

English 344  
**Modern American Poetics**

West Virginia University, Fall 2017  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-3:45pm, Armstrong Hall 123

**Instructor** Professor Johanna Winant

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- Office hours: Tuesdays from 1-2pm, or by appointment

**Description** What is poetry and how does it work? These were Aristotle's questions when he wrote the *Poetics* over two thousand years ago, and they're still our questions today. In this course, we will study the poetics of the most important modern American poets from the past century by reading both their poems and their theoretical writings. As a result, this course will provide an overview of the aesthetic movements that have shaped literature from a nearly exactly one hundred years ago, when Ezra Pound discovered T.S. Eliot's poetry and got it published in *Poetry Magazine* in 1915, through to December 2017's *Poetry Magazine*, assigned but not yet available. In the first part of the course, we'll focus on American modernism, its rise before World War I, and its full expression between the two world wars. Then we'll move on to the kaleidoscopic movements of American poetry in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Throughout, we'll discuss how poets continue to argue – in both their poetry and prose – about a poem is, what it should look like, and what it should do.

**Goals** Through your work in this course:

- You will become familiar with the past century of American poetry.
- You will practice your skills in developing and writing original arguments.
- You will get more comfortable with reading difficult and, frankly, really weird literature. In fact, you may even start to enjoy it.

**Texts** You must buy or borrow the following book:

- *The Norton Anthology of Poetry, Full 5<sup>th</sup> edition* (edited by Mary Jo Salter and Jon Stallworthy)

You must also print out and organize all of the texts posted on eCampus. I suggest some sort of folder or binder.

**Assignments** You will be responsible for writing four 1-2 page reading responses, writing a 5-7 page midterm essay, thoughtfully and rigorously revising and rewriting that midterm essay, writing a final essay of 7-9 pages, and presenting on the topic of your final essay to the class prior to completing it.

**Evaluation** Your grade will be determined according to the following rubric:

- 20 points for your community grade

- 20 points for reading responses (five points each)
- 30 points for the average of the midterm essay and the revision of the midterm essay (15 points each)
- 30 points for the final essay, including the presentation beforehand
- Possible extra credit of up to 2 points: I will award up to one point of extra credit for each poem from this class (with a limit of two poems) of 14 lines or longer that you memorize and recite to me in office hours. Please speak with me for more information if you are interested in this option.

Note that your “community grade” is one of the most significant factors determining your grade. Your community grade is more than just participation or attendance; I am grading you on your contribution to our classroom community. Doing well means appropriate, frequent, thoughtful, collaborative, inquisitive conversation with your instructor and your fellow students. Needless to say, you will have to be present, on time, with your texts in hand, well-prepared, and engaged in active listening in order to contribute. Being well-prepared means having read each poem at least three times: twice to yourself and once out loud. It also means having questions, observations, and ideas ready to share when you walk in the classroom, and being curious about those of others. **I strongly recommend that you notice something specific about each poem that you’ve read and write it down.** This course is a collaboration, and I am grading you on whether you do your part.

### ***Policies***

You are expected to understand and follow the following basic ground rules:

- You may be absent three times for any reason over the course of the semester. The next three absences will each deduct 5 points from your final grade, and if you are absent a seventh time, you will fail the course, regardless of how “well” you are doing.
- You are not permitted to use any technology in class. If you need to use a laptop because of a disability, please discuss it with me first. And remember that I can see you check your smartphone, and I will ask you to leave class, which will count as one of your absences.
- If you need to contact me, email is best, but do not expect a reply immediately; it may take up to 24 hours for me to respond. And remember that emails are a piece of writing that you are sending to your professor; be professional, polite, and grammatically-correct. Email is suitable for questions requiring brief answers that are not found on the syllabus, for example, to arrange an appointment for office hours if you can’t make the regularly scheduled times. I do not give feedback on drafts of essays over email or respond to open-ended questions; I am happy to do both in office hours.
- If you would like someone to work with you on any stage of the writing process, I encourage you to visit the Writing Studio. Make an appointment by calling 304.293.5788 or on their website (<http://speakwrite.wvu.edu/writing-studio>).

- If you ever find yourself overwhelmed with work or emotions or are just in general need of assistance, I urge you to get help at WVU's Carruth Center: 304-293-4431. See also [well.wvu.edu/ccpps](http://well.wvu.edu/ccpps)
- WVU is committed to social justice, as am I. That means you can expect a learning environment that is based on mutual respect and non-discrimination.
- Any student with a disability who needs an accommodation or other assistance in this course should make an appointment to speak with me as soon as possible, and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (304-293-6700 or Voice/TDD 304-293-7740).
- The calendar of readings may be revised as our discussion develops, if it becomes apparent that different assignments will be more productive than those I've chosen in advance.

