

ENGL 4360: Modern American Poetry, 1900-1950

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Spring 2009
TTh 3:30 – 4:50
Dallas Hall 137

Course Description: Do modern poems have meaning, and if so, how do we value them? How do readers relate to poems, and how do poems relate to a transforming world? This intensive, critical study of American poetry from the first half of the twentieth century examines these questions, paying special attention to the fascinating – and sometimes contested – concept of modernism in the age of modernity. We will study poetry, short prose and criticism in relation to the philosophical, political and cultural transformations of this exciting and tumultuous period, a time that included the Jazz Age, the Great Depression and two world wars. Authors studied include Eliot, Loy, Frost, Stein, Williams, Stevens, Toomer, Grinké, Moore and Hughes.

Aims and Goals:

1. Learn to analyze, interpret and write about a range – but certainly not the whole – of American “modernist” poetry from the first half of the twentieth-century. Discover some of the additional materials (i.e., the *OED*, contexts, biography, source material) critics use and employ them yourself when analyzing this poetry.
2. Become familiar with some of the major debates – both old and new – that critics make about these poems. Evaluate these debates for yourself and in class groups.
3. Critically engage with these critical discussions in shorter papers and exercises, taking your own positions on the debates. For the final longer paper, you will do more: through additional, individual research, you will identify a critical debate that you want to examine, study it thoroughly, and propose and take a position on this debate (or a modification of it).

Texts (books available at SMU bookstore):

1. *The New Anthology of American Poetry: Modernisms, 1900-1950*, ed. Axelrod, Roman and Travisano.
2. T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, ed. Michael North (Norton edition).
3. Selected materials to be distributed electronically via Blackboard and printed out by you.

Assignments and Grading: Grades will be determined by five brief (one-page) writing exercises, two short papers, a debate proposal and bibliography for the final essay, the final essay, an exam, participation and – if needed -- pop quizzes. All assignments are due at the beginning of class. For readings, please come to class prepared with notes, talking points, and questions. Written assignments should be error-free. Please note that I do not accept late work, nor do I allow re-writes. Computer or printer failure is not an excuse.

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| 1. Five 1-page writing exercises | 15% |
| 2. Two 4-5 page papers | 30% |
| 3. Debate proposal and bibliography | 10% |
| 4. Final 8-10 page paper | 20 % |
| 5. Exam | 15% |
| 6. Participation (& pop quizzes?) | 10% |

Attendance: Due to the demanding nature of the material and the rapid pace, I maintain a strict attendance policy. I will reduce grades by one whole letter grade for every unexcused absence after the first three absences. If you do miss class, refer to the syllabus to keep up with assignments. I also expect you to be in class *on time* (with cell phones off) for the *entire* class period. Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class should notify me in writing at the beginning of the semester, and should discuss with me, in advance, acceptable ways of making up any work missed because of the absence. (See University Policy No. 1.9.) Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity will be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with me prior to any missed scheduled examination or other missed assignment for making up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalogue.)

Essay Submission: Essays and assignments should be typed in a font similar to this one, double-spaced with one-inch margins all around. Please follow MLA style and documentation guidelines.

Plagiarism: From the *SMU Student Handbook*: “Intellectual integrity and academic honesty are fundamental to the processes of learning and of evaluating academic performance, and maintaining them is the responsibility of all members of an educational institution.” Fabrication (the falsification of work), collusion (working with others to misrepresent work), and plagiarism (knowingly representing the words or ideas of another as one’s own) are all serious breaches of SMU’s Honor Code. Any academically dishonest work will be failed automatically. Further action may be taken.

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first contact Ms. Rebecca Marin, Coordinator, Services for Students with Disabilities (214-768-4557) to verify the disability and establish eligibility for accommodations. They should then schedule an appointment with me to make appropriate arrangements. (See University Policy No. 2.4.)

