *Collected Poems***  
               Introduction, xi-xxxvi  
 MAPS:        About H.D.’s Life and Career—An Essay by Bonnie Kime Scott  
               “Sea Rose,” 5  
               “The Helmsman,” 5  
               “Mid-day,” 10  
               “Garden,” 24  
               “Oread,” 55  
               “Helen,” 154  
 Other:        “Eurydice,” 51  
               “The Gift,” 15  
               “Evening,” 18  
               “Sheltered Garden,” 19  
               “Storm,” 36  
               “Demeter,” 111  
               “Circe,” 118  
               “At Baia,” 128  
               “Heliadora,” 151  
               “Fragment Thirty-six,” 165  
               “Fragment Forty,” 173  
               “Hyacinth,” 203
- Oct.     17      **H.D., *Collected Poems***  
               *Trilogy*, “The Walls Do Not Fall,” 509-43 (MAPS), “Tribute to the Angels,” 547-74, “The  
 Flowering of the Rod,” 577-612  
               “Red Roses for Bronze,” 211  
               “Chance Meeting,” 231  
               “Trance,” 244  
               “Halcyon,” 270  
               “Sigil,” 294  
               “Epitaph,” 299  
               “The Poet,” 461  
               “The Master,” 451

“Ancient Wisdom Speaks,” 482

Oct. 24 **Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes***

Introduction and Chronology, 3-20

MAPS: Hughes’ Life and Career—by Arnold Rampersad

“The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” 23

“The Weary Blues,” 50

“The Cat and the Saxophone (2 a.m.),” 89

“Negro,” 24

“Justice,” 31

“Mulatto,” 100

“Lynching Song,” 214

“The Bitter River,” 242

“Ku Klux,” 252

“Letter from Spain,” 201

“Goodbye Christ,” 166

“Christ in Alabama,” 143

“Let America Be America Again,” 189

“Madam and the Phone Bill,” 353

“The Backlash Blues,” 552

Other: “Visitors to the Black Belt,” 215

“Poet to Patron,” 212

VIDEO: Voices and Visions: Langston Hughes

Oct. 31 **Midterm Exam Distributed**

**Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes***

*Montage of a Dream Deferred*, 387-429

MAPS: “Harlem,” 426 and 363

Other: “Red Clay Blues,” 212

“Young Gal’s Blues,” 123

“Crowing Hen Blues,” 278

“Comment on War,” 221

“Song for Billie Holiday,” 360

“The Ballad of Margie Polite,” 282

**Marianne Moore, *Complete Poems***

MAPS: On Moore’s Life and Career and A Moore Chronology

“Poetry,” 36

“The Fish,” 32

“Sojourn in the Whale,” 90

“A Grave,” 49

“Silence,” 91

“Peter,” 43

“An Egyptian Pulled Glass Bottle in the Shape of a Fish,” 83

“No Swan So Fine,” 19

“The Pangolin,” 117

“Bird-Witted,” 105

“The Paper Nautilus,” 121

Nov. 7 **Midterm Exam Due**

**Marianne Moore, *Complete Poems***

MAPS: “Marriage,” 62

“An Octopus,” 71

- Other: "O to Be a Dragon," 177  
 "The Steeple-Jack," 5  
 "To a Steam Roller," 84  
 "To a Snail," 85  
 "The Sycamore," 167  
 "What Are Years?" 95  
 "Critics and Connoisseurs," 38  
 "The Mind Is an Enchanting Thing," 134  
 "Baseball and Writing," 221  
 VIDEO: Voices and Visions, Marianne Moore
- Nov. 14 No regular class; **Research Paper Proposals with Tentative Bibliography Due** (email to me)
- Nov. 21 **Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems***  
 MAPS: Biography  
 "Disillusionment of Ten o'Clock," 66  
 "Anecdote of the Jar," 76  
 "Floral Decorations for Bananas," 53  
 "The Snow Man," 9  
 "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," 65  
 "The Emperor of Ice Cream," 64  
 "Peter Quince at the Clavier," 89-92  
 "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," 92  
 "The Death of a Soldier," 97  
 "Sea Surface Full of Clouds," 98-102  
 Other: "Domination of Black," 8  
 "Anecdote of the Prince of Peacocks," 57  
 "Bantams in Pine-Woods," 75  
 "Theory," 86  
 "Nomad Exquisite," 95  
 "The Curtains in the House of the Metaphysician," 62  
 "Arrival at the Waldorf," 240  
 "The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm," 358  
 VIDEO: Voices and Visions: Wallace Stevens
- Nov. 28 **Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems***  
 MAPS: "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman," 59  
 "Sunday Morning," 66-70  
 "The Idea of Order at Key West," 128  
 "Mozart, 1935," 131  
 "A Postcard from the Volcano," 158  
 "Study of Two Pears," 196  
 "The Plain Sense of Things," 502  
 Other: "How to Live, What to Do," 125  
 "Dutch Graves in Bucks County," 290  
 "Men Made Out of Words," 355  
 "Thinking of the Relation Between the Images of Metaphors," 356  
 "The Pure Good of Theory," 329  
 "A Quiet Normal Life," 523  
 "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour," 524  
 "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself," 534

Dec. 5 Research Essay Due /Class Presentations of Research

Dec. 12 Final exam due

**Focus Questions for Course:**

- 1) What makes poetry "modern"? How does modern poetry relate to the cultural movements that came before and after, such as Romanticism and Postmodernism?
- 2) Do American poets share similar or different concerns? What do they worry about? What are they afraid of, intrigued or angered by?
- 3) How did the development of modern poetry in the United States contribute to the break away from a culture that imitated European forms and manners? How did modern poetry participate in the creation of a distinctively "American" culture?
- 4) What stylistic techniques characterize "American-ness"? For that matter, does such a thing exist?
- 5) What kind of society do modern poets perceive? How can it be changed? What problems do poets identify and what solutions, if any, do they suggest?
- 6) How has American poetry helped to provide a voice for alternative views and opinions that otherwise might be lost or silenced in the "official story"? How may it have contributed to the silencing of difference?

**Focus Questions for Readings:**

- 1) What does the reading recall from your own experience or past reading?
- 2) What do you think the author intends to achieve? What is the author's subject matter?
- 3) What interests you about the use of language and form? Why? What perplexes or bothers you?
- 4) How do you interpret various lines and stanzas? What are the key tropes or metaphors? What changes, if any, do you notice in the speaker's voice or tone from beginning to end?
- 5) What questions does this reading raise for you?