The history of modern American poetry is a queer one. In this course, we will look to the enduring presence of queer poets throughout different periods, movements and aesthetics in American poetry to understand how queerness has functioned as a constitutive force within our canon. Our title refers to works by Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, whose contrasting expressions of queer selfhood will serve as our point of departure; from there, we will read our way up to the contemporary poetic moment. Throughout, we will interrogate notions of queerness, Americanness, and history with the help of critical texts from multiple disciplines, presupposing that we cannot consider questions of sexuality or gender without considering questions of race, ethnicity, and class. We’ll also write some poems.

**Grading**

*Responses: 30%*

Each week, you will write a response to the assigned reading: six of these responses must be critical reflections (2–3 pages); for the remaining six, you must submit a new poem that engages in some way with what we are reading and/or discussing in class. I will consider the quality and timely completion of these responses in my assessment of them, in addition to your effort.

*Recitation: 10%*

Throughout the semester (on a schedule to be determined), each student must memorize and recite a poem (or an excerpt from a long poem) of at least 14 lines.

*Final Paper: 35%*

At the end of the semester, you will write a research paper on a queer poet of your choosing, considering their work through the lens of one or more of the critical texts assigned.

*Final portfolio 25%*

Along with your final paper, you’ll also submit a short portfolio containing revised versions of the six poems you submitted throughout the semester, based on the feedback you will have received from me and your classmates.

*Attendance and Participation: 10%*
Week 1: Dickinson & Whitman // & What Do We Mean When We Say “Queer”

In Class:

Poems by Emily Dickinson
Poems by Walt Whitman

“What’s Queer?” by Eve Sedgwick (from Tendencies, 4-9)

Selections from "My Emily Dickinson" by Mary Ruefle (from Madness, Rack, and Honey, 143-182)

“We Fathom You Not—We Love You”: Walt Whitman’s Social Ontology and Radical Democracy” by Ryan Cull (from Criticism vol. 56 no. 4, 761-780)

Reading:

“Neither Lesbian nor Straight: Multiple Eroticisms in Emily Dickinson’s Love Poetry” by Sylvia Henneberg (from The Emily Dickinson Journal vol. 4 no. 2, 1-19)

“Amplitude of Queer Desire in Dickinson’s Erotic Language” by Suzanne Juhasz (from The Emily Dickinson Journal vol. 14, no. 2, 24-33)

“The American Renaissance” by Gregory Woods (from The History Of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition, 151-166)


Week 2: What Do We Mean When We Say “American”

In Class:

Discussion of Readings

“From Whitman to Walmart” by CA Conrad (from Harriet, 1-6)

Poems by Paula Gunn Allen
Poems by Natalie Diaz
Poems by Tommy Pico
Poems by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (“Suspend, Singer Swan,” “The Ripcord of Love,” “You Foolish Men,” “Love Opened a Mortal Wound,” “Since I Am Condemned”) Poems by Eduardo C. Corral (from Slow Lightning)

Reading:

“The Homeland, Aztlán,” “Movimientos de rebeldía ya las culturas que traicionan,” and “Entering Into the Serpent” by Gloria Anzaldúa (from Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza, 1-39)

“We Other Victorians” and “The Incitement of Discourse” by Michel Foucault (from The History Of Sexuality Vol. 1, 3-13, 17-35)

“Before Heterosexuality” by Jonathan Ned Katz (from The Invention of Heterosexuality, 33-55)

**Week 3: Form & Resistance // Complicating Queerness**

Discussion of Anzaldúa, Foucault & Katz

In-Class:

“Witch-Wife” and “Sonnet II” by Edna St. Vincent Millay
“The Lost Pardner” by Badger Clark
H.D. (“Eurydice” “Cities” “All Mountains”)

Gertrude Stein & The Avant Garde Impulse (Selections from Stein’s Tender Buttons)

Reading:

“The Harlem Renaissance” by Gregory Woods (from The History Of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition, 209-216)

“Cross-Dressing Harlem, Re-Dressing Race” by Anne Stavney (127-155)


Foreword to Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the Work of Richard Bruce Nugent by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (xi-xii)
“You See, I Am Homosexual” and “Shadow” by Richard Bruce Nugent (from *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the Work of Richard Bruce Nugent*, 268-272)

Poems by Angelina Weld Grimké
Poems by Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, (“You! Inez!,” “To the Negro Farmers of the United States”)
Poems by Claude McKay (“After the Winter,” “I Know My Soul,” “The Barrier,” “The City’s Love,” “America,” “Joy in the Woods” etc)
Poems by Countee Cullen (“To The Swimmer,” “Epitaphs,” “I Have a Rendezvous with Life”)
Poems by Langston Hughes (“Poem to FS,” “Cafe: 3AM,” etc.)