And Finally: The structure of this course invites independent study and exploration beyond the constraints of the syllabus and the classroom. I encourage you to e-mail or visit me early and often to talk about your interests and questions. I am always happy to meet with students and to help them with their intellectual pursuits.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

T 1/20	<u>Introduction</u> . William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming” and Archibald MacLeish, “Ars Poetica.”
Th 1/22	<u>Analyzing Robert Frost</u> . Preface (Axelrod xxxi-xxxii) and Introduction, “First-Generation Modernisms” (1-8). Frost Intro (44-46), “The Pasture” (48), “Mending Wall” (48-9), “After Apple-Picking” (58-9), “Birches” (61-2). 1 st exercise assigned.
T 1/27	<u>Analyzing Frost with the OED</u> . “Desert Places,” “Design” and “Directive” (65-7), “The Figure a Poem Makes” (67-70). 1st exercise (1 page) due in class: Using the OED to Interpret “Design”
Th 1/29	<i>no class for us</i> – follows a Monday class schedule
T 2/3	<u>Debating Frost</u> . American Primitive or Wily Modernist Experimenter? “The Road Not Taken” (60-1); Selected, excerpted criticism of “The Road Not Taken”: Cowley, Pritchard, and Lentricchia (Bb).
Th 2/5	<u>Analyzing Eliot, Poetry and Prose</u> . Intro and “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Axelrod 389-98), “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (431-7), selections from Edgar Lee Masters, <i>Spoon River Anthology</i> (Bb). 2 nd exercise assigned.
T 2/10	<u>Reading Eliot in Context</u> . <i>The Waste Land</i> , parts I-III (North 5-15) and selections from “Contexts” (35-43, 46-58). Paper #1 assigned (Frost or Eliot). 2nd exercise (1 page) due in class: Contextualizing a section of <i>The Waste Land</i>
Th 2/12	<u>Analyzing Eliot, with (New) Criticism</u> . <i>The Waste Land</i> , cont., parts IV, V (North 16-20), Eliot’s Notes (21-26), from “Contexts” (59-63), Cleanth Brooks, “The Waste Land: An Analysis” (185-195, 209-210).
T 2/17	<u>Debating Eliot</u> . <i>The Waste Land</i> : Christian Allegory or Exhausted Epic? Ronald Bush, “Unknown Terror and Mystery” (North 246-256). Criticism chart due in class
Th 2/19	<u>Analyzing Wallace Stevens</u> . Intro (Axelrod 146-9), “Disillusionment at Ten O’Clock” (153), “Death of a Soldier” (156) “Anecdote of a Jar” (156) “Bantams in Pine-Woods” (158) “The Emperor of Ice Cream” (162).
T 2/24	<u>Group “Performance” of “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”</u> , “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (154-6).

