

College of Arts/Department of English
PhD Course: Modern American Poetry
(2022-2023)

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The course is designed to provide the PhD students of the department a thorough introduction to the various movements, schools, and groups of American poets in the twentieth century. It will them to understand and analyze comprehensively modern and contemporary poetry. The first part of the course deals with the transition from the nineteenth-century poetic output and thought to early twentieth century modernism in American poetry. Major American poets are to be studied starting from Emerson and Whitman, moving to Emily Dickinson, Robinson Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams, and several others.

Cultural and intellectual movements as well as poetic trends are to be discussed such as the Harlem Renaissance, New Criticism, Confessionalism, including poetic groups as the Fugitives and Beats. Discussions of the most important poems are to be placed in the larger context of literary, cultural, and social history to help students develop a rich and ample understanding of the American poets and their poetic approaches that constituted what we now call modern American poetry. Modern Black and Native Americans poets are to be studied too; to name a few Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni, Joy Harjo and Sherman Alexie.

As a background material, the course will begin with:

1. First Week: Introduction to Colonial Period/Puritanism....Agrarian America vs. Industrial America; Fantasies of the New World; the Golden Age vs. the Gilded Age (the American Civil War (1861-65)), its after math, and the reconstruction era 1877–1895) ; tradition vs. experimentations & modernism; optimism (the American Dream) vs. disillusionment.

2. Second Week: The importance of Ralph Waldo Emerson ((1803 –1882) prophet of American culture) and transcendentalism. Reading from his essays and poetry such as “Nature,” “The American Scholar,” and “Self-reliance,” “Boston Hymn,” & “The Snow-Storm”.

3. Third Week: Walt Whitman (1819 – 1892): his influence on 20th century poets; his new poetic form (use of free verse); his faith in progress; his championship of democracy and the common man; his nationalistic vision; his romanticism vs. his modernity; his enthusiasm for science; his mysticism; his disillusionment with American democracy (readings from *Democratic Vistas* (1871)); Preface to *Leave of Grass* (1855).

Poems for discussion: From “Song of Myself” (1855); “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” (1856); “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking” (1860 in his poetic collection *Leaves of Grass*); “Pioneers, O Pioneers” (1865); “Passage to India” (1870); “War Poems” (appeared in *Drum-Taps* (1865)), “Beat! Beat! Drums” & “Oh Captain! My Captain!”

The Main Body of the Course

4. Fourth Week: Emily Dickinson’s (1830-1886) “Because I could not stop for Death—” and “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—,” and “I felt a Funeral, in my Brain”. Marianne Moore

E.A. Robinson (1869 – 1935): America’s foremost poet with whom modern American poetry begins; forces that influenced him both a man and as a poet, his poetic form, his use of symbolic language, his technique of implication, his preoccupation with sub-conscious; his search for the Ideal, his interest in the inner light, his emphasis on the gulf between truth and illusion, his skill as a psychological portrait-painter, as well as his nihilism.

Poems for discussion: “Flammonde,” “Bewick Finzer,” and “The Man Against the Sky” (from *The Man Against the Sky* (1916)), “Richard Cory” (1897), “Aaron Stark,” & “Credo” (from *The Children of the Night* (1897)), “Mr. Flood’s Party” (from *Collected Poems* (1921)), “New England”(from *Dionysus in Doubt: A Book of Poems* 1925).

5. Fifth Week: The Emergence of Modernism- Experimentation as a response to the social, economic, technological, and cultural changes of the modern world, a break with the conventional nineteenth-century norms, influence of the traumatic World War I, exposition to European culture, Modern realism, etc.

-Modernist Impersonality- New Criticism of the early 1930s-1960s : “the autonomy of the work itself vs intentional fallacy,” the fugitive poets of the 1930s. **Ezra Pound (1885 –1972)** an expatriate American poet and critic, promoter of modernist aestheticism of poetry, leading figure of **Imagism** and its emphasis on concise language, basic imagery, and a lyrical and verbal connection.

