

Reading Poetry

Chuck Carlise

This course will present the act of reading and writing poetry as a conversation—or more directly, a series of possible conversations. The first half of the course will explore three debates in the poetry world that critics and writers have been parsing for the last few years: the spoken word vs. the written word, the Romantic tradition vs. the Modernist, and the narrative tradition vs. what Stephen Burt has called “the elliptical.” These weeks will begin with a day of reading and discussion on one side of the debate, then a day on the opposite side, with a third day to debate the difference, using a critical argument essay as a launch. After the mid-term in week five, the final four weeks will consider poetry as four conversations poets engage: with the self, with an “other,” with the socio-political world, and with the eternal. Essays by T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Susan B.A. Somers Willet, and Tony Hoagland will inform the discussions, but the bulk of the course will be devoted to reading poetry and applying ideas to the poems themselves. As the calendar below indicates, the course includes a week of establishing a common vocabulary for discussing poems, as well as a week at mid-term and finals to review before exams or papers are due. Students will also be expected to present the work of a poet of their choosing at the conclusion of the course.

Ultimately, this is a class on textual analysis and strategies for reading poetry. Applying concepts is more important than memorizing, so exams and papers will be demonstrative in nature—asking students to consider poems they likely have not encountered before through various lenses we’ve established. It is my hope that students will emerge as sharper, more succinct readers of poetry, but also with a greater love of the genre.

Attached:

Grading Summary
Course Calendar

Grading Summary

Participation	30%	<i>* includes participation in weekly course blog</i>
Mid-Term Essay Exam	20%	
Mid-Term Essay	20%	
Final Paper	20%	
<u>Quizzes</u>	<u>10%</u>	<i>*one scheduled quiz, plus occasional reading quizzes</i>
	100	

Please note: I’ve configured the following calendar for three class meetings per week, but it could easily be rescheduled for two meetings. There are also other debates that could be added or substituted for the ones I’ve chosen (for example: “enacted” vs “embodied verse,” or “formal” vs “free verse,” or “Confessional” replacing “narrative” in week 4).

CALENDAR:

Week 1

How to talk about poetry / how to read poetry

- Mon. Syllabus & Course Discussion
- Wed. Terms & Ideas
Essay: Robert Frost – “The Shape a Poem Makes”
- Fri. Applying those terms & Ideas
Reading: Robert Hayden – “Those Winter Sundays”
Matthea Harvey – “Pity the Bathtub its Forced Embrace of the Human Form”
Philip Larkin – “Church Going”
Adrienne Rich – “Diving into the Wreck”
Richard Wilbur – “Love Calls Us to the Things of the World”
Quiz: Poetry Terms

Week 2

Spoken Word vs Written Word

- Mon. Spoken Word
Listening: Shira Erlichman – “Daddy’s Parking Lot Sermon”
Jack Kerouac – “San Francisco Scene”
Anis Mojgani – “For Those Who Can Ride in an Airplane for the First Time”
Patricia Smith – “For John Coltrane”
Saul Williams – “Five Senses”
Reading: Sterling Brown – “Memphis Blues”
Langston Hughes – “Weary Blues”
- Wed. Written Word
Reading: Gwendolyn Brooks – “We Real Cool”
Fred Chappell – “Narcissus and Echo”
D. A. Powell – [listen mother, he punched the air: I am not your son dying]
William Shakespeare – from *Romeo and Juliet*
William Carlos Williams – “Spring and All”
- Fri. The Debate...
Essay: Susan B.A. Sommers Willet – “Can Slam Poetry Matter?”

Week 3

The Romantic vs the Modernist

- Mon. Background: Romanticism
Reading: Samuel Taylor Coleridge – “Kubla Khan”
John Keats – “Ode to a Nightingale; This Living Hand”
Percy Shelley – “Ozymandias”
William Wordsworth – “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey”
Essay: John Keats – excerpt from *Letters* (on negative capability)
- Wed. Background: Modernism
Reading: T.S. Eliot – “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”
Ezra Pound – “In a Station of the Metro”
Gertrude Stein – excerpt from *Tender Buttons*
Wallace Stevens – “Anecdote of the Jar”
William Carlos Williams – “Between Buildings”
Essay: T.S. Eliot – excerpts from “The Metaphysical Poets” & “Tradition & the Individual Talent”
- Fri. The Debate...

