

English 330: Modern American Poetry  
Hendrix College, Spring 2015

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It's not necessarily a search for truth as much as a search for confrontation. And I'm talking about confronting that which is real, by finding that which is inside oneself. So I've pretty much defined poetry for myself as a celebration and confrontation.... The celebration is that we care to describe something a hundred different ways. I'm willing to observe an insect, I'm willing to observe someone playing basketball, putting the whole body and mind into that observation and consequently getting even closer to the experience, in a sense.... I don't want it to influence, I want it to be an instrument of meditation. I want it to be understood. I want people, at least momentarily, to be willing to embrace it.... Certain things we are not going to understand immediately and that's fine, but if we reenter the territory of the poem with care, with insistence, with love, then we understand it. We don't necessarily have to understand it a certain way. We understand it in relationships to who we are. What we've brought to it.

--Yusef Komunyakaa

## **Description**

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the poetry of American modernism—chronologically speaking, roughly the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—as well as a sampling of more contemporary current poets, especially as they are in conversation with their immediate forebears. Given the extent and richness of the subject, the course will be suggestive rather than inclusive or even thoroughly representative. In order to gain as much from this course as possible, you must actively engage the course content. While short lectures by the professor will certainly occur, student interaction—with the poems and supplementary reading material, with classmates, with the instructor, with your own imaginations and critical eye—will constitute the primary course activity.

In terms of pages, your reading amount is far less than in a prose-based course. You will need to attend to the poems. Reread them more than once and study them. Read the headnote about the poet (or check out the poet online for those not in our book). In addition, you will be required to write a fair number of short exercises in preparation for class conversation and for your three formal essays. We will spend time on your essays, through conferences and peer workshops. But you should be working ahead, beginning your drafts in the week or weeks prior to their due date.

## **Texts**

- ✎ Cary Nelson, ed., *Anthology of American Poetry*
- ✎ Carolyn Forché, *The Country Between Us*
- ✎ Brian Turner, *Here, Bullet*
- ✎ other texts, online or otherwise made available
- ✎ poetry volume of your choosing for Essay 3

## Requirements

☞ *Class Participation*: Class participation is mandatory. Tardiness will be reflected in the class participation grade. The class participation grade includes active participation in class activities, assessed subjectively. Read the headnote about each poet; think about the poems, spend time with them, and come to class prepared to share. I will occasionally be more specific in class preparation instructions.

Have a printed copy of all texts for class discussion.

☞ *Writing Exercises*: You will complete a series of these over the course of the semester, each constituting a progression leading up to an essay. The assignments will be presented in class. These are short: at least two full but no more than three pages (MLA). They will be graded on a ✓ / ✓- system, based on perceived level of effort. Worry about ideas and their best expression; do not worry so much about form and structure. This is a space for ideas to be explored.

☞ *Essays*: Three formal essays. The full assignments will be presented in class:

Idea and Image. This essay will work with the essays and poems studied in roughly the first third of the course.

He Says / She Says. Write about rival or conversing poems, from two different poets, which we have studied. Your essay will fully account for the rivalry or conversation.

Secrets of the Poet's Mind. You will choose a single-author poetry volume, possibly a short book of selected poetry, by a poet we studied in class, and write an essay revealing what you believe to be central to our understanding of the writer's mind and aesthetic sensibility.

☞ *Final Exam*: The exam content TBD—most likely identification and short explication.

## Grades

Class Participation	15%	Essay 1	15%
Writing Exercises	15%	Essay 2	20%
Exam	15%	Essay 3	20%

## **Other Policies**

- ☒ Drinks are permitted in class, but no food. No hats, either, except for religious headgear.
- ☒ The syllabus is subject to revision as the course progresses.
- ☒ *Disabilities*: It is the policy of Hendrix College to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law. Any student who needs accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the instructor at the beginning of the course. In order to receive accommodations, students with disabilities are directed to contact Julie Brown in Academic Support Services at 505-2954 or brownj@hendrix.edu.
- ☒ *Email*: Email will be used to contact the entire class for communicating changes to the syllabus and other matters. Check your Hendrix account daily.
- ☒ *Academic Integrity*: Intellectual dishonesty will not be tolerated. See the academic integrity statement and policy in the student handbook. Frequently, errors in documentation and attribution are not deliberate attempts to pass another's ideas and words off as one's own, but rather misunderstandings of how to give that other person sufficient credit. Please consult with me on any potential confusion so we can avoid problems.
- ☒ *Late essays*: Late essays are not accepted. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must consult me at least one week prior to the paper's due date (except in the case of actual emergencies, of course). Otherwise, you will lose three points for every day they are late. The clock begins ticking when class begins the day the essay is due.
- ☒ *Essay Format*: All submitted essays must follow the MLA style for format, documentation, and bibliography. Specifically:
  - ☒ MLA format: 12 point font, with serifs. 1" margins all around (campus MS Word default is 1.5" left margin. No cover sheet. No folders. Attach pages with a staple (which I will not provide—unstapled papers will not be accepted). Page numbers must appear in the upper right corner of each page except the first. All papers must have a title and a "Works Cited" section.
  - ☒ Exceptions to MLA format: Single-space the name/course/date/professor information on the first page. 1.5-space block/indented quotations. If you have room, add your entire "Works Cited" section at the bottom of your last page.
  - ☒ MLA documentation: MLA calls for parenthetical documentation, not footnotes or endnotes. Consult any recent English handbook, the *MLA Handbook* in the library, or the online guide linked via the English Department's website. *Rule of thumb*: *Given the context of the surrounding passage and the bibliography listing, include the absolute minimum amount of information necessary within the parentheses.*

