

English 343
American Poetry

West Virginia University
Fall 2016

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 1:30-2:20pm
Clark Hall 111

Instructor Professor Johanna Winant

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- Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10-11:30am in Colson 229

Description Walt Whitman wrote, “I hear America singing,” and half a century later, Langston Hughes asserted, “I, too, sing America.” In 1956, Allen Ginsberg asks, “America when will you be angelic?” and in 2014, Claudia Rankine writes about America’s “domestic tragedies” of racism, punning on the word “domestic” as meaning both *national* and *personal*, in *Citizen: An American Lyric*. The poets in this course range over centuries, and some wrote privately and others wrote for presidential inaugurations, but all wrote poetry that asks and addresses these questions: What does it mean to “sing America?” or even to sing to America? What is America, and who is an American? And what is an American poem? In this course, we’ll ask and address these questions as well.

Goals Through your work in this course:

- You will become familiar with the long history of American poetry. This course is a survey of American poetry from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first century, with particular emphasis on modernism.
- You will learn poetic terms and how to identify poetic techniques.
- You will practice your skills in developing and writing original arguments.

Texts You must buy or borrow the following book:

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

Assignments You will be responsible for writing three essays of 5-7 pages each, taking ten open-book reading quizzes, and completing the final exam.

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

- 15 percent for each essay (total of 45 points)
- 15 percent for class participation (1 point a week with 1 bonus point)
- 2 points for each quiz (total of 20 points)
- 20 points for your final exam
- Possible extra credit of up to 2 points: I will award up to one point of extra credit for each poem (with a limit of three 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 participation is one of the most significant factors determining your grade. “Participation” is more than just attendance. Doing well for your participation grade 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, and well-prepared, in order to participate. 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. **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 to foster the thoughtful discussion that creates an intellectual community.

It’s easier to create a community if you know each other’s names. To that end: you must pass a test in which you correctly identify the names of at least 75% of your classmates within the first week of the semester. Your grade will not be affected by this test, but passing this test is a prerequisite for passing the class. You will have three tries.

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. This why you have a 1 point participation bonus. 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.
- If you are absent and miss a quiz, it may be made up in office hours within a week with no penalty. If the quiz is not made up within the allotted time, you will receive a zero.
- Essays are due via eCampus as .doc, .docx, or .pdf. Essays must be in 12point Times New Roman with one inch margins and double spaced. You must have page numbers. Essays will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late, including over the weekend, so Friday’s A- is Monday’s B-.
- Plagiarism is a form of theft and has very serious consequences at WVU. If you have any questions about what counts as plagiarism, please see me before turning in an essay.
- 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
- 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.

Calendar

Wednesday, August 17: Introductions

- Who sings for America?

Friday, August 19: Review of poetic terminology

- Read from *The Golden Gate* by Vikram Seth (1952-), page 1994
- **First try for the name test**

Monday, August 22: from the 17th Century

- The Massachusetts Bay Psalm Book (1640)
 - Read “Psalm 58” and “Psalm 114”, p. 391-392
- Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)
 - Read “Before the Birth of One of Her Children” and “The Author to Her Book,” pages 464-465
- **Second try for the name test**

Wednesday, August 24: from the 18th Century

- Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1753-1784)
 - Read “On Being Brought from Africa to America” page 720
- Selection of spirituals
 - Read “Go Down, Moses,” “Steal Away to Jesus,” and “Ezekiel Saw the Wheel,” pages 1057-1059
- **Third try for the name test**

Friday, August 26: from the 19th Century

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882)
 - Read from “Evangeline,” page 951
- Edgar Allen Poe (1809–1849)
 - Read “The Raven,” page 977
- **Reading Quiz number 1**

Monday, August 29: Transcendentalism/American Renaissance

- Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)
 - Read “Concord Hymn,” page 941
- Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)
 - Read “I Am a Parcel of Vain Strivings Tied,” page 1045

Wednesday, August 31: Whitman/American Renaissance

- Walt Whitman (1819-1892)
 - Read from “Song of Myself,” page 1060

Friday, September 2: Whitman/American Renaissance

- Walt Whitman
 - Read “When I heard the Learn’d Astronomer,” “The Dalliance of Eagles,” and “The Noiseless Patient Spider,” pages 1071-1085
- **Reading Quiz number 2**

Monday, September 5: Labor Day, class canceled

Wednesday, September 7: Dickinson/American Renaissance

- Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
 - Read “124, second version,” “260,” “340,” pages 1112-1114”

Friday, September 9: Dickinson/The American Renaissance

- Emily Dickinson
 - Read “340,” “445,” “591,” pages 1115-1121

Monday, September 12: Early 20th Century/Modernism?

- Emma Lazarus (1849-1887)
 - Read “The New Colossus,” page 1172
- Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)
 - Read “Chicago,” page 1252
- Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)
 - Read “First Fig,” “Second Fig,” “Spring,” pages 1382-1383
- **Reading Quiz number 3**

Wednesday, September 14: Modernism?

- Robert Frost (1874-1963)
 - Read “Mending Wall,” and “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” pages 1227-1237

Friday, September 16: Modernism?