Week 4

The Narrative vs The Elliptical

- Mon. Background: Narrative Tradition
Reading: Samuel Amadon – “Asylum Avenue”
W.H. Auden – “September 1, 1939”
Robert Hass – “The World as Will and Representation”
Terrance Hayes – “Talk”
Dorianne Laux – “Fast Gas”
Frank O’Hara – “The Day Lady Died”
- Wed. Background: Elliptical Poetry
Reading: Emily Dickinson – “Wild Nights! Wild Nights!”
Emily Dickinson – “I Like the Look of Agony”
Ruaon Klassnik – from *Holy Land*
Ben Lerner – from *Angle of Yaw*
Dean Young – “To Those of You Alive in the Future”
Essay: Stephen Burt – “The Elliptical Poets”
- Fri. The Debate...
Essay: Tony Hoagland, “The Dean Young Effect”

Week 5

Review & Midterm

- Mon. Review for Mid-term
- Wed. Mid-term (in class)
- Fri. Writing Day

Week 6

Conversations with the Self

- Mon. Self, Directly
Reading: Kim Addonizio – “The Singing”
Lucille Clifton – “Homage to My Hips”
Terrance Hayes – “Blue Terrace”
Etheridge Knight – “Welcome Back, Mr. K, Love of My Life”
James Wright – “Lying in a Hammock on William Duffy’s Farm...”
- Wed. Self in Confrontation
Reading: Robert Browning – “A Toccatta of Galuppi’s”
Stephen Dobyns – “How to Like It”
Yusef Komunyakaa – “Nude Interrogation”
Sharon Olds – “Satan Says”
Joe Wenderoth – “First Impression”
- Fri. Self as Definition
Reading: Rae Armantrout – “Two, Three”
Philip Larkin – “High Windows”
W.S. Merwin – “Some Last Questions”
Sylvia Plath – “Lady Lazarus”
Anne Sexton – “With Mercy for the Greedy”
James Tate – “Teaching the Ape to Write Poems”

Week 7

Conversations with an Other

- Mon. The Absent Other
Reading: Anne Bradstreet – “A Letter to Her Husband...”
Paul Monnet – “No Goodbyes”
Ruth Stone – “Curtains”
James L. White – “Making Love to Myself”
Margaret Atwood – “Variations on the Word Sleep”
- Wed. In Alter Ego/Persona
Reading: Ai – “She Didn’t Even Wave”
Nick Flynn – “Emptying Town”
Jeremy Glazier – “To Harcamone, as Genet”
Jeffrey McDaniel – “The Quiet World”
John Yau – “Borrowed Love Poems”
- Fri. The Other, Under Pressure
Reading: Louise Gluck – “The Mirror”
Marie Howe – “The Attic”
George Merideth – “XXX”
Pablo Neruda – “Your Feet”
Cesare Pavese – “Words for a Girlfriend”
Theodore Roethke – “My Papa’s Waltz”

Week 8**Conversations with the World**

- Mon. World in Motion/Anecdote
Reading: Sherman Alexie – “The Exaggeration of Despair”
Countee Cullen – “Incident”
Lawrence Ferlinghetti – “Dog”
Thomas Hardy – “Channel Firing”
Alice Notley – from *Decent of Alette*
- Wed. World as Addressee/Monolog
Reading: Gwendolyn Brooks – “Song for the Front Yard”
Marilyn Chin – “Portrait of Self as Nation, 1990-1991”
Allen Ginsberg – “America”
Robert Lowell – “For the Union Dead”
Hayan Charara – “Animals”
Claudia Rankine – from *Citizen*
- Fri. World as Listener/3rd Party
Reading: Carolyn Forché – “The Colonel”
Larry Levis – “Oldest Living Thing in L.A.”
Les Murray – “The Cows on Killing Day”
Patricia Smith – “34”
Joe Wenderoth – “Detailed History of the Western World”

Week 9**Conversations with the Universe**

- Mon. Meaning & Insignificance
Reading: A.R. Ammons – “So I Said I Am Ezra”
Stephen Crane – “A Man Said to the Universe”
Gerard Manly Hopkins – “God’s Grandeur”
Ranier Maria Rilke – “First Elegy”
Gary Snyder – “Why Log Truck Drivers Rise Earlier than Students of Zen”
- Wed. On Death
Reading: Paul Celan – “Death Fugue”
Emily Dickinson – “Because I Could Not Stop for Death”
Mark Doty – “Tiara”
Thom Gunn – “The Annihilation of Nothing”
Brigit Pegeen Kelly – “Song”
Dylan Thomas – “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Goodnight”
C.K. Williams – “Fragment”
- Fri. Life as a Situation
Reading: Ashley Capps – “April”
Edward Hirsch – “Wild Gratitude”
Galway Kinnell – “Why Regret?”
Maurice Manning – “A Condensed History of Beauty”
Kent Shaw – “I Can’t Believe We Could Take a Train Into the Earth”

Week 10

Catching Up & Tying Loose Ends

Mon. Presenting on Final Paper
Wed. Presenting on Final Paper
Fri. Evaluations and Close-Down Discussion

Week 11

Finals Week

***Final Paper Due**