COURSE DESCRIPTION

What is an author who writes both poetry and novels: A poet who writes novels? A novelist who writes poems? Both a poet and a novelist? A novelist-poet? A poet-novelist? A novelists’ poet, or a poet’s novelist?

The literary world tends to draw a bright line between fiction writers and poets, but authors frequently cross the divide to produce work in both forms. How do authors define themselves? How do the critics and readers define authors? How contiguous are the novels with the poems? What does cross-generic production look like over the shape of a career, both aesthetically and biographically?

After critical uproar over Jude the Obscure—called “Jude the Obscene” by more than one contemporary review—Thomas Hardy quit writing novels and turned his attention solely to poems. Philip Larkin wrote two novels as a young man, but never finished another; instead, he published several collections of poetry and built his career as a poet. Ben Lerner, on the other hand, started as a poet but has since built his career on his novels. William Carlos Williams published all forms—poetry, novels, hybrids—throughout his career.

Our discussions will center around seven authors: Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, Gwendolyn Brooks, William Carlos Williams, Sylvia Plath, Philip Larkin, and Ben Lerner. By focusing primarily on 20th century authors, this class will also be an opportunity to trace British and American literature from Thomas Hardy to the present. We’ll discuss each author’s work in depth, but we’ll also use his or her writing as a launch pad to explore surrounding historical, aesthetic, cultural, political, and ethical concerns. We’ll also consider the development across writers of the novelist / poet figure: what career models become more or less possible over time? How does one writer’s work and persona influence others?

The authors at the backbone of this syllabus serve as a starting point, not a constraint. We’ll incorporate other writers into our discussion throughout the course through students’ presentation and research. Other writers to consider include the following (though this list is not exclusive!):

John Ashbery
Margaret Atwood
Charles Baxter
Emily Brontë
Robert Creeley
Guy Davenport
H.D.
Randall Jarrell
Denis Johnson
Maxine Kumin
D.H. Lawrence
Ursula K. LeGuin
Kenneth Koch
D.H. Lawrence
Herman Melville
Eileen Myles
Vladimir Nabokov
Marge Piercy
Edgar Allan Poe
Ishmael Reed
Raymond Roussel
James Schulyer
John Updike

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
(Note: all dates are still tentative, pending departmental finalization)

*Regular attendance and participation in seminar. Students should also expect to attend general meetings for junior tutorials during the semester. You will also be required to schedule a meeting with the Departmental Writing Fellow at the beginning of the semester.

*Library Visit. Within the first three weeks of the semester (date TBD), we will meet with Odile Harter, our library liaison, to discuss research strategies.

*Response Exercises. Brief, informal exercises, due at the beginning of seminar. These will take a forms: a close reading, a summary of a critical article, a pastiche of an author’s work, a presentation on some aspect of the week’s reading, etc.

*Oral Presentation. Throughout the first half of the semester, students will be asked to give a five-to-seven minute oral presentation on a novelist-poet / poet-novelist whom we are NOT reading together. Students will give an interpretive précis of the author’s work as well as critical reception and debate.

*Short Paper (5-6 pages). Due Week 4
    --This paper will focus on close reading
    --Followed by individual conferences to discuss the paper

*Two-page Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography. Due Week 6

*Draft of Junior Paper. Due Tuesday, April 12 (departmental deadline)

*Junior Tutorial Conference Paper. Due Tuesday, May 3 or Wednesday, May 4 (departmental deadline): Students present 5-minute papers on their research; the conference usually takes place the week before papers are due

*Final Junior Paper – Tuesday, May 3 (departmental deadline) – due to tutor and department
GRADE BREAKDOWN

Participation (including weekly responses): 25%
Short paper and oral presentation: 20%
Prospectus and annotated bibliography: 15%
Draft of junior paper: 15%
Junior paper: 25%

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

**Note on secondary sources:** I have provided a few starting suggestions, but these resources will be augmented significantly over the course of the semester. The theory and criticism that we will read in tandem with our primary texts are subject to change based on students’ interests. Some of the sources will specifically focus on the author discussed, and some will provide a more general background and to expand our critical vocabulary.

**Students will sign up to give oral presentations in the first half of the semester. These presentations will focus on authors whom we will not be reading as a group.**

**Thomas Hardy: Naturalism and Supernaturalism**

WEEK ONE

Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*

*Ian Watt, selections from *The Rise of the Novel*
*Franco Moretti, excerpts from *The Novel*
*Critical reception: selected reviews of *Jude the Obscure*

WEEK TWO

Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* cont’d
Selected poetry, incl. “The Convergence of the Twain”; “The Darkling Thrush”; *Satries of Circumstance*

*Jahan Ramazani, selections from *The Poetry of Mourning*
*Derek Attridge, selections from *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction*
*Matthew Arnold, “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time”*
*Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (selections)

**Oscar Wilde: “All art is quite useless”**

WEEK THREE

Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*
Wilde, *Salomé*
Wilde, Poems

*Arthur Symons, “The Decadent Movement in Literature”
*Walter Pater, selections from The Renaissance
*E.M. Forster, selections from Aspects of the Novel

Gwendolyn Brooks: “We / Jazz June”

WEEK FOUR

**Short Paper due**

Brooks, Selected Poems
Brooks, Maud Martha

*Mark Sanders, “African-American folk roots and Harlem Renaissance Poetry,” from The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance
*D.H. Melhem, selections from Gwendolyn Brooks: Poetry and the Heroic Voice

William Carlos Williams: “No ideas but in things”

WEEK FIVE

Williams, Spring and All
Williams, Kora in Hell
Williams, selections from The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, vols. 1 and 2

*William Carlos Williams, "The Poem as a Field of Action"
*Charles Altieri, selections from The Art of Twentieth Century American Poetry
*Randall Jarrell, Introduction to Williams, from Poetry and the Age
*T.S. Eliot, “ Tradition and the Individual Talent”

WEEK SIX

**Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography due**

Williams, White Mule
Williams, selections from Paterson (esp. Book I)

Sylvia Plath: Gender and the Poet-Novelist

WEEK SEVEN

Plath, selections from Collected Poems
Ted Hughes, selected poems and translations
Recordings of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath

*Linda Wagner-Martin, “Plath and Contemporary American Poetry”
*M.L. Rosenthal, “Poetry as Confession”
WEEK EIGHT

Plath, *The Bell Jar*

*Marjorie Perloff, “A Ritual for Being Born Twice’: Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*”
*Meg Wolitzer, *Belzhar*

**Philip Larkin:** “Man hands on misery to man”

WEEK NINE

Larkin, *A Girl In Winter*
Larkin, selections from *Collected Poems*

*Andrew Motion, “Philip Larkin”
*John Wain, “The Importance of Philip Larkin”
*Philip Larkin, *Paris Review* interview

**Ben Lerner:** Post-Modern-Meta-Poet-Novelist

WEEK TEN

Lerner, selected poems from *Angle of Yaw, The Lichtenberg Figures, Mean Free Path*
Lerner, “Contest of Words”

*Selections from *Lana Turner* on the avant-garde in contemporary poetry*
*Selections from *jacket2*
*Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (selections)*
*Brian Reed, *Phenomenal Reading* (selections)*

WEEK ELEVEN

Lerner, *Leaving the Atocha Station*

*Brian McHale, *Postmodern Fiction* (selections)*
*Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images* (selections)*

**Conclusions: Looking Backward, Moving Forward**

WEEK TWELVE

Workshop and wrap-up

**Junior Paper due Tuesday, May 3**