

MIDCENTURY POETICS

AMERICAN STUDIES 385 / ENGLISH 389 / WOMEN'S STUDIES 385

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Office Hours: T, Th 10:20-11:20 a.m.
and by appointment.

Spring 2011
Emory University
Woodruff Library 217
T, Th 11:30-12:45 p.m.

COURSE TEXTS

- Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems* (Harper Perennial, 2008) ISBN: 0061558893
- Robert Lowell, *Life Studies and For the Union Dead* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) ISBN: 0374530963
- Anne Sexton, *The Complete Poems* (Mariner Books, 1999) ISBN: 0395957761
- Gwendolyn Brooks, *The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks* (Library of America, 2005) ISBN: 1931082871
- Robert Hayden, *Collected Poems* (Liveright Publishing Company, 2007) ISBN: 0871401592
- John Berryman, *Selected Poems* (Library of America, 2004) ISBN: 1931082693

COURSE OVERVIEW

Midcentury Poetics is a course in American poetry and culture from 1945 to 1970. In addition to becoming more skillful readers of poetry, the students will develop a more detailed understanding of shifts in American verse amidst larger cultural, political, and historical trajectories. Central themes in our analysis of post-war poetry will include the roles of psychology, gender, race, poetic form, the visual arts, academic institutions, and confessional strategies. The students will work with periodicals, material from writers' journals, correspondence, and manuscripts in order to interpret poets' responses to and roles in shaping midcentury academic and artistic culture.

ASSESSMENT

- Essay 1 (5 pages) 15%
 - Essay 2 (5 pages) 15%
 - Essay 3 (10 pages) 20%
 - Presentation 20%
 - Class Participation 30%
- Papers are due on Blackboard at least thirty minutes before our class session begins.
 - Papers must be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, and double-spaced with 1-inch margins on all sides. Students must use MLA format.
 - Students will complete three papers. The first two papers will be five pages long and the final essay ten pages long. The students can also decide to revise one of their five page essays by the final day of class.

- The first paper asks students to develop an argument analyzing the poetry of Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, or both writers in relation to the primary and secondary sources we have read. The second paper will include students' examination of materials related to the writers we have read in Emory's Manuscript, Archives, and, Rare Book Library. The final paper asks students select one poet to address in greater depth. This paper will include close readings of several poems and research with primary and secondary sources, which may include archival materials.
- The last class session will be a class conference in which students will present their final papers. During the classes leading up to the conference, students will propose a theme for the conference and form groups based on their topics. The groups will not only serve as in class peer review groups for critiquing each other's paper drafts, but will also provide panels for the conference. Students' contributions to the conference will count toward class participation.
- **Presentations:** For several of the poets we will read, one or two students will give a presentation to frame our analysis of the text. Presentations should be fifteen minutes long for one presenter and thirty minutes long for two presenters. The presentation should be a focused exploration of aspects of the text and close readings of passages we have not yet considered that builds from themes we have discussed. Presenters should also address the text's historical context and introduce evidence that sheds light on the text.
- **Late Policy:** Each day that a paper is late, the grade will decrease by 3 points.
- **Class participation** is 30% of your final grade. Participation consists of your contribution to class discussion, group work, response papers, and quizzes.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

- Plagiarism, or academic dishonesty, is presenting someone else's ideas or writing as your own. In your writing for this class, you are encouraged to refer to other people's thoughts and writing -- as long as you cite them.
- Students are expected to follow the college's honor code strictly. Suspected cases of plagiarism will be handed over immediately to the Honor Council. If you are ever in doubt about whether you are citing something correctly, please contact the professor.
- You are encouraged to read secondary source materials, but you must list all sources you consult in your works cited list. You must cite web pages.
- In moments of crisis students sometimes make decisions that they would not otherwise make. If you find yourself in a situation that affects your work in this class, please see the instructor or the Academic Dean's Office.

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Students should read the texts indicated below and are encouraged to become acquainted with writers' *oeuvres* and critical histories.

Thursday 1/13: First Day of Class. Introductions.

