

Dr. Heather H. Thomas
Fall 2005 ENG 364 Sec. 010
W 1-3:50 OM280

Office: LY 256
MW 4:00-5:00; TH 12:30-1:30, 4:30-5;
Phone: 610.683.4347
Email: hthomas@kutztown.edu

MODERN POETRY

To read a poem should be an experience, like experiencing an act. One reads poetry with one's nerves.—W. Stevens

Anthology of Modern American Poetry, Cary Nelson, ed. (Oxford University Press, 2000)
Modern American Poetry (MAPS) website: <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps>

Focus and Method

We will read 20th century American poetry, beginning with major contemporary poets and working our way back to their 19th century British and American precursors. The heart of the course will be intensive study of major Modernist poets from 1910 to 1945, whose work had the greatest impact on 20th century American poetry. In teaching literature I assume that poetry is a social form reflecting the cultural and historical moment in which it is written, so we will study historical, social, and biographical contexts of the poems. Consideration will be given to gender and race because these matters are central to identity, one of modernity's preoccupations that has continued to flourish today in poetries organized around gender, ethnicity, aesthetics, politics, and generation. This has heightened debates over poetry's traditionally understood function as a language of "universal" values. Besides poetry's role in shaping identities, we will examine its function in the construction and criticism of a "modern" American culture. We will study language, form, and literary devices, examining how elements of style mark the unfolding of a poet's consciousness. Style looms large because the early 20th century Modernist, living amid rapid change, was concerned with the problem of order and disorder, along with the prospect of solving this problem in the enclosures of art and myth. I will encourage you to read poetry through the various critical lenses applied to literary studies. You will be required to memorize and recite a poem to the class, to write a short poetry explication, and to do literary research and write a long critical analysis. There will be midterm and final exams, as well as quizzes, if needed, to confirm that assignments have been read.

Course Focus Questions:

1. What makes poetry "modern"? How does Modernism relate to the cultural movements that came before, such as Romanticism, and after, or Postmodernism?
2. What concerns do these poets share? What are their differences? What intrigues, angers or worries them?
3. How did the development of modern poetry in the U.S. aid the break from an imitation of European forms and manners, and thus help to create an American culture?
4. What qualities characterize North American style? Does such a thing exist?
5. What kind of society do modern poets perceive? What problems do poets identify and what solutions, if any, do they suggest?
6. Over time, how do poetry's issues and concerns change? What is the poet's role in American society?

Before reading the poems, always read the poet's headnote!

Week 1/Aug.31 Introduction: Syllabus Review, Social-Historical Background

- Poets on Poetry: **Thomas McGrath**, “Ars Poetica: or: Who Lives in the Ivory Tower?” 745; **Archibald MacLeish**, “Ars Poetica,” 331; **Wallace Stevens**, “Of Modern Poetry,” 142; **Marianne Moore**, “Poetry,” 251

Week 2/Sept. 7 “Diversity” Poetics

- **Adrienne Rich**, “Trying to Talk with a Man,” 942; “Diving into the Wreck,” 943; **Michael J. Harper**, “Song: *I Want a Witness*,” 1043; “Brother John,” 1044; “American History,” 1045; **Mark Doty**, “Homo Will Not Inherit,” 1183; **Martin Espada**, “Bully,” 1210; “Federico’s Ghost,” 1212; “The Skull Beneath the Skin of the Mango,” 1214; “Imagine the Angels of Bread,” 1214; **Ron Silliman**, from *Toner*, 1121-4
- **MAPS**, “What Is American about American Poetry?” (link from Doty page)
- Journal: 1) How are the three major types of poetry—lyric, narrative, and dramatic—represented in these poems? 2) In *American Poetry Since 1950*, Eliot Weinberger writes that while universities, where U.S. poetry is now institutionalized, take pride in “diversity,” it is one “based on ethnicity, not poetry; it is sometimes astonishing how such varied backgrounds can lead to the same poems.” After reading the above poems, how do you respond?