Readings from “In a Station of the Metro” (1913), “The Garden” (1916)/ **Amy Lowell’s** (1874-1925) “Patterns,” “In a Garden” from her second collection, *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914)

6. Sixth & Seventh Weeks : Carl Sandburg (1878 –1967) a major figure in modern American poetry; his Whitmanesque tendencies, his use of language, poetic form, indecorous style, his portrayal of urban and industrial America vs. the rural. Poems for discussion from his *Chicago Poems* (1918) “Chicago,” “Fog,” “Cool Tombs,” and “Grass”.

Wallace Stevens’s (1879–1955) “The Emperor of Ice-Cream”, "Anecdote of the Jar", "Disillusionment of Ten O'clock", **William Carlos Williams** (1883–1963) “Spring and All” (1923), “The Widow’s Lament in Spring Time,” & “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower”(1955).

7. Eighth Week: Generational Break with Modernism/ Poets of the 1950s and 1960s (the academic formalists following the tenets of the New Criticism-Formalism)

Confessionalism (1950s- 1960s): Readings from **Sylvia Plath’s** (1932 –1963) “Lady Lazarus,” “Daddy,” “The Moon and the Yew Tree” from *Collected Poems* (1960) & **John Berryman** (1914 –1972) readings from the lyric sequence *The Dream Songs*: “ Song 29,” “45,”& “384”, **the Beat Poets:** readings from **Allen Ginsberg’s** (1926 –1997) *Howl* (1956).

8. Ninth Week: Readings from Robert Lowell (1917 –1977) who often combined the public with the personal. He is known as tragic poet, concerned with America’s decay of conscience, influences that had impact on his art (family, religion, war), his poetic style, his religious conversion; violence in poems, his use of the confessional mode, his interest in history, his use of religious imagery...

Poems for discussion: “The Quaker Graveyard at Nantucket” (1946), “Waking in the Blue” (1959), “Skunk Hour,” “A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich”

(published in *Life Studies* (1959)), "For the Union Dead" (From *For the Union Dead* (1964)).

9. Tenth Week: The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and early 1930s African American Activism: Readings from **Langston Hughes'** (1902-1967) "The negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Weary Blues," "I too Sing America"; **Countee Cullen's** (1903 –1946) "Yet Do I Marvel" (1925), "Heritage," "From the Dark Tower" (1927).

10. Eleventh & Twelfth: Post-Renaissance Poetry of the 1940s and 1950s, and the Black Arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s

Later Black poets:

-**Amiri Baraka** (born as Leroi Jones in Newark, New Jersey, in 1934 -2014):

Readings from his: "An Agony. As Now.," "It's Nation Time"

-**Nikki Giovanni's** "The True Import of Present Dialogue, Black vs. Negro," "A Short Essay of Affirmation Explaining Why," "Beautiful Black Men," "Revolutionary Dreams,"

-**June Jordan's** (1936-2002) — "The Beirut Joke Book" from *Living Room* (1985) "Lebanon Lebanon" (1997), "Moving Towards Home"(1982), "The Bombing of Baghdad" from *Kissing God Goodbye* (1997).

11. Thirteenth & Fourteenth: Native American poets: **Joy Hargo's** (1951-) "She Had Some Horses," "New Orleans," and "Remember," **Sherman Alexie's** (1966-) "Grandmother," "War All the Time," "The Reservation Cab Driver," and "Giving Blood" from *The Business of Fancydancing: Stories and Poems* (1992).

12. Requirements: Regular attendance at sessions, discussions, and presentations; texts of poems are supposed to be always at hand in class (not via cell-phones), weekly assignments are to be submitted and discussed in class, **a mid-term exam or two are also to be taken too.**

Grading: Class Presentations & Participation: 10%

Weekly assignments: 10%

Midterm examination: 10%

Final examination: 70%