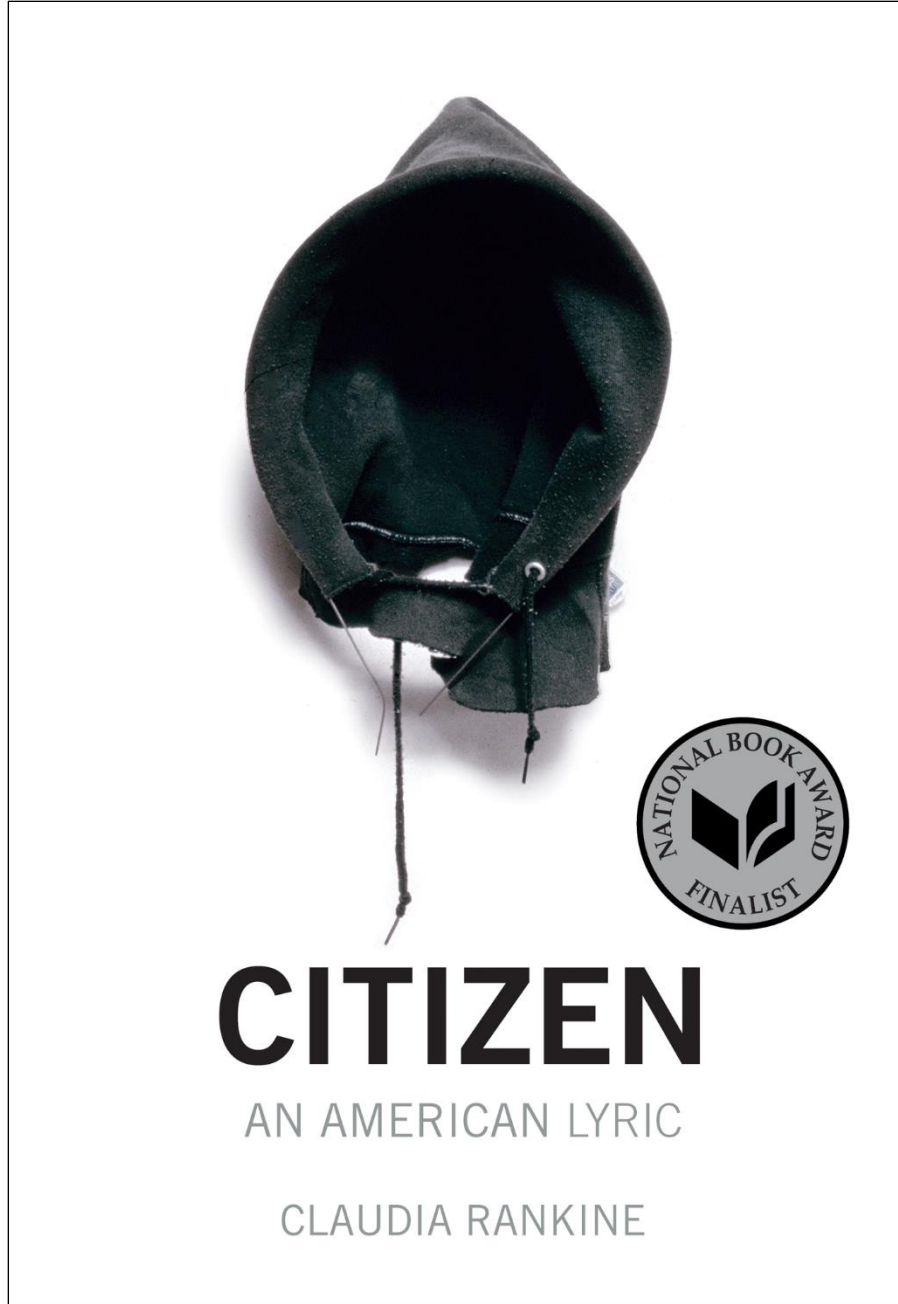


The Long and the Short:  
Modern and Contemporary American Poets



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American poetry, from modernism to now—where do we begin? Can modern American poets situate themselves between Walt Whitman’s multitude-containing maximalism and Emily Dickinson’s loaded-gun minimalism, or do they avoid those two poles entirely? What forms and modes define the past century-or-so of American poetry, and how are those forms and modes changed by poets of different races, genders, sexualities, backgrounds, and traditions?