Tuesday 1/18: Read excerpts from Laurence Perrine and Thomas Arp, *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry* (1956, 1992) and Terry Eagleton, *How to Read a Poem* (2007). Read T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," James Longenbach, "Modern Poetry, from *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), Harry Levin, "What Was Modernism?" (1960), and Diane Middlebrook's "What Was Confessional Poetry?" (1993).

Thursday 1/20: Read Robert Lowell, *Life Studies and For the Union Dead*, particularly "Waking in the Blue," "Memories of West Street and Lepke," "Man and Wife," "Skunk Hour," "91 Revere Street," "For the Union Dead," and excerpt from Paul Mariani, *Lost Puritan: A Life of Robert Lowell* (1994).

Tuesday 1/25: Presentation. Lowell continued. Read excerpts from William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (1956), David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950), and Herbert Marcuse, *The One Dimensional Man* (1964).

Thursday 1/27: Presentation. Read Helen Vendler, "Robert Lowell and History" (1995) and excerpt from Deborah Nelson, *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America* (2002). In class discuss facsimiles of Lowell's poem drafts.

Tuesday 2/1: Read Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems 1957-1959*, particularly "Black Rook in Rainy Weather," "Spinster," "The Disquieting Muses," "Full Fathom Five," "Mushrooms," and "The Colossus." Read excerpts from *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath* (2000) and *Letters Home* (1975).

Thursday 2/3: Read Plath, *The Collected Poems 1960-1963*, particularly "Morning Song," "Ariel," "Lady Lazarus," "Cut," and "Daddy." Read excerpts from Tracy Brain, *The Other Sylvia Plath* (2001) and Susan Van Dyne, *Revising Life: Sylvia Plath's Ariel Poems* (1993). In class discuss facsimiles of Plath's drafts.

Tuesday 2/8: Presentation. Read segments from *The Bell Jar* (1963), Luke Ferreter, "The Politics of Sylvia Plath's Fiction," from *Sylvia Plath's Fiction: A Critical Study* (2010), and Vendler, "The Context of Freedom and Restraint: Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*," from *Last Looks, Last Books* (2010).

Thursday 2/10: Class session in Emory's Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library to see Plath's manuscripts and volumes from her personal library.

Tuesday 2/15: Paper 1 Due. Read Anne Sexton's *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960) in her *Complete Poems*, particularly, "Her Kind" and "Said the Poet to the Analyst." Read excerpt from Diane Middlebrook, *Anne Sexton: A Biography* (1991) and Jo Gill, introduction and chapter 1 of *Anne Sexton's Confessional Poetics* (2007).

Thursday 2/17: Presentation. Read Sexton, *All My Pretty Ones* (1962), particularly, “The Truth the Dead Know,” “All My Pretty Ones,” and “The Double Image.” Read Sexton’s essay, “The Bar Fly Ought to Sing,” and “Interview with Harry Moore” in *No Evil Star: Selected Essays, Interviews, and Prose* (1985).

Tuesday 2/22: Presentation. Read Sexton, *Live or Die* (1966) and *Love Poems* (1969), particularly, “Flee on Your Donkey,” “Self in 1958,” and “Eighteen Days Without You.” Read chapter from Nelson. In class discuss facsimiles of Sexton’s poem drafts.

Thursday 2/24: Read selection of Theodore Roethke poems, particularly “Cuttings,” “Weed Puller,” “The Lost Son,” and “The Waking.” Excerpt from Peter Balakian, *Theodore Roethke’s Far Fields* (1989).

Tuesday 3/1: Presentation. Roethke Continued. Read excerpt from *The Selected Letters of Theodore Roethke* (1968).

Thursday 3/3: Read Allen Ginsberg, “Howl,” “America,” “A Supermarket in California,” and “Kaddish.”

No Class 3/8, 3/10: Spring Recess

Tuesday 3/15: Paper 2 Due. Presentation. Ginsberg continued. Read Ann Charters, Introduction to *The Portable Beat Reader* (2003), excerpts from Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957), “Howl” facsimile, and Norman Mailer, “The White Negro” (1957).
<http://www.learntoquestion.com/resources/database/archives/003327.html>

Thursday 3/17: Read Frank O’Hara, “Poem,” “A Step Away from Them,” “The Day Lady Died,” “Rhapsody,” “A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island,” “Why I am Not a Painter,” and John Ashbery, “Some Trees,” “The Instruction Manual,” “The Tennis Court Oath,” “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” “Wet Casements,” and “Paradoxes and Oxymorons.” Brian Reed, “Twentieth-century Poetry and the New York Art World,” in *A Concise Companion to Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2005).

