

U.S. Poetry Since 1945
ENGL 333-01 / Spring 2004
TTh 9:35-10:50 / King 227

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Hours: T-Th 2:00-
4:00, W 4:30-5:30

Description

This course considers U.S. poets since 1945 as participants in larger movements. “Make it new,” Ezra Pound urged poets at the start of the twentieth century, and the poets of succeeding generations often banded together in the spirit of collective innovation and experimentation. As we discuss new forms and notable poets from the second half of the twentieth century, we’ll consider terms such as multiculturalism, the New Criticism, open form, confessional poetry, and language poetry. We’ll work together to develop a sense of the specific aesthetic and historical characteristics that give these terms meaning and cultural impact. We’ll also work to identify the questions and ideas that resurface throughout the second half of the twentieth century, establishing connections between different poets and competing movements. Why is it, for instance, that so many of the poets represented in this course feel the need to claim and redefine the notion of “natural,” “concrete,” or “direct” poetic expression? Why and how do other poets choose indirection over direction, abstraction over concreteness, artifice over transparency? Finally, we’ll ask ourselves if the commitment to making it new ever gets old. In a contemporary culture saturated with claims to novelty and stylish expression, what are the stakes and challenges of creating truly “original” language? And what happens when innovation becomes an established tradition?

Requirements

Written work for this course consists of two 7-page essays and three 2-page responses. 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

- * Jahan Ramazani et al, *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry* (2003)
- * Tan Lin, *BlipSoak01* (2003)

Course Policies

You’re permitted two absences. If you miss more than two 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

7-page Essays: 70% Participation: 15% 2-page Responses: 15%

Course Schedule

Introductions and Critical Overviews

T 2/10 Introduction to Contemporary U.S. Poetry
Th 2/12 James Merrill, “b o d y” (320); Amiri Baraka, “In the Funk World” (639);
Charles Bernstein, “Autonomy is Jeopardy” (910); Lorna Dee Cervantes,
“Cannery Town in August” (1010)

Subtlety and Experimentation: Elizabeth Bishop and Charles Olson

T 2/17 Elizabeth Bishop, “The Map,” “The Man-Moth,” “The Fish,” “Roosters,” “At the
Fishhouses” (17-19, 21-28)
Th 2/19 Bishop, “Sestina,” “The Armadillo,” “Brazil, January 1, 1502,” “In the Waiting
Room,” “Poem,” “One Art,” “North Haven” (30-36, 40-41, 43-44)

T 2/24 Charles Olson, “Pacific Lament,” “The Thing Was Moving,” “I, Maximus of
Gloucester, to You” (3-9)
Th 2/26 Olson, “Maximus, to Himself,” “Maximus, to Gloucester, Letter 19 (A Pastoral
Letter),” “Maximus to Gloucester, Letter 27 [Withheld],” “[Sun / Right in My
Eye] (9-15)

The New Criticism and Its Influence

T 3/2 Robert Lowell, “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket” (121-25); Richard Wilbur,
“Ceremony” (197)
Th 3/4 Gwendolyn Brooks, “A Song in the Front Yard,” “Sadie and Maud,” “Of De Witt
Williams on His Way to Lincoln Cemetery,” “The Vacant Lot,” “The Rites for
Cousin Vit,” “The Bean Eaters,” “We Real Cool,” “The Last Quatrain of Emmett
Till” (141-145)
***1st Response Due**

Variations on Open Form

T 3/9 Allen Ginsberg, “Howl” (337-344)
Th 3/11 Ginsberg, “Supermarket in California” (344-45); Denise Levertov, “Pleasures,”
“The Dog of Art,” “Song for Ishtar,” “The Ache of Marriage,” “September 1961”
(248-51)

T 3/16 Amiri Baraka, “In Memory of Radio,” “Ostriches & Grandmothers” (photocopy),
“An Agony. As Now,” “A Poem for Speculative Hipsters,” “A Poem for Black
Hearts,” “Legacy,” “Wise I,” “Y The Link Will Not Always Be ‘Missing’ #40,”
“Monk’s World” (634-40)
Th 3/18 Frank O’Hara, “Poem” (“The eager note on my door”), “Poem” (“At night
Chinamen jump”), “A Step Away from Them,” “The Day Lady Died” (362-65)
***1st Essay Due**

T 3/23 O’Hara, “Rhapsody,” “A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island,”
“Why I Am Not a Painter,” “Les Luths” (366-70)
Th 3/25 *BlipSoak01*: A Day of Ambient Reading

T 3/39 SPRING BREAK
Th 4/1 SPRING BREAK

Lyrical States of the Future, Present: John Ashbery

T 4/6 John Ashbery, "Some Trees," "The Instruction Manual," "The Tennis Court Oath," "These Lacustrine Cities," "Soonest Mended" (386-392)
Th 4/8 Ashbery, "Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape," "As One Put Drunk into the Packet-Boat," "Wet Casements," "Paradoxes and Oxymorons," "At North Farm," "Of the Light" (393-95, 406-08)

Degrees of Confessional Poetry

T 4/13 Lowell, "Waking in the Blue," "Memories of West Street and Lepke," "Skunk Hour," "For the Union Dead" (129-135)
Th 4/15 Ginsberg, "America" (347-49); Sylvia Plath, "Daddy," "Fever 103°," "Cut," "Poppies in October," "Ariel" (606-612)
 ***2nd Response Due**

T 4/20 Plath, "Morning Song," "Tulips," "The Arrival of the Bee Box," "The Applicant," "Lady Lazarus," "Edge" (598, 600-01, 604-06, 612-15); Audre Lorde, "Now that I Am Forever with Child" (617)
Th 4/22 Lorde, "Coal," "Love Poem," "From the House of Yemanjá," "Hanging Fire," "A Question of Climate" (616-20); Lorna Dee Cervantes, "The Body as Braille," "Refugee Ship," "Poema para los Californios Muertos" (1011-12)

Postconfessional L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E

T 4/27 Jorie Graham, "At Luca Signorelli's Resurrection of the Body," "Fission," "The Dream of the Unified Field," "The Surface," "The Swarm" (920-33)
Th 4/29 Charles Bernstein, "The Kiwi Bird in the Kiwi Tree," from "The Lives of the Toll Takers," "Have Pen, Will Travel" (910-15); Lynn Hejinian, from *My Life* (789-792)

T 5/4 *BlipSoak01*: Ambient Discussions
Th 5/6 *BlipSoak01*: Ambient Discussions

T 5/11 ***3rd Response Drafted in Class**
Th 5/13 Final Discussions

T 5/18 ***2nd Essay Due**