Th 2/26	<u>Performing and Analyzing Stevens, cont.</u> Finishing group analysis of “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” “Connoisseur of Chaos” (165-6), “Of Modern Poetry” (166-7), “Large Red Man Reading” (167-8).
F 2/27	Paper #1 (4-5 pages) due FRIDAY, 2/27 at <u>noon</u> in my office
T 3/3	<u>Debating Stevens.</u> Is Stevens’s Poetry More Aesthetic or More Political? “Idea of Order at Key West” (163-5), Selected, excerpted criticism of “The Idea of Order at Key West”: Latimer, Vendler, Voros, Longenbach, Szalay (Bb) Paper #2 assigned (Stein or Stevens)
Th 3/5	Exam
3/10 & 3/12	<i>No class -- spring break – make good choices!</i>
T 3/17	<u>Analyzing Gertrude Stein in the Context of Modern Painting.</u> Intro and “Picasso” (89-96), “Matisse” (Bb), “Guillaume Apollinaire” (98), selection from <i>The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas</i> (Bb); <i>in-class</i> : paintings by Matisse and Picasso. 3 rd exercise assigned.
Th 3/19	<u>Analyzing Stein, with Criticism.</u> “Susie Asado” and “Preciosilla” (96-8), Mina Loy, “Gertrude Stein” (206), selection from Marjorie Perloff, “Poetry as Word-System: The Art of Gertrude Stein” (67-85, Bb) 3rd exercise (1 page) due in class: Analyzing Stein’s Portraiture
T 3/24	<u>Performing Stein.</u> “Objects” from <i>Tender Buttons</i> (Bb).
Th 3/26	<u>Debating Stein.</u> Is Stein Meaningless or Meaningful? Perloff (98-108); Kathryn Kent, “‘Excreate a no sense’ The Erotic Currency of Gertrude Stein’s <i>Tender Buttons</i> ” (139-165)
M 3/30	Paper #2 (4-5 pages) due MONDAY, 3/30 at <u>noon</u> in my office
T 3/31	<u>Analyzing Marianne Moore.</u> “A Jelly-Fish” “To Military Progress,” “Critics and Connoisseurs,” “The Fish,” “Poetry” (356-364). “In Distrust of Merits” (384-6) Paper #3 Assigned (Identifying your own critical debate and analyzing it: on Moore, Williams or Hughes, 8-10 pages)
Th 4/2	<u>Analyzing Moore.</u> “A Grave,” “Marriage,” “Silence,” “To Military Progress,” “The Steeple-Jack,” “The Pangolin” (364-377). 4 th exercise assigned
T 4/7	<u>Debating Moore, with Mina Loy.</u> Feminist or Lady Poetess? “The Paper Nautilus” (380-1), Mina Loy, “Feminist Manifesto” (Bb), Selected, excerpted criticism of “The Paper Nautilus”: Heuving, Schulman, Diehl, Sielke, Lin (Bb). 4th exercise (1 page) on Moore criticism due in class <i>*Meet with me this week to discuss your research and debate proposal ideas</i>

Th 4/9	<u>Analyzing William Carlos Williams, with Ezra Pound.</u> Intro (216-220), “Tract” (222-3), “The Great Figure” (226), “Spring and All” (227), “The Rose” (228-9), “The Red Wheelbarrow” (232), “This is Just to Say” (234), “The Locust Tree in Flower” (234), “The Danse” (238), Prose selection from <i>Spring and All</i> (252-7); Ezra Pound, “Prose” (294-5), “In a Station of the Metro” (267-8).
T 4/14	<u>Analyzing Williams, cont.</u> “Danse Russe” (224), “Portrait of a Lady” (225), “Queen Anne’s Lace” (225-6), “To Elsie” (230-2).
Th 4/16	<u>Debating Williams.</u> Fantasy or Parody? “The Young Housewife” (220). Selected, excerpted criticism of “The Young Housewife”: Nelson, Perloff, DuPlessis, Kinnahan (Bb)
F 4/17	Final Paper debate proposal and bibliography (3-4 pages) due FRIDAY, 4/17 at <u>noon</u> in my office.
T 4/21	<u>Analyzing Jean Toomer and Angelina Weld Grimké.</u> Toomer Intro, “Skyline,” “Reapers,” “November Cotton Flower,” “Song of the Son,” “Seventh Street,” “Her Lips Are Copper White” (511-519); Angelina Weld Grimké, Intro, “The Black Finger,” “Little Grey Dreams,” “Tenebris” (169-73). 5 th exercise assigned.
Th 4/23	<u>Analyzing Langston Hughes.</u> Intro, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “Danse Africaine,” “Jazzonia” (692-9), “The Weary Blues” (699-700), “Desire” (702), “Poem [2]” (702), “Goodbye Christ” (708-10); W.C. Hadley’s Blues lyrics (575-581). 5th exercise (1 page) on Hughes due in class
T 4/28	<u>Interpreting the Hughes/Schuyler Debate: Hokum or Art?</u> Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (711-716), George Schuyler “Negro Art Hokum” (Bb)
Th 4/30	Conclusions.
F 5/1	Paper #3 (8-10 pages) due FRIDAY, 5/1 at <u>noon</u> in my office