### ***Good faith***

An unenforceable requirement of this course is that you undertake your reading, our discussions, and your writing in good faith. That means: Assume there is a purpose behind every text we study. When you seek to understand our texts, presume to see them in their strongest, most persuasive, most interesting, most valid, and most true form. Philosophy calls this "the principle of charity," and it is not a posture of stupid cheerfulness. Rather, it is the rigorous core of all successful interpretation.

The material in this course is challenging. The difficulty of the literature we will be reading makes it more, rather than less, important that you learn to work your own way through it. I urge you to eschew online study guides such as Sparknotes. Instead, trust yourselves – be patient when you feel alienated and frustrated, be calm when you feel afraid – and also trust one another.

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### ***Calendar***

Thursday, August 17: Introductions

Tuesday, August 22: Modernist Poetics

- Read Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" (1297), "Vortex," "A Retrospect," and "A Few Don'ts" (eCampus)
- First try for the name test

Thursday, August 24: Modernist Poetics

- Read T.S. Eliot's "A Love Song for J. Alfred Prufrock" (1340), "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and "Hamlet and His Problems" (eCampus)
- Second try for the name test

Tuesday, August 29: Modernist Poetics

- Read T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "The Burial of the Dead," "A Game of Chess," and "The Fire Sermon" (1344)

- Third try for the name test

Thursday, August 31: Modernist Poetics

- Read T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "Death By Water" and "What the Thunder Said" (1344)
- **1-2 page reading response due in class**

Tuesday, September 5: Modernist Poetics

- Read Gertrude Stein's *Tender Buttons*, "Objects" and "Composition as Explanation" (eCampus), and read William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1274), "This Is Just to Say" (1274), and "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" (1283), and "The Poem as a Field of Action" (eCampus)

Thursday, September 7: Modernist Poetics

- Read Marianne Moore's "The Fish" (1328), "The Steeple-Jack" (1331), and "Some Answers to Questions Posed by Howard Nemerov" (eCampus), and Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning" (1257)

Tuesday, September 12: Modernist Poetics

- Read Langston Hughes, "The Weary Blues" (1429), "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1430), "Harlem" (1433), "Theme for English B" (1434), and "Dinner Guest: Me" (1435), and "200 Years of Afro-American Poetry," and "Jazz as Communication," and "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (eCampus)

Thursday, September 14: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics

- Read Elizabeth Bishop's "Visits to St Elizabeths" (eCampus) "The Armadillo" (1519), and "In the Waiting Room" (1521)
- **1-2 page reading response due in class**

Tuesday, September 19: Confessional Poetics

- Read Robert Lowell's "Beyond the Alps" (eCampus) and "Skunk Hour" (1601), read John Berryman's *Dream Songs* 1, 4, 14, and 29 (1584), and "Changes" (eCampus)

Thursday, September 21: Feminist Poetics

- Read Sylvia Plath's "Morning Song" (1837), "Elm" (1839), and "Lady Lazarus" (1843), read Anne Sexton's "And One for My Dame" (1764), and Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" (1797), and "Someone is Writing a Poem" (eCampus)

Tuesday, September 26: New York School Poetics

- Read Frank O'Hara's "The Day Lady Died" (1728), "Why I Am Not A Painter" (1730), and "Personism" (eCampus), and read

Barbara Guest's "Roses" (1961) and "Invisible Architecture" (eCampus), James Schuyler's "Shimmer" (1964), and Kenneth Koch's "Permanently" (1961), and "Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams" (1963)

Thursday, September 28: New York School Poetics

- Read John Ashbery's "Soonest Mended" (1937)
- **Midterm Essay due at noon on eCampus**

Tuesday, October 3: Beat Poetics

- Read the excerpt from Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1955), Gary Snyder's "Above Pate Valley" (1916), and Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "Underwear" and "More Light" (eCampus)

Thursday, October 5: Black Arts Poetics

- Read Amiri Baraka's "In Memory of Radio" (1956) and "An Agony. As Now." (1957), and "Expressive Language" and "A Post-Racial Anthology?" (eCampus), and read Nikki Giovanni's "Rosa Parks" and "Nikki-Rosa" (eCampus), and Gwendolyn Brooks's "kitchenette building" (1966), and "the rites for Cousin Vit" (1967)