To answer these questions, our tutorial charts an idiosyncratic course through modern and contemporary American poetry, focusing entirely on its greatest long and short poems. We’ll see, for example, how one incarnation of the modernist long poem reconstructs the fragments of classical epic and myth, and how another incarnation, taking cues from be-bop, is “punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and disc-tortions of the music of community and transition” (Langston Hughes, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*). And we’ll see how the contemporary short poem has learned as much from Japanese haiku and the dozens as from stand-up jokes and memes. Unraveling the intertwined histories of the long and the short poem, we will survey many of the chief topics in twentieth- and twenty-first-century American poetry. Certain topics will seem exclusively modern: ecopoetics, poetry and social media, writing in the age of American empire and #BlackLivesMatter. Other topics raise enduring, transhistorical question: What can poetry learn from neighboring arts? How do poets influence other poets? And what is a lyric poem anyway?

We will focus on roughly ten poets, but we also consider how poets today are grouped according to identities, presses, scenes, and moments. As we read ten books closely (one a week), we’ll also learn about the many media in which modern and contemporary poetry has been published, reviewed, and adapted—from little magazines to anthologies, from Twitter to web series. In the first half of the semester we will read, reverse-engineer, and try our hands at perhaps the primary prose genre of contemporary-poetry criticism, the book review. Our writing will culminate in a Junior Essay, equal in scope and ambition to a publishable review-essay or scholarly article. Producing what may likely be the most extensive essays yet written on our poets of choice, we will discover ways of writing sensitively and resourcefully about poetry from modernism to right now, or invent those ways ourselves.

## GOALS

The primary goal of this tutorial is to guide you through cooking the entrée of the honors program, from prepwork to presentation: **a twenty-to-twenty-five-page research paper**. To that end, we will learn how to:

- Design a research question.
- Approach that question from diverse methods.
- Develop a critical bibliography around that question.
- Connect that question to secondary criticism.
- Articulate a clear, provocative, synthesizing argument.
- Pursue that argument in writing that sustains originality, precision, and consistency.

## ASSIGNMENTS

For almost every meeting of this tutorial, you'll hand in a piece of writing. This, like every Junior Tutorial, culminates with a twenty-to-twenty-five-page research paper, due during reading period. That may be longer than any paper you have yet written, or will ever write, as a Harvard undergraduate, so we'll start getting ready early. Helping you along are some intermediate assignments (and deadlines): a two-page prospectus (week 8), two ungraded prove-you've-started-working excerpts (the first due week 10, which can take the form of an outline; the second due week 11, which should be prose), and a rough draft (week 12), an in-class workshop (week 13). (Those are the mandatory steps. You're very welcome to turn in or meet with Chris about additional drafts, half-drafts, ramblings, etc.)

When you are not working on your Junior Essay, you will be writing short critical or creative exercises (describing the moving parts of long poems, parodying or imitating incomparable styles) or drafting and editing book reviews. Every participant in the tutorial will write one 6-to-8-page (1500-word) review of a poetry collection or book-length poem, due week 5; we will share excerpts from those books and workshop each other's reviews in week 6. In our first meeting, I'll hand out a long list of possible books to review; if you hope to publish your review, you should pick a just-published or about-to-be-published book or reissue.

Plan to meet with Chris three times this semester:

- Weeks 2–3: Get-to-know-you meeting; talk about a book-review topic.
- Weeks 7–8: Bring Junior Essay ideas; Chris can help you refine your topic.
- Weeks 12–13: Talk to Chris about what you can do between rough draft and submission.

A weekly responsibly, to enrich and expand our readings. For every meeting we will have one or two presenters, whose duties are a) to give unobjectionable Wikipedia-level background on that week's poet, readings, or topic and b) to open our discussion with a few thoughts on what surprised, what stood out, what didn't square. No materials necessary for these presentations, though the following are nice:

1. a handout or email before the meeting with ideas or quotes to share;
2. photocopies of additional poems or readings;
3. books or physical objects to show and tell;
4. some sort of digital or pyrotechnic display;
5. careful coordination between the text/topic/author under discussion and your outfit.