Week 3/Sept. 14 Contemporary Lyrics

- **Lorine Niedecker**, “Paean to Place,” 536-41; **Theodore Roethke**, from *North American Sequence*, “Journey to the Interior” and “The Far Field,” 593-599; **Elizabeth Bishop**, “The Fish,” 631; **W.S. Merwin**, “For a Coming Extinction,” 916; **Robert Creeley**, “I Know a Man,” 876; **Gary Snyder**, “Riprap,” 955
- Journal: Given that lyric poetry usually presents the poet thinking as well as feeling, what are these poets thinking about? What philosophical issues concern them? Note specific examples.

Week 4/Sept. 21 Rebellion, Race and War

- Poem Title/Author due for Short Paper
- **Allen Ginsberg**, from “Howl,” Part I 848-55; **Robert Duncan**, “Up Rising Passages 25,” 790; **Denise Levertov**, “Life at War,” 813; **Judy Grahn**, “I Have Come to Claim Marilyn Monroe’s Body”; **Yusef Komunyakaa**, “Tu Do Street,” 1142; **Amiri Baraka**, “When We’ll Worship Jesus,” 999
- **MAPS**: “About Vietnam”(link via Duncan), “About the Black Arts Movement”(link via Baraka)
- Journal: Which of these poems do you find powerful as statements of protest? Why? Which are powerful as poems? Why? What, if anything, distinguishes power in a statement of protest from power in a poem?

Martin Espada Poetry Reading, Tuesday, Sept. 27, SUB Alumni Auditorium, 7:30 p.m. (required)

Week 5/Sept. 28 Confessionals and New York School

- **Robert Lowell**, “Man and Wife,” 755; **Anne Sexton**, “Her Kind,” 921; “The Truth the Dead Know,” 922; **Sylvia Plath**, “Daddy,” 984; “Ariel,” 987; **Frank O’Hara**, “Why I Am Not a Painter,” 830; **John Ashbery**, “Paradoxes and Oxymorons,” 905; “Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape,” 895
- Journal: The “Confessional” poets and the “New York School” poets represent two divergent responses to the 1950s and 60s. Do the “Confessionals,” known for mining the psychological

depths of personal experience, also explore any social or cultural issues? Do the “New York School” poets, known for their interest in art, form, and wit, allow for personal revelations? Discuss with examples.

Week 6/Oct. 5 World War II and Great Depression

- Short Paper due
- **Muriel Rukeyser**, (To be a Jew in the Twentieth Century), 688; **Randall Jarrell**, “Death of the Bull Turret Gunner, 713; “Losses,” 714; **Charles Reznikoff**, “Massacres,” from *Holocaust*, 364-70; **Genevieve Taggard**, “Mill Town,” 338
- **MAPS**: “About World War II” (link via Reznikoff), “About the Great Depression” (link via Taggard)
- Journal: Given the powerful content of these poems, in what way do the forms seem relevant or significant?

Week 7/Oct. 12 Midterm exam

Week 8/Oct. 19 Imagism and Modern Style

- **Ezra Pound**, “A Pact,” 204; “In a Station of the Metro,” 204; **H.D.**, “Oread,” 233; “Garden,” 234; “Eurydice,” 236-9; **Marianne Moore**, “The Fish,” 252; “The Paper Nautilus,” 273
- **MAPS**: “Pound, ‘A Retrospect,’ (include ‘A Few Don’ts’) link via Pound; “Eurydice in Classical Myth” (link via H.D.)
- Journal: 1) Explain the three principles of Imagism as exemplified in “Oread” or “In a Station of the Metro.” 2) What else does Moore contribute to modern style?