Tuesday, October 10: Objectivist Poetics

- Read George Oppen's "Five Poems about Poetry" and "The Mind's Own Place," Louis Zukofsky's "An Objective," and "Mantis," and Lorine Niedecker's "Foreclosure," "Poet's Work," and "Paeon to Place" (eCampus)

Thursday, October 12: Black Mountain Poetics

- Read Charles Olson's "Projective Verse" and "The Kingfishers" (eCampus)
- **1-2 page reading response due in class**

Tuesday, October 17: Black Mountain Poetics

- Read Robert Creeley's "I Know a Man" (1955 and eCampus), "The Warning," and "One Day," and read Denise Levertov's "Some Notes on Organic Form," "The Ache of Marriage," and "The Secret" (eCampus)

Thursday, October 19: San Francisco Renaissance Poetics

- Read Robert Duncan's "My Mother Would Be a Falconress," "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" and "Towards an Open Universe," and read Kenneth Rexroth's "The Bad Old Days" (eCampus)

Tuesday, October 24: San Francisco Renaissance Poetics

- Read Jack Spicer's "Vancouver Lectures," "Imaginary Elegies" numbers V and VI, and the excerpt from "Admonitions" (eCampus)

Thursday, October 26: *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* Poetics

- Read the excerpt from Lyn Hejinian's *My Life*, "Reason looks for two, then arranges it from there" and "The Rejection of Closure," and read Charles Bernstein's "Me and My Pharoah," "The Difficult Poem," and "The Practice of Poetics" (eCampus)

Tuesday, October 31: *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* Poetics, Perhaps?

- You'll read something by Susan Howe, to be determined. I can't make up my mind. I will soon.
- **1-2 page reading response due in class**

Thursday, November 2: The Poetics of Cut Outs/Erasure

- Read William Burroughs, "The Cut Up Method," read the excerpt from Ronald Johnson's *Radi os*, read the excerpt from Srikanth Reddy's *Voyager* and "Note on Process," and read "The Near Transitive Properties of Political and Poetical: Erasure" and "Look" by Solmaz Sharif (eCampus)

Tuesday, November 7: Elliptical Poetics

- Read Steph Burt's "Review: Smokes," Susan Wheeler's "Pantoum: His Dying," "Ezra's Lament," and "Alphabet's End," Mark Levine's "Work Song" and "Seconds," and Lucie Brock-Broido's "Radiating Naivete," and "Everybody Has a Heart, Except Some People" (eCampus)

Thursday, November 9: The Poetics of the New Thing

- Read Steph Burt's "The New Thing," Devin Johnston's "The Roman World," "Aversion," "Another Version," and Rae Armantrout's "Theory of Everything," "Soon," and "Framing" (eCampus)

Tuesday, November 14: Contemporary Poetics

- Read "The Waste Land" by John Beer, and read the excerpt from Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (eCampus)

Thursday, November 16: Super Contemporary Poetics

- Read the excerpts from the most recent *Poetry Magazine* (eCampus)
- **Midterm revision due by noon on eCampus**

Tuesday, November 28: Student presentations

Thursday, November 30: Student presentations

Tuesday, December 5: Student presentations

**Wednesday, December 13<sup>th</sup>: Final essay due at noon on eCampus**

I have sadly excluded the following poets because of time constraints  
(a partial list, mostly off the top of my head, in roughly chronological order)

Robert Frost  
H.D.  
Hart Crane  
e. e. cummings  
W.H. Auden (kind of British)  
Robert Hayden  
May Swenson  
Theodore Roethke  
A.R. Ammons  
Louise Bogan  
Howard Nemerov  
Charles Reznikoff  
Muriel Rukeyser  
James Merrill  
Anthony Hecht  
Charles Simic  
Stanley Kunitz (I named my dog after him)  
W. S. Merwin  
Richard Wilbur  
James Tate  
James Wright  
Nathaniel Mackey  
Anne Carson (Canadian but still)  
Thom Gunn (also kind of British)  
Mark Strand  
Robert Hass  
C. D. Wright  
Robert Pinsky  
Philip Levine  
Rita Dove  
Jorie Graham  
C.K. Williams  
Paul Muldoon (kind of Irish)  
Susan Stewart  
Mary Jo Bang  
Louise Gluck  
Bernadette Mayer  
Alice Notley  
Ted Berrigan  
Harryette Mullen  
Joy Harjo  
Juan Felipe Herrera  
And also poets under the age of 60, many of whom are amazing