## READINGS

We read ten books, some in full, others in selections. Please read everything assigned at least once, by the scheduled meeting, and come prepared with thoughts, questions, scribblings, favorites and least-favorites. In the order we read them:

Wallace Stevens, *Wallace Stevens: Collected Poems and Poetry*, edited by Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (Library of America, 1997)

Marianne Moore, *Observations* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016) [also available in *New Collected Poems*, edited by Heather Cass White (2017)]

- Langston Hughes, *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, edited by Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (Knopf, 1994)
- Gwendolyn Brooks, *The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks*, edited by Elizabeth Alexander (Library of America, 2005) [also available in the highly recommended, out-of-print *Blacks* (Third World Press, 1987)]
- A. R. Ammons, *Garbage* (W. W. Norton, 1993) [also available in *The Complete Poems of A. R. Ammons: Volume 2 1978–2005*, edited by Robert M. West (2017)]
- Adrienne Rich, *Selected Poems: 1950–2012* (W. W. Norton, 2018) [all poems also available in *Collected Poems: 1950–2012* (2016)]
- Harryette Mullen, *Recyclopedia: Trimmings, S\*PeRM\*\*K\*T, and Muse & Drudge* (Graywolf, 2006)
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf, 2014)
- Craig Santos Perez, *from unincorporated territory [lukao]* (Omnidawn, 2017)
- Tommy Pico, *Nature Poem* (Tin House Books, 2017)

[Anything too familiar, or not enticing enough? Want to read T. S. Eliot or Juan Felipe Herrera or Theresa Hak Kyung Cha? We can swap things in and out.]

The common Junior Tutorial practice is *not* to order course books to any bookstore. You can buy (and often rent) our books, new or used, at the Coop, Harvard Book Store, the Grolier Poetry Book Shop, Raven Used Books, and Porter Square Books (to name only a few Cambridge bookstores).

All our books are on reserve at Lamont. So are selected books of or on American poetry: check Canvas for the whole list. Everything else we read—poems, sections of books, reviews, articles—is available online, legally and for free, or will be handed out.

#### GRADE BREAKDOWN

Participation (including attendance, presentations, short assignments)	30%
Book review	10%
Junior Essay	60%
– Prospectus plus bibliography	– 10%
– Rough draft	– 10%
– Final submitted draft	– 40%

#### POLICIES

*Submission.* Submit a digital version of everything (.docx or .doc, not .pdf or .pages) through email: [cspaide@g.harvard.edu](mailto:cspaide@g.harvard.edu). Bring short assignments to our meetings, either printed out or on a device, in case you want to share your writing with the class. In many courses, longer papers are also due in class, or the day of. The results, in my experience, are bad: we all come to class having read the readings *or* written the writing—never both. So: the prospectus, outline, and rough draft are due by 5pm on Friday of the week they're due. Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade per day.

*Extensions.* For short extensions, ask before the day of. For extensions longer than two days, bring a note from HUHS or your dean.

*Disability accommodation.* Students with disabilities are encouraged to request accommodation, as soon as is convenient, through Harvard's [Accessible Education Office](#): "Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term."

*Gadgetry.* Laptops and tablets are allowed for reading poems, taking notes, and looking things up. If you use them for social media or any distracting or time-wasting purpose, you will be noticed, and your participation grade will go down. (EXCEPTION: During our week on social media, the reverse is true.)

*Academic honesty, collaboration, citation.* Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failing grades on assignments to dismissal from the course or even more serious actions. Here's [The Harvard College Honor Code](#):

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity—that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

If you have questions about what constitutes proper collaboration, or about how to cite sources and peers, ask me.

Unless you're citing poems available only online, cite poems from book or magazine publications. Preferred citation styles are MLA (8th ed.) and Chicago (17th ed.). I can help you with either, but the MLA has a spiffy new website explaining the latest version of their style—<https://style.mla.org/>—and the latest edition of the Chicago Manual of Style is available online for Harvard students: [chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/home.html](http://chicagomanualofstyle.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/home.html). Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL) has a quick guide to both: [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue\\_owl.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html).