Tuesday 3/22: Visit to Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Library to see African American Periodicals. Read Claude MacKay, “A Midnight Woman to the Bobby,” “The Harlem Dancer,” “If We Must Die,” Sterling Brown, “Odyssey of Big Boy,” “Southern Road,” “Ma Rainey,” Langston Hughes, “The Weary Blues,” “Life is Fine,” “From Montage of a Dream Deferred,” Rowan Ricardo Phillips, “The Blue Century: Brief Notes of Twentieth-century African-American Poetry,” in *A Concise Companion to Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2005).

Thursday 3/24: Begin Gwendolyn Brooks. Read *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945) in *The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks*, particularly, “kitchenette building,” “the mother,” “a song in the front yard,” “of De Witt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery,” and “We Real Cool” from *The Bean Eaters* (1960). Read Elizabeth Alexander’s introduction to *The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks* (2005).

Tuesday 3/29: Presentation. Continue Brooks, read *Annie Allen* (1949), particularly “The Anniad,” and *The Bean Eaters* (1960). Read interview with Brooks (1961) and chapter on Brooks’s poetry in Betsy Erkkila, *The Wicked Sisters: Women Poets, Literary History, and Discord* (1992).

Thursday 3/31: Begin Robert Hayden. Read introduction to *Collected Poems* by Arnold Rampersad and poems in *A Ballad of Remembrance* (1962, 1966), particularly “Night, Death, Mississippi,” “Those Winter Sundays,” and “Middle Passage.” Read interviews with Hayden in *Collected Prose* (1987).

Tuesday 4/5: Final Paper Proposal and Bibliography Due. Presentation Hayden Continued, Read “Night-Blooming Cereus.” W. D. Snodgrass, “Robert Hayden: The Man in the Middle,” Gwendolyn Brooks review, David Huddle, “The ‘Banked Fire’ of Robert Hayden’s ‘Those Winter Sundays,’” and Vera Kutzinski, “Changing Permanences: Historical and Literary Revisionism in Robert Hayden’s ‘Middle Passage,’” in *Robert Hayden: Essays on the Poetry* (2001).

Thursday 4/7: Read John Berryman Dream Songs 1, 4, 14, 18, 22, 53, 76, and 77. Read “Encountering Henry: A Roundtable on Dream Song 1” from *“After Thirty Falls”: New Essays on John Berryman* (2007), Kevin Young’s introduction to Berryman’s *Selected Poems* (2004), and excerpt from Mariani, *Dream Song: A Life of John Berryman* (1996).

Tuesday 4/12: Presentation. Read Dream Songs 153 and 385. Read Marjorie Perloff, “*Poetes Mandits* and the Genteel Tradition,” in *Robert Lowell: Essays on the Poetry* (1989), Robert Lowell, “John Berryman,” Adrienne Rich, “Living with Henry,” Denis Donohue, “Berryman’s Long Dream,” and Berryman’s interview with the *Paris Review* in *Berryman’s Understanding* (1988). In class, discuss Berryman’s correspondence with Lowell and Berryman’s teaching materials.

Thursday 4/14: Read Elizabeth Bishop, “The Map,” “The Fish,” “The Man-Moth,” “Roosters,” “In the Waiting Room,” “One Art,” and “Over 2,000 Illustrations and a Complete Concordance.”

Tuesday 4/19: Bishop continued. Read Siobhan Philips, “The Everyday Elegies of Elizabeth Bishop,” in *The Poetics of the Everyday: Creative Repetition in American Verse* (2009), Vendler, “Caught and Freed: Elizabeth Bishop and *Geography III*,” in *Last Looks, Last Books* (2010), and excerpt from *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell* (2008).

Thursday 4/21: Final Paper and Optional Revision Due. Class Conference.