Tues., 10/25, English Dept. Foust Lecture: David Budbill, poet, 7 p.m., SUB 250 (required)

Week 9/Oct. 26 Populists of Modern Vernacular

Amy Lowell, “The Weather-Cock Points South,” 47; **William Carlos Williams**, “Queen Anne’s Lace,” 166; “The Great Figure,” 167; “Spring and All,” 167; “The Red Wheelbarrow,” 170; **Robert Frost**, “Mending Wall,” 84; “Birches,” 90; “The Oven Bird,” 92; **Carl Sandburg**, “Chicago,” 107; “Subway,” 108; “Nigger,” 109; **Edna St. Vincent Millay**, “I Being Born a Woman and Distressed,” 320; “Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!” 321

- **MAPS**: “On Lowell, Pound, and Imagism” (link via Amy Lowell); “About World War I” (link via Sandburg); “Sandburg on Race”; “About the Sonnet,” (link via Millay);
- Journal: What variations in voice and tone do you hear in this work?

Week 10/Nov. 2 T.S. Eliot: Prufrock and The Waste Land

- **T.S. Eliot**, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” 278-82; *The Waste Land*, 285-301
- **MAPS**: “On the Composition of *The Waste Land*,” “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” (link via Eliot)
- Journal: Is *The Waste Land* representing modernity as a historical decline from the past, or is this work a timeless allegory about desire, faith, and the soul?

Week 11/Nov. 9 Alternatives to Emptiness: Imagination and Innovation

- Long Paper proposals due
- **Wallace Stevens**, “Tea at the Palaz of Hoon,” 129; “Anecdote of the Jar,” 130; “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” 127; “The Snow Man,” 132; “The Emperor of Ice Cream,” 132; **E.E. Cummings**, “Thy fingers make early flowers of,” 344; “in Just-,” 344; “O sweet spontaneous,” 345; “next to of course god america i,” 348; “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r,” 350
- Journal: How are Stevens’ and Cummings’ poems at once traditional yet modern? Compared to Eliot, what are their attitudes toward modern life?

Week 12/Nov. 16 Harlem Renaissance

- **Langston Hughes**, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” 503; “Harlem,” 523; “The Weary Blues,” 504; “Justice,” 507; “Three Songs About Lynching,” 509; “Let America Be America Again,” 515; see graphic “Come to the Waldorf Astoria,” 1230); **Claude McKay**, “The Harlem Dancer,” 315; “To the White Fiends,” 315; **Sterling Brown**, “Slim in Atlanta,” 476; “Old Lem,” 482; **Angelina Weld Grimke**, “The Black Finger,” 145; “A Mona Lisa,” 146
- **MAPS**: “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926), “To Negro Writers” (1935) (link via Hughes)
- Journal: One modern characteristic of Harlem Renaissance poetry is its “double consciousness” because the poets write from self-awareness as well as self-consciousness about writing for a white audience. Do you detect this in any of the poems?

Week 13/Nov. 23 Thanksgiving Break!

Week 14/Nov. 30 North American Precursors: Dickinson, Whitman

- Typed draft of Long Paper due in class Conferences

Week 15/Dec. 7 British Precursors: Yeats, Hardy, Hopkins (handouts)

- Thurs., Dec. 8 Final Long Paper due (Deliver to LY 256 by 4:30 p.m. Late papers not accepted)
- **W.B. Yeats**, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” “A Coat,” “The Second Coming,” “Sailing to Byzantium” (handouts); **Thomas Hardy**, “The Darkling Thrush,” “The Harbour Bridge” (handouts); **Walt Whitman**, “One-Self I Sing,” 2; “I Hear It Was Charged Against Me,” 3; “A Glimpse,” 3; “Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night,” 3; **Emily Dickinson**, #280, 10; #508, 12; #520, 12; #754, 15
- Journal: 1) Yeats’ work is said to exemplify the “modern symbolist imagination.” Define this term and apply it to one of his poems. 2) Hardy influenced modern poetry through his colloquial language and psychological directness. Explain and illustrate. 3) Stylistically, how do Whitman and Dickinson, two Romantic poets, foreshadow the modern?

