JEFFERSON COLLEGE
COURSE SYLLABUS

INACTIVE COURSE, AS OF 2006-2007 PROGRAM REVIEW

ENG255H
HONORS POETRY: POEMS AND THEIR MAKERS

3 Credit Hours

Prepared by:
John A. White

Revised Date: February 2000
by
John Pleimann

Arts & Science Education
Dr. Mindy Selsor, Dean
ENG255H HONORS POETRY: POEMS AND THEIR MAKERS

I. CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION

Prerequisite: None
3 semester hours credit

Honors Poetry: Poems and their Makers includes the lives of influential American modernists from Whitman to Plath. Students relate essential elements that contribute to poetry’s insights and possibilities, with Voices and Visions sources. (F,S)

II. GENERAL COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

A. Understand and discuss important biographical influences on the following American poets: Whitman, Dickinson, Frost, Pound Eliot, W.C. Williams, Hughes, Bishop, Robert Lowell, Plath.

B. Understand the following poetic elements within the individual poem: image, sound and rhythm, structure, and theme.

C. Keep a journal for notations and comments on daily observation as to poetic possibility and insights into poems read.

D. Show skill as a critical reader by demonstrating an awareness of language, its denotative and connotative meanings.

E. Be able to identify essential elements that contribute to the poem’s effectiveness via weekly short reaction papers.

F. Be able to choose a suitable topic for a longer analytical paper, then write an analysis in proper documented form.

III. COURSE OUTLINE (course content will be drawn from this)

A. Introduction (what poetry is and is not)
   1. The class will read and react to a variety of contemporary poets (some unknown) to decide on what poetry is.
   2. Poetry may not necessarily be rhymed or written in complete thoughts.
   3. Poetry may encompass a variety of topics, not just the “romantic” or beautiful.”
   4. Poetry is compressed emotional thought “recollected.”
   5. Poetry is about something that is “bigger” than the poem; this “theme” is often implied and comes out of poem’s implications.
6. Poems say much in a few words; they may move through time and space in non-narrative patterns.
7. Poems arrange life experiences in other artistic patterns; thus, they are not true-to-life, but they are “true” anyway.

B. The poets Themselves
1. Walt Whitman (1819-1892)
   “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.”
   a. The poet as redeemer and representative man
   b. The expansive line and Biblical parallelism
   c. The transcendental good in all men
   d. The catalogue as a poetic device
      (1) Rhythmic patterning
      (2) World vastness and variety: *Leaves of Grass*
      (3) “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”: World Unity and Emerson’s “Oversoul”
   e. Human sexual experience
   f. Whitman’s later influence: the Biblical Jeremiads
      (1) Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl* and “A Supermarket in California”
2. Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)
   “Much Madness is divinest Sense - To a discerning Eye . . .”
   a. The poet as limited observer
   b. The condensed line and Calvinistic accountability
   c. Hymn stanza: the Protestant musical tradition
   d. The paradox of good and evil in all man/womankind
   e. The poem as paradox, a study in contrasts:
      (1) In gain is loss: “Success is counted sweetest”
      (2) Nature, a threat and comfort: “A bird came down the walk . . .”
      (3) Love: ecstatic and dangerous: “Wild nights, wild nights . . .”
      (4) Tensions between faith and doubt: “There’s a certain slant of light . . .”
      (5) Death: an eternity or an abyss: “Because I could not stop for Death . . .”
   f. The truncated line (stylistic noun capitalization and the dash for expansion)
   g. Dickinson’s influence on modern poets: William Carlos Williams, Adrienne Rich
3. Robert Frost (1874-1963)
   “I have been one acquainted with the night.”
   a. The poet as synecdochist, a part for the whole
   b. The dialectics of an idea: two sides “Mending Wall” and “The Road Not Taken”
   e. Biography into the dramatic dialogue: “Home Burial”
   f. The Sonnet
4. Ezra Pound (1885-1972)
   “Let the Gods forgive what I have made...”
   a. The poet as scholar and internationalist
   b. The Sestina as a poetic form: “Sestina: Altaforte”
      (1) Student Sestina writing assignment
   c. Oriental verse in translation
      (1) “Liu Ch’e”
      (2) “The River Merchant’s Wife: a Letter”
   d. Imagism
      (1) “In a Station of the Metro”
   e. Pound’s Politics
      (1) Incarceration and St. Elizabeth’s
      (2) Final days: influence on Ginsberg and Elizabeth Bishop

