

Contemporary Poetry and the Question of Identity

ENGL 236-01 / Spring 2004

MWF 1:30-2:20 / AJLC 102

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Hours: T-Th 2:00-

4:00, W 4:30-5:30

Description

As an introduction to literary study, this course examines the benefits and limitations of characterizing poets through references to racial, sexual, gender, and geographic identity. Focusing on the work of Audre Lorde, James Merrill, Frank O'Hara, Sylvia Plath, and Derek Walcott, we'll work through complex and ambivalent social identifications that often seem "divided to the vein." With the help of a small number of critical essays, we'll take care to emphasize the differences between lived and poetic identities, asking ourselves whether the pleasures, difficulties, and disruptions of poetic language begin to suggest their own strategies for imagining the self in relation to the social world.

Requirements

Written work for this course consists of two 7-page essays and three 2-page response papers. The rest of your work will consist of completing reading assignments and participating intelligently in class discussion. I cannot overemphasize how highly I value the time and effort it takes to play an active role in class discussions.

Required Texts

- * Audre Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (Norton)
- * James Merrill, *Collected Poems* (Knopf)
- * Frank O'Hara, *Lunch Poems* (City Lights)
- * Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* (Perennial Classics)
- * Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (Noonday Press)

Course Policies

You're permitted three absences. If you miss more than three classes, your grade will suffer. Essays are due in class on the date indicated on the course schedule. You may turn in one late paper of any kind, which can be late by one class period, but I may penalize a second lateness, or any lateness of more than one class period.

Honor Code

Students are responsible for following the guidelines set out by the Oberlin College Honor Code (http://www.oberlin.edu/~stlife/Honor_Code/Honor_Code.html). Please come speak with me during the semester if you have any questions about citing or acknowledging outside sources. You should append the signed honor pledge to all written work for this course. The pledge should read as follows: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."

Grading

2 Essays: 70%

Participation: 15%

3 Responses: 15%

Course Schedule

Poetry and Social Identity I

- M 2/9 Introduction to ENGL 236
W 2/11 Lorde, "Coal" (CP 6); Walcott, "A Far Cry from Africa" (CP 17-18)
F 2/13 Merrill, "Childlessness" (CP 148-49); O'Hara, "Ave Maria" (LP 51-52);
Plath, "Edge" (A 93-94)

Visions and Revisions of Self: Plath's Ariel

- M 2/16 Plath, "Morning Song," "Sheep in Fog," "The Applicant" (A 1, 3-5)
W 2/18 Plath, "Lady Lazarus," "Tulips," "Cut," "Elm" (A 6-17)
F 2/20 Plath, "Poppies in October," "Ariel," "Daddy" (A 20, 29-30, 56-59)
- M 2/23 Pamela Annas, "The Self in the World: The Social Context of Sylvia Plath's Late Poems" (photocopy)
W 2/25 Plath, "Fever 103°," "The Munich Mannequins," "Totem" (A 61-63, 82-85)
F 2/27 Plath, "The Bee Meeting," "The Arrival of the Bee Box," "Stings," "The Swarm," "Wintering" (A 64-76)

Merrill's Artificial Selves

- M 3/1 Merrill, "Getting Through," "Nightgown," "Maisie" (CP 150-51, 175, 186-87)
W 3/3 Merrill, "An Urban Convalescence," "To a Butterfly" (CP 127-29, 161-62)
F 3/5 Merrill, "The World and the Child," "The Broken Home" (CP 147, 197-200)
- M 3/8 Vernon Shetley, "Public and Private in James Merrill's Work" (photocopy)
W 3/10 Merrill, "Days of 1964," "After the Fire" (CP 220-222, 296-98)
F 3/12 Merrill, "The Kimono," "Lost in Translation" (CP 361-67)
***1st Response Due**

Poetry and Social Identity II

- M 3/15 Merrill, "b o d y" (CP 646); Plath, "Words" (A 95)
W 3/17 Lorde, "Now that I Am Forever with Child" (CP 8); Plath, "Lesbos" (A 33-36)
F 3/19 Walcott, "The Glory Trumpeter" (CP 64-65)
O'Hara, "Memoir of Sergei O. . ." (LP 64-65)

Sex and the City: O'Hara's Lunch Poems

- M 3/22 O'Hara, "Music," "A Step Away from Them" (LP 1-2, 15-17)
W 3/24 O'Hara, "The Day Lady Died," "Poem" ("Khrushchev is coming on the right day!") (LP 25-26, 28-29)
F 3/26 O'Hara, "Naptha," "Personal Poem," "Adieu to Norman, Bon Jour to Joan and Jean-Paul" (LP 30-36)
***1st Essay Due**
- M 3/29 SPRING BREAK
W 3/31 SPRING BREAK
F 4/2 SPRING BREAK

- M 4/5 O'Hara, "Rhapsody," "Cornkind" (*LP* 37-39, 42-43)
 W 4/7 Andrew Ross, "The Day Lady Died" (photocopy)
 F 4/9 O'Hara, "Steps," "Mary Desti's Ass," "St. Paul and All That" (*LP* 56-63)

Audre Lorde and the Transformation of Silence

- M 4/12 Lorde, "To Desi As Joe As Smoky The Lover Of 115th Street," "One Year To Life On The Grand Central Shuttle," "A Trip On The Staten Island Ferry," "Love Poem" (105-06, 113, 119, 127)
 W 4/14 Lorde, "Equinox," "Who Said It Was Simple," "To My Daughter The Junkie On A Train" (63-64, 92, 103-4)
 F 4/16 Lorde, "A Family Resemblance," "What My Child Learns of the Sea," "Father Son and Holy Ghost," "Generation" (*CP* 5, 7, 15, 17)
***2nd Response Due**
 M 4/19 Lorde, "Poetry is Not a Luxury," "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" (photocopy)
 W 4/21 Lorde, "The Workers Rose On May Day," "Revolution Is One Form Of Social Change," "Power," "The Black Unicorn" (*CP* 114, 139, 215-16, 233)
 F 4/23 Lorde, "From the House of Yemanjá," "Hanging Fire," "Sisters in Arms" (*CP* 235-36, 308, 357-58)

Walcott's Imaginary Histories of Place

- M 4/26 Walcott, "Prelude," "As John to Patmos," "Parang" (*CP* 3-5, 33-34)
 W 4/28 Walcott, "Two Poems on the Passing of an Empire," "Blecker Street, Summer," "Islands" (*CP* 35, 40, 52)
 F 4/30 Walcott, "Elegy," "Blues," "Sea Grapes" (*CP* 109-112, 297)
***3rd Response Due**
 M 5/3 Walcott, "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" (photocopy)
 W 5/5 Walcott, "Names," "Sainte Lucie" (*CP* 305-323)
 F 5/7 Walcott, "Volcano," "Sabbaths, W.I.," "Upstate" (*CP* 324-25, 362-63, 401-02)

Poetry and Social Identity III

- M 5/10 Lorde, "To the Poet Who Happens to Be Black and the Black Poet Who Happens to Be a Woman" (*CP* 359-60); O'Hara, "Poem" ("Lana Turner has collapsed") (*LP* 78); Plath, "Kindness" (*A* 91)
 W 5/12 Merrill, "Pieces of History" (*CP* 299-300); Walcott, "XXVII" (*CP* 486-87)
 F 5/14 Final Discussions
 T 5/18 ***2nd Essay Due**