SCHEDULE

**Week 1: Nineteenth-century precursors: Walt Whitman (1819–1892), Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), and others** – *Presenter:* Chris

Before our first meeting, read the following poems, all online:

- Whitman, “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” [\[online\]](#)
- Dickinson, selected poems [\[online\]](#) (R. W. Franklin’s numbering in parentheses)
  1. “After great pain, a formal feeling comes - ” (372)
  2. “Because I could not stop for Death - ” (479)
  3. “‘Faith’ is fine invention” (202)
  4. “Fame is a bee.” (1788)
  5. “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers - ” (314)
  6. “I dwell in Possibility - ” (466)
  7. “I heard a Fly buzz - when I died - ” (591)
  8. “My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun” (764)
  9. “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” (124)
  10. “Some keep the Sabbath going to Church - ” (236)
  11. “Tell all the truth but tell it slant - ” (1263)
  12. “There’s a certain Slant of light” (320)
  13. “They shut me up in Prose - ” (445)
  14. “This World is not Conclusion” (373)
  15. “Wild nights - Wild nights!” (269)
- Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus” [\[online\]](#)
- Paul Laurence Dunbar, “Little Brown Baby,” “Sympathy,” “We Wear the Mask” [\[online\]](#)

Introductions. I give out free books. Questions are answered, worries assuaged. Handouts galore:

- Syllabus (this very document)
- Snippets of the Whitmanian and the Dickinsonian from their time to Patricia Lockwood’s “The Father and Mother of American ‘Tit-Pics” (2014)
- Teasers of our upcoming reading
- A list of books to review

**Week 2: Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)** – *Presenter:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Wallace Stevens: Collected Poems and Poetry:* “Sunday Morning,” “The Auroras of Autumn,” and selected shorter poems

Review of *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) in Randall Jarrell, *Poetry and the Age* (1953)

**Writing on the long poem and the short poem:** Passages from Helen Vendler, “Douceurs, Tristesses,” in *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens’ Longer Pomes* (1969) and Helen Vendler, “Stevens’ Secrecies,” in *Words Chosen Out of Desire* (1986)

**Assignment:** In about 500 words, draw out one similarity and one difference between Stevens’s short-poem style and his long-poem style, using concrete examples from at least one short and one long poem. How would you characterize Stevensian style, regardless of poem length?

**Week 3: Marianne Moore (1887–1972) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Observations:* “Marriage,” “An Octopus,” and selected shorter poems

Maureen N. McLane, “My Marianne Moore,” in *My Poets* (2012)

**Institutions:** Evan Kindley, “Picking and Choosing: Marianne Moore among the Agonists,” *ELH* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 685–713

**Assignment:** Have your get-to-know-you meeting with Chris; come with ideas of books for your book review (due week 6).

**Week 4: Langston Hughes (1901–1967) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes: Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) and *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961)

Kevin Young, “‘If You Can’t Read, Run Anyhow!’: Langston Hughes and the Poetics of Refusal,” in *The Gray Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (2012)

**Poetry and its neighbors:** Anita Patterson, “Jazz, Realism, and the Modernist Lyric,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (December 2000): 651–82

**Assignment:** In around 500 words, puzzle over how two or three sections of *Montage* or *Ask Your Mama* interact with one another and with the entire long poem. Why might Hughes have placed these sections where he did? What (if anything) makes each section memorable on its own, and what makes it instrumental to the long poem’s overarching structure?

**Week 5: Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks:* all selections from *Annie Allen* (1949) and selected shorter poems

Brooks, “In the Mecca” (1968) [PDF on Canvas]

Elizabeth Alexander, “Meditations on ‘Mecca’: Gwendolyn Brooks and the Responsibilities of the Black Poet,” in *The Black Interior: Essays* (2004)

**Black women in the epic:** Evie Shockley, “Changing the Subject: Gwendolyn Brooks’s ‘The Anniad,’” in *Renegade Poetics: Black Aesthetics and Formal Innovation in African American Poetry* (2011)

**Assignment:** Book review (6–8 pp.). In your document, include texts of three poems—at least one you mention in your review, at least one you don’t—for the rest of the tutorial to read. Send everything to Chris: he’ll share all the files with the rest of the tutorial.

**Week 6 – Book-review workshop: no presenter**

Poems from books under review

Read your peers’ reviews, reread your own, and be prepared to workshop them

**Influence:** Excerpts from T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” (1919) and Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973).

**Assignment:** None, but it’s never too early to start thinking about topics or goals for your Junior Essay (or to meet with Chris).