5. Thomas Sterns Eliot (1899-1965)
   “I have measured out my life with coffee spoons...”
   a. St. Louis antecedents and European displacement
   b. Early domestic turmoil and Freudian concepts: The dramatic monologue “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”
   c. Christian change: “Journey of the Magi”
   d. Resolution of time: “East Coker” (Four Quartets)

6. William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)
   “... no ideas but in things.”
   a. An American poet, not an expatriate
   b. Keen medical/clinical observation
   c. From modern art (the Armory Show) to modern verse technique
   d. The poem as a construction “Spring and All”
   e. The poem as word painting: “The Great Figure” and “The Pot of Flowers” (after Charles DeMuth’s paintings)
   f. “The Locust Tree in Flower” (two versions)
   g. The artist as Icarus “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus”
   h. Second model paper for analytical midterm: “Explication of W.C. Williams’ >The Young Housewife”

7. Langston Hughes (1902-1967)
   “I’ve known rivers:...”
   a. Missouri Antecedents and European Displacement
   b. The Harlem Renaissance and socialism
      (1) Blues form and rhythm
      (2) Blues subject matter
   d. Jazz poems: “Dream Boogie” and “Trumpet Player”
   e. Cultural contexts: “Theme for English B”
   f. Political awareness: “Harlem”
8. Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979)
   “Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?”
   a. Early Displacement: “sestina”
      (1) Review of the Verse Form
      (2) Antecedents: A Child’s View
   b. Awareness of Self and Others: “In the Waiting Room”
   d. Brazil, Flora and Fauna: “The Fish”
   e. “Questions of Travel: “the choice is never wide and never free”
   f. Bishop’s friendship with Robert Lowell
   “I myself am hell/nobody’s here . . .”
   a. Rebellion of the elite Bostonian Brahmin
      Conscientious objection and imprisonment:
      “Memories of West Street and Lepke”
   b. Joining the Catholic church
   c. From allusive poetic formality to confessional self-exploration: “My
      Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereaux Winslow” and “Skunk Hour”
   d. Political dissent: “For the Union Dead”
10. Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)
    “I have done it again. / One year in every ten . . .”
    a. Early paternal loss and depression: “Tulips,” “Lady Lazarus,” and
       “The Bee Meeting”
    b. Poetic fame: “Ariel”
    c. Motherhood: “Morning Song”
    d. Estrangement from Ted Hughes and Suicidal Involvement: “Daddy”
       and “For a Fatherless Son”
    e. Last Poems: “Fever 103” and “Edge”
11. Contemporary Black Women Poets
    a. Gwendolyn Brooks (b. 1917 - )
    b. Lucille Clifton (b. 1936 - )
    c. Rita Dove (b. 1952 - )
12. Further Confessional Feminist Poets
    a. Anne Sexton (1928-1974)
    b. Adrienne Rich (b. 1929 - )
    c. Louise Gluck (b. 1943 - )
13. Other Contemporary Influences
    b. Randall Jarrell (1914-1965)
    c. Donald Hall (b. 1928 - )
    d. Gary Snyder (b. 1930 - )

Note: These last selections encompass living poets, some of whom were influenced by the earlier
Voices and Visions group; these will change per each instructor’s background and updating.
IV. UNIT OBJECTIVES

A. Review unknown poets and their subject matter.
   1. The experience of not knowing a poet’s background; i.e., one reads the poem and judges only its content.
      a. Poetry’s phraseology, its different “look”
      b. Poetry’s unique way of saying: sound and sense
      c. Compressed emotion, said in fewer words
      d. Arrangement and emphasis: word choice
      e. Figures of speech: looking at one thing but seeing another

B. Journal Keeping: Writing Down the Bones
   1. Weekly reaction papers from observation, class
   2. Audio cassette of Natalie Goldberg’s writing workshop

C. Historical Influences: The Table is Set:
   1. Whitman’s unique influences:
      a. The King James Bible’s parallelism
      b. The open line to tout democracy: catalogues
      c. The opera and musicality
      d. Transcendental philosophy: Emersonian optimism
      e. Belief in the common man, common trades
      f. Sexual frankness from Puritanic restriction
      g. First student seminar and discussion
   2. Dickinson’s compression and power:
      a. Protestant hymnology
      b. Microscopic observation of nature
      c. The compressed line with capitalized metaphor
      d. Puritanic self-doubt vs. repressed sexuality
      e. Predestined faith
      f. Second student seminar and discussion