Week 16 Final Exam / Paper Presentations

Attendance/Participation/General Policies

You are expected to be prepared and to attend class. Assignments must be read before class, and journals written. Bring your questions to class and voice them. Before class begins, please turn off all

cell phones, beepers, and headsets. Always bring your book, take notes, and participate actively and constructively in discussion. The wheel of the class turns on your participation. I am not here to discuss these poems by myself. Together we will explore, analyze, contemplate, and argue about the readings. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility the notes and assignments (other than listed here) from a classmate. Please do not expect me to answer routine emails or voicemails about missed classes. That's what office hours are for, so stop in. You are always welcome!

Focus Questions for Readings:

1. What do you notice about the poem?
2. How does the poem connect with your own experience or past reading?
3. What do you think the author intends to achieve?
4. What interests you about language, form, or subject? Why? What perplexes or bothers you?
5. How do you interpret the meaning? What are the key metaphors? Do you notice any change in the speaker's voice or tone from beginning to end?
6. What other questions do you want to raise about this reading?

Poetry Recitation

Each student will recite at least 20 lines of poetry chosen from our anthologies. You may recite one poem, two short poems or a section from a long poem. Your total recitation must be at least 20 lines and no more than 40. The recitation grade will be based on your successful presentation and delivery of the poem on the assigned day without prompts or mumbling.

Short Paper: Poem Explication (due Oct. 5)

This is an explication of a poem in the Nelson anthology. You may choose any poem not on the syllabus, or discussed in class. Choose a fairly short poem so that you can effectively explicate it within the given space and time: MLA style, 3-4 typed pages double-spaced, 12-point type. No outside sources required; cite if consulted. Use the "Unpacking a Poem" handout as a guide. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in failure for the project and for the course.**

Long Paper: Critical Analysis & Research (written proposal due Nov. 9; draft due Nov. 30)

Critical Analysis: An interpretive paper (8-10 pages; MLA documentation and style) based on your own close readings and analysis, supplemented with outside research of the criticism and biography. From a tentative thesis and bibliography, you must develop an argument about an element of poetry or poetics, a theme, a matter of historical, social, biographical or cultural context. You may choose to 1) discuss several short poems or one long work by a poet; OR 2) compare/contrast two poets and their works; OR 3) focus on an issue/idea and discuss relevant poets and poems. Poets must be included in our book, but you may include individual poems not in the anthology. Written proposal is required, based on a class handout. You may request this handout early. I must approve your written topic proposal and a tentative bibliography.

Check out the library's research guide:

http://www.kutztown.edu/library/reference/research_guides/guide_library_use.htm

Research: Begin in Rohrbach Library's Reference section online or at the library with the Gale collection on Poetry and Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism. Do not rely solely on online sources. Make sure any online sources used are authoritative and credible. Evaluate a source before using it. Learn how at <http://www.kutztown.edu/library/evaluation.htm>

MLA Style: Follow the guides for MLA Format and Style. Consult your composition handbook, the *MLA Guide to Research Papers*, and/or the library Web page:

www.kutztown.edu/library/reference/citation.htm.

Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in failure for the paper and possibly for the course. Do not let a Website, commercial term-paper service, or someone else write the paper for you. Avoid plagiarism by acknowledging your sources and citing them correctly. If you have a question about plagiarism, ask me, consult a composition handbook, or visit:

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

Writing: If you need help with writing and organizing your essay clearly, coherently, and correctly, make an appointment at the **Writing Center, Old Main 132**, as soon as possible (**Phone: x34733 or, from outside KU, 683-4353 and ask for WC**). The Writing Center is not an editing service for papers; however, you can get help with organization, clarity, precision, and grammar.

<http://www.kutztown.edu/writingcenter/>

Evaluation

Participation and journal	10 points/percent
Poem Recitation	10
Poetry Explication	10
Critical Paper	25
Midterm	20
Final	25
Total = 100 points/percent	A = 90 to 100; B = 80 to 89; C = 70 to 79; D = 60 to 69; F = below 60