**Week 7: A. R. Ammons (1926–2001) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Garbage*: entire book

Selections from *The Really Short Poems of A. R. Ammons* (1991)

Mark Ford, “Entropy with Doxology,” *Poetry* 213, no. 4 (January 2019): 390–402 [\[online\]](#)

**Nature poetry and ecopoetics:** Christopher Todd Anderson, “Sacred Waste: Ecology, Spirit, and the American Garbage Poem,” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 17, No. 1 (Winter 2010): 35–60

**Assignment:** Write a parody or imitation (or something in-between) of a poet, poem, or style we’ve encountered thus far. (Or, if you’d like, parody or imitate a poet, poem, or style later on our syllabus, or another American poet entirely. But be warned: fewer of your fellow tutorial participants will applaud your ingenious mimicry or get your brilliant jokes.)

**Date TBD**

**Trip:** Harvard poetry reading or performance.

**Week 8: Adrienne Rich (1929–2012) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Selected Poems*: “An Atlas of the Difficult World” (1990–91) and selected shorter poems

Helen Vendler, “Mapping the Air,” *New York Review of Books*, 21 November 1991 [\[online\]](#) [this is also a review of Jorie Graham’s *Region of Unlikeness*; you can skim those sections, but read the conclusion]

**Empire and audience:** Piotr Gwiazda, “‘Nothing Else Left to Read’: Poetry and Audience in Adrienne Rich’s ‘An Atlas of the Difficult World,’” *Journal of Modern Literature* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 165–88 [\[online\]](#)

**Assignment:** Two-page prospectus for Junior Essay.

**Week 9: Harryette Mullen (born 1953) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Recyclopedia*: entire book, but focus on *Muse & Drudge* (1995)

Stephen Yenser, “Wild Plots,” *Partisan Review* 61, no. 2 (Spring 1994)

**“Hybrid traditions”:** Elisabeth A. Frost, “‘Belatedly Beladied Blues’: Hybrid Traditions in the Poetry of Harryette Mullen,” in *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (2005) [\[online\]](#)

**Assignment:** Start outlining and drafting pages of the Junior Essay.

**Week 10: Claudia Rankine (born 1963) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Citizen*: entire book

Read or listen to at least two: [Reviews on the Amazon page](#), [Artforum](#), [Booksforum](#), [Boston Review](#), [Guardian](#), [New Yorker](#), [New York Review of Books](#), [New York Times Book Review](#), [NPR](#), [Los Angeles Review of Books review](#), [Los Angeles Review of Books roundtable](#), [Slate](#), [Bookworm podcast](#), [Radio Open Source podcast](#) . . .

**Lyric theory:** From the forum on “The New Lyric Studies” in *PMLA* 123, no. 1 (January 2008): Virginia Jackson, “Who Reads Poetry?”; Jonathan Culler, “Why Lyric?” [\[online\]](#)

**Assignment:** Outline or partial draft (ungraded).

**Week 11: Craig Santos Perez (born 1980) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*from unincorporated territory* [lukao]: entire book

Timothy Otte, Review of Perez's four-book *from unincorporated territory* series, *The Poetry Project* 255 (April–May 2018) [\[online\]](#).

**Race and the avant-garde:** Cathy Park Hong, "Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde," *Lana Turner* 7 (2014) [\[online\]](#)

**Assignment:** Partial draft (ungraded).

**Date TBD**

**Trip:** Outside-of-Harvard poetry reading or performance.

**Week 12: Tommy Pico / the Internet (both born 1983) – Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Nature Poem:* entire book

Poems and criticism online: see Canvas for the list; add your own discoveries.

**Poetry and social media:** On Twitter—feel free to make a new account; do not feel obliged to use your personal account—follow at least 25 poets, critics, news sources, publications, presses, poetry bots, etc. Tweet as much poetry or criticism or self-promotion or snark as you want. Be prepared to show the tutorial what you've done, and to live-tweet our final meeting.

**Assignment:** Rough draft (ungraded). Set up a time to meet with Chris about what needs to happen between your rough draft and your final submission.

**Week 13 – Junior-essay workshop: no presenter**

Read your peers' drafts (and reread your own), respond at length to one draft and be prepared to workshop the others

**Assignment:** Optional meetings and additional drafts with Chris.

**Reading period**

Extra-long all-hands-on-deck it's-imminently-due office hours, room TBD.

Final day, 4pm: Final submission due to the department!