*Week 4: The Queer Harlem Renaissance*

In Class:

Discussion of Readings

scenes from *Looking for Langston*, dir. Isaac Julien

“Tain’t Nobody’s Bizness What I Do” by Bessie Smith

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cngx_KKiWE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cngx_KKiWE)

*Workshop Group 1*

Reading:

“Jelly Jelly Jellyroll: Lesbian Sexuality In Women’s Blues” by Maria V. Johnson (31-52)

“Elizabeth Bishop,’ “Sonnet” by Lloyd Schwartz (from *The Atlantic*)

*Week 5: Mid-Century Queers*

Poems by W.H. Auden (“The Platonic Blow (A Day For A Lay)”)
Poems by James Merrill
Poems by Elizabeth Bishop (“The Fish,” “The Shampoo,” “One Art,” “In the Waiting Room,” “Sonnet”)

*Workshop Group 2*
Reading:

“The Homosexual and the Beat Generation” by Wallace de Ortega Maxey (from ONE)

“On the Road: The Original Scroll; Or, We’re Not Queer, We’re Just Beats” by Dan Napelee

Week 6: The Beats

In Class:

Poems by Allen Ginsberg (“Howl,” “America,” “Sunflower Sutra,” “A Supermarket in California,” etc.)

*Workshop Group 3*

Reading:

“Personism: A Manifesto” by Frank O’Hara

“Queer Culture & Popular Representation” by Diane Raymond

Week 7: The New York School & Its Resonances

Poems by Frank O’Hara (“Ode to Joy,” “Homosexuality,” “Avenue A,” “Now That I Am In Madrid and Can Think,” etc.)

Poems by John Ashbery

Poems by James Schuyler

Poems by James Baldwin

Poems by Eileen Myles

Poems by Tim Dlugos

Poems by David Trinidad

Reading:

“The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House” by Audre Lorde (from Sister Outsider, 110-114)

“Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” by Adrienne Rich (375-377)
Week 8: The Personal Is Political: 1970s

In Class:

Poems by Audre Lorde
Poems by Adrienne Rich (“Diving Into The Wreck”)
Poems by Marilyn Hacker
Poems by Eileen Myles

Poems by James L. White
Miguel Piñero & The Nuyorican Poets Cafe

*Workshop Group 1*

Reading:

Excerpts from In the Company of My Solitude

Week 9: Queer Mourning: Poetry of the HIV & AIDS Epidemic

Poems by Tim Dlugos, Essex Hemphill, Reinaldo Arenas, Assoto Saint, Mark Doty, Michael Klein, Tory Dent, Marie Howe, and John Ashbery

*Workshop Group 2*

Reading:

Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity by José Muñoz (1-234)

Week 10: History & Futurity

In Class:

Discussion of Cruising Utopia

*Workshop Group 3*

Reading:

Preface of Sad Girl Poems by Christopher Soto (7-11)
Week 11: Contemporary Queer Poets // Queer Lineages

Carl Phillips, Jericho Brown, Rickey Laurentiis

Gertrude Stein, Kay Ryan, Brenda Shaughnessy, Dawn Lundy Martin, Sophia Le Fraga

Frank O’Hara, Ginsberg, Paul Legault, Alex Dimitrov, Andrew Durbin

Timothy Liu, Richard Siken, Danez Smith, Saeed Jones, Ocean Vuong

Eduardo C. Corral, Christopher Soto

Week 12: Contemporary Queer Poets // Troubling the Line

Selections from Troubling the Line (poems by Trace Peterson, CA Conrad, TC Tolbert, Joy Ladin, and Eileen Myles)

Week 13: Queer Failure: The Future of Queer Futurity

Chapter 3 from The Queer Art of Failure by Jack Halberstam (89-121)

Chapters from Disidentifications by José Muñoz

Week 14: Farewell Reading