Modern Poetry: Craft and Revolution
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Office: Lillian Vernon Creative Writing Center, 58 West 10th Street  212-992-8816

COURSE NUMBER (w/ SECTION): FRSEM-UA X, section X

COURSE SCHEDULE: Tuesdays 11AM-1:30PM

This course will thrust students headlong into the dark cobwebby interiors of the modern poem. We’ll look closely at how modern poems became modern, looking at several revolutions in thinking about what poems are --- beginning in England in 1798, coming to Walt Whitman’s and Emily Dickinson’s America in the 1850s, stopping in Harlem in the 1920s and ending up online. We’ll look at how modern poems are actually put together, considering such elemental concerns as image, voice, structure, etc. And we'll also write our own poems, sometimes with these examples as our models. Students will leave this course with a deeper understanding of the lineage of the modern poem and what makes the modern poem go. And combined with the generous and critical attentions of the workshop, students will come to the same understanding of their own work.

The class is divided in two: We will go over the readings and sometimes do writing exercises based loosely on them in order to help us figure out what the authors are doing. And of course we'll also workshop your poems. In keeping with the college’s goals for you of Reading, Writing, Research and Public Speaking, this course will ask you to engage in all four; we will read poems, we will write poems and responses to them, we will research an area of modern poetry of your choosing, and you will present on that research, as well as present your own poems, to the class,

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Each of you should come to class ready to discuss the reading for that week. You’ll hand in 4-5 critical discussion questions about the reading. Not questions like “how many pages long is this?” but more like “how does Langston Hughes’ essay relate to Whitman’s preface to LEAVES OF GRASS?”. As a guideline, use the general topic for each class to guide your questions. Be analytical, look closely at structure, methods, techniques, etc
- You’ll also turn in 2 copies of a half page write-up for each of the poems up for discussion that day in workshop—one copy is to hand in to me, the other for the student who was workshopped.
- Participation, of course, is not only required, but necessary. A class like this simply doesn’t work without your participation.
- Shelley wrote ODE TO THE WEST WIND without electricity, so please – no phones or laptops. It’s just for a couple of hours. I won’t check my phone while we’re in class together; please don’t check yours.
YOUR GRADE WILL BE BASED ON:

- Participation. I’m not grading you on whether or not I think your poems are amazing. I’m grading you on your participation in our little community of learners. This includes showing up and being an active participant in our discussions, as well as handing in the write ups on the readings and workshop poems. Excused absences need a doctor’s or other appropriate note; more than 2 unexcused absences will lower your letter grade a half step (i.e.: B to B-). An absence on a day you are to be workshopped is so dreadful, let’s not find out what happens if you do this.

- A large part of your grade is turning in a poem each time you are up for workshop; that means turning it in on time the week BEFORE you are to be workshopped. That means papers copies for all of us, in class the week before your workshop. Emailing it late is an annoyance and a slippery slope, and will not be tolerated. THIS IS INFLEXIBLE. If you do not bring a hard copy of your poem the week before you are to be workshopped, you will not be workshopped. If we don’t get all of the poems for the next week, that next week’s class will be shorter. And the atmosphere will be icy and full of recriminations, don’t you think?

- If you are absent on the day your hard copy poem is due, you may email it to the class (via NYUCLASSES or whatever) until 5PM that day. If we don’t get it by 5PM, we won’t workshop it, and you won’t get credit for it.

- Your final research paper. This will be loosely based on our exploration over the course of the semester of the notion of the Demotic in poetry. We will discuss this further during the semester. The paper should be about 5-7 pages.

POINT BREAKDOWN

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<th>Item</th>
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<td>Attendance</td>
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<td>Paragraphs on your classmates' poems:</td>
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<td>Critical Discussion Questions:</td>
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<td>Your poems for workshop:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
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<td>TOTAL POINTS:</td>
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DISABILITY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

DIFFICULT MATERIAL

We will always assume the speaker in a poem is fictional; it's the polite thing to do. However, if the nature of your creative work is particularly disturbing, or seems to be a cry for help, I am going to email you to make sure all is well. If you would like to send me an email putting this work in context before submitting, please do. Also it should be taken for granted that the basis of all art is conflict and that you may be exposed to challenging subjects or language while reading poems. Please see me or contact me if you have any concerns.

And remember that the NYU Wellness Center is always there for you. The NYU Wellness Exchange Hotline can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at (212) 443-9999.

THE WORKSHOP

It'll work like this: We'll write out at least half a page of comments on each poem to hand to the poet after we're done discussing the poem. You will also give one to me. During discussion, you can read from your paragraph if you like, but you don't need to. This is to make sure you have thought out your ideas on the poem's strengths and weaknesses, and it's also something the poet can return to later, to digest, and use what's useful.

The comments should begin by focusing on what is working in the poem; what its strengths are. Then you should make suggestions for how the poem could be even more successful.

I'll divide the class into groups for the workshop so you'll always know what day your poem is due.

On the first day of class, we will go over the workshop model, how to think about and comment on poems, and some of the major poetic terms I'll want you to use.

Your poem should in some way reflect the reading(s) for the week; they can be imitations of the poems, or use the same form, or deal with the same subject matter. Please come to class prepared to talk to us about how you did this.
If you all bring generous and empathetic readings of your colleague’s poems to this course, it will be an exciting and generative experience for everyone.

There is much to be learned about how poems work or don't from listening to and participating in everyone’s discussion --- perhaps more than you can get from discussion of your own poems. I expect everyone to bring a collegial sense of constructive criticism to the class. Just like I will.

Office Hours

My office is on the 3rd floor in the back of the Lillian Vernon Creative Writing Center (58 West 10th Street). Office hours are Tues 4-5 and Thurs 12-3. There’s a sign up sheet on my door. If you can’t make these times but need to see me, we can work something out.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Week 1

Introduction/stuff/things – poetic terms; Haiku & Stevens divide into workshop groups
Homework: read introduction to SLEEPING ON THE WING plus Lyrical Ballads

Week 2

Lyrical Ballads + Coleridge Conversation Poems [handouts] + Gray/Collins examples [handouts] + Practice Workshop/ Go Over Workshop Rubric
Group 1 turns in poems

Week 3

Whitman: Song of Myself from SLEEPING ON THE WING/The Sleepers+ Preface [handouts]
Workshop Group 1

Week 4

Emily Dickinson from SLEEPING ON THE WING+ letter to TW Higginson [handout]
Workshop Group 2
Week 5

William Carlos Williams vs Eliot from SLEEPING ON THE WING + [several handouts]
Workshop Group 3

Week 6

Whitman’s descendants: Ginsberg HOWL + Frank O’Hara from SLEEPING ON THE WING + even better Frank O’Hara poems [handouts]
Workshop Group 1

Week 7

Workshop Group 2

Week 8

Harlem Renaissance as Whitman descendants
read INTRODUCTION; Hughes p.92-95; Bennett p.221-223; Cullen p.242-251; Hughes p. 256-270; McKay p. 289-298
Workshop Group 3

Week 9

Workshop Group 1

Week 10

Collage/Flarf --Goldsmith essay + Flarf online discussion [handouts]
Workshop Group 2

Week 11

Language As Material – Gertrude Stein + John Yau [handout]
Workshop Group 3
Week 12
Erasure—Visual Language? NETS, A LITTLE WHITE SHADOW, RED
Workshop Group 1

Week 13
Revision – Bishop; Wright; Wilco [handouts+ in class]
Workshop Group 2

Week 14
Last Day of Class
Workshop Group 3; Final Exam