

Modern Poetry and the End of the World as We Knew It

English 332 (CRN 12555)

T-Th 1:30-2:45

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Office Hours: T-Th: 3-5pm. And by appointment.

Course Description:

Poetry in English during the period of the World Wars: chiefly Eliot, Pound, Frost, Williams, Stevens, Moore, Crane, Hughes, Auden. We will contemplate the inner working of the poems, keeping in mind the conceptual and historical contexts from which they arise. General concepts and (and specific phenomena) to be discussed: Destruction (War), Improvisation (Jazz), Plot and Disjunction (Cinema), Description (Photography), Abstraction (Nonrepresentational Art), Disclosure (Pornography), and Concealment (The Body's Unknowable Interior).

Goals and Basic Premises:

Why is it that poetry, in the half part of the twentieth century, had to remake itself so profoundly? Why is it that certain assumptions about poetic practice fell so abruptly out of favor? What formal, conceptual, aesthetic, and philosophical problems did the poets of this period face, as though for the first time? The goal of this course is to foster a deep engagement with the inner tensions and forces that motivated such profound changes in poetic art. The challenge you will be asked to face is the daunting task of finding illuminating critical and descriptive language (in your class comments, presentations, and essays) for works that frequently seemed utterly unrecognizable and unreadable to the literary public of the day. Our discussions will dedicate themselves primarily to the poems themselves, but we will bear in mind, at every point, the historical, social, and philosophical contexts that play their part in shaping the work.

Requirements:

Papers:

There will be four written assignments for this course (70% of final grade) . The first, due very soon, will be a diagnostic paper (3pp), which will not be graded but which we'll discuss in detail in person. The second will be brief (5pp) as will the third (also 5pp). A final project, 7-10pp, will incorporate some account of available secondary sources.

The virtues of a successful paper will include **incisiveness, imagination, clarity of thought, rhetorical command, stylistic grace, felicity of phrase, and perfection of surface.**

You will also be asked, from time to time, to present a poem or a topic to the class. These presentations will inaugurate our discussions every meeting, and will constitute an important element of your participation grade (which is 30% of your final mark). Presentations, while they do not need to be written out, should argue a point or formulate a distinct question about the work at hand. They should last 8-10 minutes. The other part of your participation will assess your willingness to make frequent and adventurous comments during discussion.

Extensions:

You may take an automatic extension on one assignment up to three days. You do not need to inform me in advance. All other work is due on the appointed day, by 5 pm. Late work will be downgraded by half a mark for each day that it is late. (If a paper is, say, three days late, it will not be eligible for a grade higher than a B.) Provided that you do not have any questions about this policy, please do not approach me about an extension unless you have already secured a written dispensation from your class dean or doctor. If you are obliged to turn work in after the deadline beyond the scope of the automatic extension, please append a note of explanation to the final draft. I, for my part, will return all written work within seven days of submission.

Conferences:

After our initial meeting, in which we'll discuss the diagnostic paper and your own goals for the course, you have a standing invitation to drop in during my office hours, or to schedule a meeting at a different time, whether to discuss concerns you have about the course, or any other issue that might arise.

Attendance:

Class will begin promptly at 1:30. More than two unexcused absences will drop your participation grade to zero. Arriving in class more than 10 minutes late constitutes an absence.

Text:

The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry. Eds. Ramazani, Ellmann, and O'Clair. 3rd edition. New York: Norton, 2003. Books are available at the Oberlin Bookstore.

Unless stipulated otherwise, the readings for each week will consist of the complete selections in the Norton for the assigned author.

Supplemental readings may be distributed from time to time.

2/7	1	Introduction/ Hopkins	
2/14	2	Hardy	
2/21	3	Yeats	First Paper, Diagnostic
2/28	4	Yeats	
3/7	5	Eliot	
3/14	6	Eliot	Second Paper
3/21	7	Crane	
3/28	8	SPRING BREAK	
4/4	9	Moore	
4/11	10	Frost	
4/18	11	Frost	Third Paper
4/25	12	Hughes	
5/2	13	Stevens	
5/9	14	Stevens	
5/16	15	Final Projects Due	Final