

20th-Century American Poetry: Manifestos, Modernisms, and Magazines

Instructor: Sarah Jingyu Liu

Tutorial Description: In the 20th century, everyone had an opinion about what poetry should be—especially the Americans. This course examines various aspects of 20th-century American poetry through a series of manifestos, a form of writing that Mary Ann Caws defines as a proclamation of “what it wants to oppose, to leave, to defend, to change.” What motivations lie behind these manifest proclamations? In what ways did these two disparate forms—the poem and the manifesto—feed into each other? How did the manifesto contribute to the formation of an American poetic identity? Most weeks, we will read up to three manifestos alongside a number of related poems and secondary texts. Two of the weeks will be dedicated to exploring little magazines, which served as both a platform for poets to publish their works as well as a means to forge alliances and generate discourse with fellow poets. Poets we will read include Walt Whitman, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, T.S. Eliot, Marianne Moore, Langston Hughes, Khalil Gibran, Frank O’Hara, John Ashbery, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich. Critical subtopics include postcolonialism, Marxism, and feminist/queer theory.

Week 1: Apollo’s Privilege

Primary texts:

“The Poet” from *Essays: Second Series* (1844) by Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Song of Myself” from *Leaves of Grass* (1892 ed.) by Walt Whitman

Secondary texts:

Chapter 1: “The Concept of the Avant-Garde” from *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968) by Renato Poggioli, 15 pgs.

Chapter 1: “A Revolutionary Formation” from *Whitman the Political Poet* (1989) by Betsy Erkkila, 22 pgs.

“The Poetics of the Manifesto: Nowness and Newness” (2010), published in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (ed. Caws) by Mary Ann Caws, 14 pgs.

Week 2: The Pound Era

Primary texts:

“A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” (1913), published in *Poetry*, and “A Retrospect” from *Pavannes and Divisions* (1918) by Ezra Pound

“The Imagists: ‘H.D.’ and John Gould Fletcher” from *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* (1917) by Amy Lowell

Selected poems by H.D., Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound from *Des Imagistes, An Anthology* (1914)

Secondary texts:

“Ezra Pound and Walt Whitman” (1955), published in *American Literature* by Herbert Bergman, 6 pgs.

Introduction to *Orientalism* (1977) by Edward Said, 30 pgs.

“Critical Dreams: Orientalism, Modernism, and the Meaning of Pound’s China” (1999), published in *Twentieth Century Literature* by Eric Hayot, 23 pgs.

Week 3: Correspondences

Primary texts:

“Tradition and Individual Talent” (1919), published in *The Egoist* by T.S. Eliot

“The Waste Land” (1922), published in *The Criterion* and *The Dial* by T.S. Eliot

Selected poems from *Observations* (1924) by Marianne Moore

Secondary texts:

Selections from *Minima Moralia* (1951) by Theodore Adorno

“Presenting Miss Moore, Modernist: T.S. Eliot’s Edition of Marianne Moore’s *Selected Poems*” (1994), published in *Journal of Modern Literature* by Andrew Kappel, 22 pgs.

Week 4: Magazine Week I

First paper due (no readings)

Week 5: Harlem Renaissance, or the “flowering of Negro Literature”

Primary texts:

“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926) by Langston Hughes

“If We Must Die” (1919) and selected poems from *Harlem Shadows* (1922) by Claude McKay

Selected poems from *Cane* (1923) by Jean Toomer

Secondary texts:

“The Negro and Language” from *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) by Frantz Fanon, 23 pgs.

“Notes for an Oppositional Poetics” (1990) by Erica Hunt, 16 pgs.

“The Harlem Renaissance as Postcolonial Phenomenon” (2006), published in *African American Review* by Robert Philipson, 16 pgs.

Week 6: The American Proletarian Poetry Movement

Primary texts:

Selections from *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) by Marx and Engels

“Towards Proletarian Art” (1921) by Mike Gold

“Ballads of Lenin” (1933) by Langston Hughes

“Dirge” (1935) by Kenneth Fearing

Secondary texts:

“Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935) by Walter Benjamin, 26 pgs.

Chapter 3: “The Proletarian as New Negro; the New Negro as Proletarian: Mike Gold Meets Claude McKay” from *New Negro, Old Left: African American Writing and Communism Between the Wars* (1999) by William J. Maxwell, 30 pgs.

Excerpt from Chapter 1: “‘Leftward Ho!’: Migrations of Writers, Critics, and Magazines in the 1930s” from *Beleaguered Poets and Leftist Critics* (2011) by Milton A. Cohen

Week 7: Bestselling Poet of the 20th Century

Library Research Session

Primary texts:

1920 bylaws for the Pen League in “Arrabitch” from *Kahlil Gibran: A Biography* (1950) by Mikhail Naimy

Selections from *A Chant of Mystics, and Other Poems* (1920) by Ameen Rihani

Selections from *The Prophet* (1923) by Khalil Gibran

Secondary texts:

“Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1990) by Stuart Hall, 16 pgs.

“Eliminating Diasporic Identities” (2008), published in *PMLA* by Iman Meshal, 8 pgs.

“Mahjar Legacies: A Reinterpretation” from *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora* (2013, eds. Alsultany and Shohat) by Jacob Berman, 15 pgs.

Week 8: Magazine Week II

Prospectus and annotated bibliography due (no readings)

Week 9: Poetics of Projection

Primary texts:

“Projective Verse” (1950), published in *Poetry New York* by Charles Olson

“Some Notes on Poetic Form” (1965), published in *Poetry* by Denise Levertov

Selected poems from *In Cold Hell, in Thicket* (1953) by Charles Olson

Selected poems from *With Eyes at the Back of Our Heads* (1959) by Denise Levertov

Selected poems from *For Love: Poems 1950-1960* (1962) by Robert Creeley

Secondary texts:

Preface to *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* (1960) by Donald Allen

Introduction to *Beyond Maximus: The Construction of Public Voice in Black Mountain Poetry* (2007) by Ann Day Dewey, 16 pgs.

Week 10: Poet Among Painters

Primary texts:

“Personism: A Manifesto” (1959), published in *Yugen* by Frank O’Hara

“Howl” (1956) by Allen Ginsberg

Selected poems from *Lunch Poems* (1964) by Frank O’Hara

Selected poems from *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975) by John Ashbery

“Frank O’Hara and the Aesthetics of Attention” (1976), published in *boundary 2* by Marjorie Perloff, 28 pgs.

Week 11: Sister Arts

Draft due

Primary texts:

“Poetry Is Not a Luxury” (1985) by Audre Lorde

Twenty-One Love Poems (1976) by Adrienne Rich

Selected poems from *The Black Unicorn* (1987) by Audre Lorde

Secondary text:

“An Interview with Audre Lorde” (1981), published in *Signs* by Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, 24 pgs.

Week 12: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Beyond the Manifesto

Writing Workshop

Primary texts:

“Barbarism” from *The Language of Inquiry* (2000) by Lyn Hejinian

Selections from *My Life* (1987) by Lyn Hejinian

Selected poems from *With Strings* (2001) and *Girly Man* (2006) by Charles Bernstein

Secondary text:

“Beyond the Manifesto: Language Poetry and Lyn Hejinian’s *The Language of Inquiry*” (2005) by Srikanth Reddy