D. Pre-World War I Modernists
   1. Robert Frost’s New England voice
      a. A distrust of nature
      b. Synecdoche: looking at the part, seeing the whole
      c. Two sides: Frost’s dialectics
      d. Direct biography into the poetic mode
      e. Third student seminar and discussion
   2. Ezra Pound’s synthetic skills
      a. English coteries (Yeats, Eliot, Frost)
      b. European scholarship and displacement
      c. The Sestina form from Province
      d. Oriental translation
      e. Incarceration and disgrace: the Cantos
      f. Student Sestinas: writing poetry to a set form
E. American Modern Verse
1. William Carlos Williams’ imagist observation
2. European friendship with Eliot and Pound
3. The Armory Show: paintings as words, words as paintings
   a. “The Great Figure:
   b. “The Pot of Flowers”
4. “No ideas but in things”
   b. “Tract”
5. Common American life: the pediatrician’s observation
   a. “The Young Housewife”
   b. “Spring and all”
6. The artist out of the commonplace

F. The Black Renaissance
1. Langston Hughes’ Negritude
   a. Travel and observation of roots
   b. Harlem and the blues form
   c. Socialist leanings: the McCarthy era
   d. Cultural spokesperson
   e. Fourth student seminar and discussion

G. Return to Childhood: the World’s a Stage
1. Elizabeth Bishop’s early uprootedness
2. Pictures from childhood: “Sestina”
   a. The Sestina form revisited
3. Awareness of self and of others
   a. “In the Waiting Room”
5. Questions of travel, Brazil and beyond
   a. “Questions of Travel”
   b. “The Fish”
6. Bishop’s eye for detail and kinship with W.C. Williams

H. The Confessional Poets
1. Robert Lowell
   a. Robert Lowell’s literary antecedents
      (1) James Russell and Amy
(2) Kenyon College: John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate
   (a) Randall Jarrell’s friendship
   (b) Southern influences
b. Early rebellion from upper-class Brahmins
   (1) Conscientious objection, W.W. II
       (a) “Memories of West Street and Lepke”
   (2) Manic-depression
   (3) Comfort in Catholicism
   (4) Abandonment of faith to confessional
       (a) Self-exploration: “Skunk Hour”
   (5) Friendship with Elizabeth Bishop
   (6) “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereaux Winslow”

c. Political criticism of the establishment
   (1) “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket”
   (2) “For the Union Dead”

2. Sylvia Plath
   a. Plath’s father’s early death
   b. Her perfected juvenile years and subsequent depression
      (1) The Bell Jar
      (2) “Tulips,” “Lady Lazarus,” and “The Bee Meeting”
   c. Her union with Ted Hughes and subsequent fame in Britain
      (1) “Ariel”
      (2) Motherhood: “Morning Song”
   d. Estrangement from Hughes and dawning suicide
      (1) “Daddy” and “For a Fatherless Son”
   e. Final poems: “Fever 103” and “Edge”

V. METHOD OF INSTRUCTION

A. Lectures

B. Library Reserve Readings

C. Video Cassettes

D. Audio Cassettes

E. Student Interpretative Papers

F. Two Major Analytical Papers

G. Journal-Keeping

H. Seminar Discussion
VI. REQUIRED TEXTBOOK(S) WITH PUBLICATION INFORMATION


VII. REQUIRED MATERIALS (STUDENT)

Writing Paper, Pens
An Academic Dictionary
A Serviceable Thesaurus
Access to a Typewriter/Word Processor
A Spiral Notebook Journal

VIII. SUPPLEMENTAL REFERENCES


IX. METHOD OF EVALUATION (STUDENT)

A. Weekly Reaction Papers (250-500 words)
B. Two Major Longer Analytical Papers (1000+ words)
C. Seminar Presentations: Discussion Leadership, Oral Interpretation of Poetry
D. Field Trips to Poetry Readings (extra credit)
E. Final In-class Comprehensive Final Over Poets’ Lives, Works, Quoted Passages, Emphasis