- Robert Frost
 - Read “The Gift Outright” page 1243
- **First essay due**

Monday, September 19: Modernism

- Ezra Pound (1885-1972)
 - Read “A Pact,” “In a Station of the Metro,” and “The River-Merchant’s Wife: a Letter,” pages 1296-1297

Wednesday, September 21: Modernism

- Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)
 - Read “The Snow Man” and “The Emperor of Ice Cream,” page 1276

Friday, September 23: Modernism

- Wallace Stevens
 - Read “The Idea of Order at Key West,” page 1264
- **Reading Quiz number 4**

Monday, September 26: Modernism

- William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)
 - Read “Danse Russe,” “The Red Wheelbarrow,” “This Is Just to Say,” “Poem,” and “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus,” pages 1272-1283

Wednesday, September 28: Modernism

- T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)
 - Read “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” page 1340

Friday, September 30: Modernism

- T.S. Eliot
 - Read sections I and II of “The Waste Land,” page 1344

Monday, October 3: Modernism

- T.S. Eliot
 - Read sections III, IV, and V of “The Waste Land,” page 1349

Wednesday, October 5: Modernism

- Gertrude Stein (1864-1946)
 - Print and read handout with selections from *Tender Buttons*, on eCampus
- **Reading Quiz number 5**

Friday, October 7: Modernism

- Marianne Moore (1887-1972)
 - Read “The Fish” and “Poetry,” pages 1328-1329

Monday, October 10: Modernism

- Marianne Moore
 - Print and read handout of “The Paper Nautilus,” on eCampus

Wednesday, October 12: Modernism/Harlem Renaissance

- Langston Hughes (1902-1967)
 - Print and read handout of “I, Too,” on eCampus, and read “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “Harlem,” and “Theme for English B,” pages 1430-1435

Friday, October 14: Modernism/Harlem Renaissance

- Jean Toomer (1894-1967)
 - Read “Face,” page 1398
- Countee Cullen (1903-1946)
 - Read “Incident,” page 1446
- Claude McKay (1889-1948)
 - Print and read handout of “America,” on eCampus
- **Reading Quiz number 6**

Monday, October 17: Late Modernism

- e.e. cummings (1894-1962)
 - Read “next to of course god america i,” and “since feeling is first,” page 1394

Wednesday, October 19: Late Modernism

- Hart Crane (1899-1932)
 - Read from *The Bridge*, “Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge,” page 1415

Friday, October 21: Mid-20th Century

- Theodore Roethke (1908-1963)
 - Read “My Papa’s Waltz,” page 1494
- **Second essay due**

Monday, October 24: Mid-20th Century

- Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979)
 - “The Fish,” “Filling Station,” and “One Art,” pages 1516-1528

Wednesday, October 26: Mid-20th Century

- Elizabeth Bishop
 - Read “Sestina,” page 1520

Friday, October 28: Chicago Renaissance

- Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000)
 - Read “kitchenette building,” “We Real Cool,” “the rites for Cousin Vit,” pages 1586-1587”
- **Reading Quiz number 7**

Monday, October 31: Mid-20th Century/Confessional

- John Berryman (1914-1972)
 - Read from *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet*, “17,” and from *The Dream Songs*, “4” and “14,” pages 1546-1549
- Robert Hayden (1913-1980)
 - Read “Those Winter Sundays,” page 1533

Wednesday, November 2: Mid-20th Century/Confessional

- Robert Lowell (1917-1977)
 - Read “Skunk Hour,” page 1601
- James Merrill (1926-1995)
 - Read “The Broken Home,” page 1716

Friday, November 4: Mid-20th Century/Black Mountain/Objectivist

- Robert Duncan (1919-1988)
 - Print and read the handout of “Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow,” on eCampus
- Robert Creeley (1926-2005)
 - Print and read the handout of “I Know a Man,” on eCampus

- Lorine Niedecker (1903-1970)
 - Print and read the handout of “Poet’s Work,” on eCampus
- **Reading Quiz number 8**

Monday, November 7: Mid-20th Century/New York School

- Frank O’Hara (1926-1966)
 - Read “The Day Lady Died,” page 1728
- John Ashbery (1927-)
 - Read “Paradoxes and Oxymorons,” page 1739
- Kenneth Koch (1925-2002)
 - Read “Variations on a theme by William Carlos Williams,” page 1693

Wednesday, November 9: Mid-20th Century/Beats

- Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997)
 - Read from *Howl*, page 1708, and read and print the handout of “America,” on eCampus

Friday, November 11: Mid-20th Century/Confessional/Feminist

- Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)
 - Read “Morning Song” and “Lady Lazarus,” pages 1837-1843
- **Reading Quiz number 9**

Monday, November 14: Late 20th Century

- Amiri Baraka (1934-2014)
 - Print and read the handout of “Kenyatta Listening to Mozart,” on eCampus
- Philip Levine (1928-2015)
 - Read “You Can Have It,” page 1761

Wednesday, November 16: Late 20th Century

- Robert Hass (1941-)
 - Read “Meditation at Lagunitas,” page 1919
- Thom Gunn (1929-2004)
 - Read “The Missing,” page 1774
- **Third essay due**

Friday, November 18: I have to go to a conference, class canceled

Monday, November 28: Contemporary Poetry

- Jorie Graham (1950 -)
 - Read “The Surface,” page 1979
- James Tate (1943 - 2015)
 - Print and read the handout of “The Cowboy,” on eCampus
- Li-Young Lee (1957 -)

- Read “Persimmons,” page 2011

Wednesday, November 30: Contemporary Poetry

- Juan Felipe Herrera (1948 -)
 - Print and read the handout of “Blood on the Wheel,” on eCampus
- Solmaz Sharif (couldn’t find her birthdate! She’s quite young)
 - Print and read the handout of “Look” on eCampus
- Ocean Vuong (1988 -)
 - Print and read the handout of “DetoNation,” on eCampus

Friday, December 2: Contemporary Poetry

- Claudia Rankine (1963 -)
 - Print and read the handout of selections from *Citizen*, on eCampus
- **Reading Quiz number 10**

Monday, December 5

- Watch the clip of “Alexander Hamilton” from *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda (1980-), link on eCampus

Friday, December 9, 11am-1pm: Final Exam