1	Wed, 21 Jan	Moore, "Poetry" (250); George Steiner, "An Uncommon Reader"
<b>1&gt; Idea and Image</b>		
2	Fri, 23 Jan	☒ 1913 Armory Show ( <i>consult at least two online sources</i> ) ☒ Belitt, "'Sight: Second or Sudden—Versions of Witness" ☒ Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow" (170)
3	Mon, 26 Jan	☒ all of <a href="#">Spring and All</a> ☒ WE 1
4	Wed, 28 Jan	Pound, "Portrait d'une Femme" (205); Eliot, " <a href="#">Portrait of a Lady</a> "; Williams, "Portrait of a Lady" (165); Dunbar-Nelson, "I Sit and Sew" (105)
5	Fri, 30 Jan	Rich, " <a href="#">Vesuvius at Home</a> "; " <a href="#">Snapshots-of-a-Daughter-In-Law</a> "
6	Mon, 2 Feb	Frost, " <a href="#">The Figure a Poem Makes</a> "; "After Apple-Picking" (88), "The Wood-Pile" (89), "Birches" (90)
7	Wed, 4 Feb	Frost, "Home Burial" (85), "The Witch of Coös" (97); " <a href="#">Out, Out</a> "
8	Fri, 6 Feb	Sandburg, "Chicago" (107); Cummings, "in Just—" (344), "my sweet old etcetera" (348); Williams, "The Yachts" (192);
9	Mon, 9 Feb	☒ HD (235+); "Oread", "Sea Rose", "Garden," "Helen" ☒ WE 2
10	Wed, 11 Feb	Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sounds of Words"; "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" (127), "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock" (131), "Peter Quince at the Clavier" (133)
11	Fri, 13 Feb	Stevens, "Anecdote of the Jar" (130), "The Idea of Order at Key West" (138)
12	Mon, 16 Feb	☒ Hendrix closed (ice) ☒ WE 3 (by email)
<b>2&gt; He Says / She Says</b>		
13	Wed, 18 Feb	☒ Stevens, "Sunday Morning" (135) ☒ <i>See also Moore, "Marriage" (###)</i>
14	Fri, 20 Feb	Brooks, " <a href="#">The Anniad</a> " from <i>Annie Allen</i>
15	Mon, 23 Feb	Rich, "Twenty-One Love Poems" (945)
16	Wed, 25 Feb	Essay 1 Draft Workshop
17	Fri, 27 Feb	☒ Essay 1 due ☒ McKay, "The Harlem Dancer" (315), "The Tropics in New York" (502); "America" (503), "A Midnight Woman to her Bobby" <i>For the curious: Lindsay, "The Congo" (115); Sandburg, "Nigger" (109)</i>
18	Mon, 2 Mar	☒ Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (503), "The Weary Blues" (504); "Danse Africaine," "Harlem" (523) ☒ WE 4
19	Wed, 4 Mar	Tate, "Ode to the Confederate Dead" (409)
20	Fri, 6 Mar	Lowell, "For the Union Dead" (759); Young, " <a href="#">For the Confederate Dead</a> "
21	Mon, 9 Mar	<a href="#">Spanish Civil War</a> ; Hughes, "Letter from Spain" (517), " <a href="#">Negroes in Spain</a> " Young, "Un Chien Andalou" & "Guernica"
22	Wed, 11 Mar	Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (278)

23	Fri, 13 Mar	reading/writing day	
24	Mon, 16 Mar	☒ Brooks, " <a href="#">The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith</a> " ☒ WE 5	
25	Wed, 18 Mar	Eliot, "The Waste Land" (285)	
26	Fri, 20 Mar	Eliot, "The Waste Land" (285)	
23-27 Mar		Spring Break and All	
27	Mon, 30 Mar	Ginsburg, "Howl" (848)	
28	Wed, 1 Apr	Ginsburg, "Wichita Vortex Sutra" (857)	
29	Fri, 3 Apr	Brooks, "Gay Chaps at the Bar" (768); Young, "Elegy for Miss Brooks"	conferences
<b>3&gt; Secrets of the Poet's Mind</b>			
30	Mon, 6 Apr	Moore, " <a href="#">Critics and Connoisseurs</a> ", "The Fish" (252) "No Swan So Fine" (269),	
31	Wed, 8 Apr	☒ Moore, "The Pangolin" (269) ☒ <i>for the curious: Bishop, "The Armadillo" (638), Lowell, "Skunk Hour" (757)</i> ☒ WE 6	
32	Fri, 10 Apr	draft workshop	
33	Mon, 13 Apr	Essay 2 due	
34	Wed, 15 Apr	Forché, <i>The Country Between Us</i>	
	Thursday	Forché evening lecture/reading	
35	Fri, 17 Apr	Forché class visit?	
36	Mon, 20 Apr	reading/writing day	
37	Wed, 22 Apr	Turner, <i>Here, Bullet</i>	
38	Fri, 24 Apr	☒ Turner class visit ☒ WE 7	
24-26 Apr		Arkansas Literary Festival <i>poets include Quan Barry, Brian Turner, Jessica Jacobs, etc.</i>	
39	Mon, 27 Apr	writing day	conferences
40	Wed, 29 Apr	draft workshop	
41	Fri, 1 May	writing day	
42	Mon, 4 May	Essay 3 due	
	Tue, 5 May	Reading Day	
	Wed, 13 May 8:30-11:30	Final Exam	