

English 98r: Junior Tutorial  
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Office Hours: TBD

## AMERICAN POETRY RIGHT NOW

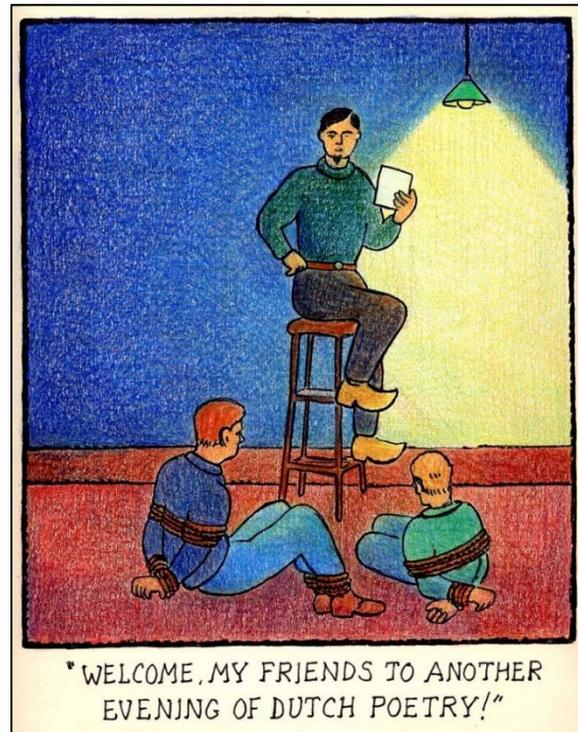


Figure 1: Our sister tutorial in Amsterdam<sup>1</sup>

This is a tutorial on what it means to read, write, and argue about American poetry right now, where “right now” can mean the twenty-first century, the past year, this month, or even the last twenty-four hours. Many of the poets whose work we will extensively read came into their mature styles sometime after the year 2000; some found their styles in the twentieth century, and will send us looking back to modernism (or earlier); some are discovering their styles as we read them. Though we will focus on eleven poets, we will also consider how all poets are grouped according to schools, presses, identities, and moments. Though we will read eleven books (one a week), we will learn about the many media in which contemporary poetry is now published and reviewed, from Twitter to academic journals, chapbooks to anthologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, a comic by Glen Baxter. Cite your sources.

## GOALS

The primary goal of this (and any other) Junior 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.
- Develop a critical bibliography, incorporating diverse methods and viewpoints, around that question.
- Put secondary criticism in conversation with that question.
- Write with greater clarity and precision.

In this particular Tutorial, we aim to:

- Survey the key concerns in contemporary poetry—those specific to our moment (MFA programs, social media, Occupy poetics), transhistorical (form, genre, place), or somewhere in between (multilingualism, eco-poetics, what is a lyric poem, anyway?).
- Question how exactly one studies the literature of one’s own time: Where and when do we start? How do we achieve the proper critical distance (assuming we want or need it)? Do we have any particular obligations, advantages, or obstacles when we write about living poets instead of, say, John Milton or Marianne Moore? How can we possibly be fair or up-to-date or comprehensive or well-read enough (or at least fake all the above)?
- Read, reverse-engineer, and try our hands at the primary prose genre of contemporary poetry, the book review.

## ASSIGNMENTS

For almost every meeting of this tutorial, you will hand in a piece of writing. This, like every Junior Tutorial, culminates with a **twenty-to-twenty-five-page research paper**, due at the end of reading period. That may be longer than any paper you have yet written, or will ever write, as a Harvard undergraduate, so helping you along are some intermediary assignments (and deadlines): a **two-page proposal plus bibliography** (week 8), an **outline or excerpt** (week 10), a **rough draft** (week 12), and a **presentation** (week 13). (Those are the mandatory, graded steps. You’re very welcome to turn in additional drafts, half-drafts, ramblings, etc.: be in touch with Chris.)

When you are not working on your research paper, you may be doing **short critical or creative exercises** (defining new forms and genres, uncreatively “writing” poetry), or drafting and editing book reviews. Every student in the tutorial will write one **1500-word review** of a book from the last five years, due week 5; we will workshop each other’s reviews in week 6, and help edit down the 1500-word review into a **500-word microreview**, due week 7. All students are encouraged to submit their reviews to journals or blogs, though whether or not your review is published has no bearing on your grade. For a long list of possible books to review, see the end of this syllabus; if you hope to publish a review, you should pick a just-published or about-to-be-published book.

We will take three poetry-related trips as a tutorial: one to the Woodberry Poetry Room, just across the street, on the third floor of Lamont; one to a Woodberry event on campus; and one to a reading or poetry performance off campus. Every week, Daniel Bouchard at MIT sends out an email compiling all the publicized readings in the Boston area: we will look over his list together, and plan on attending one non-Harvard event by week 11.

## READINGS

We read eleven books, each in its entirety—please read the entire book, at least once, by its scheduled meeting, and come prepared with thoughts and questions. Ten of those books are available in print. In the order we read them:

- Frank Bidart, *Metaphysical Dog* (2013) (collected, with a whole lot else, in *Half-Light: Collected Poems 1965–2017* (2017))
- Lucie Brock-Broido, *Stay, Illusion* (2013)
- Patricia Lockwood, *Motherland Fatherland Homelandsexuals* (2014)
- Terrance Hayes, *How to Be Drawn* (2015)
- D. A. Powell, *Useless Landscape, or A Guide for Boys* (2012)
- Juan Felipe Herrera, *Notes on the Assemblage* (2015)
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014)
- Cathy Park Hong, *Engine Empire: Poems* (2012)
- Juliana Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came* (2015)
- Rachel Zucker, *Museum of Accidents* (2010)

Most of these are available as ebooks, but be warned: poetry ebooks are imperfect facsimiles, and tend to misconstrue line endings, paratext, book design, and more. If you write on a book for this class, you should look at and get your hands on a print copy.

We will also read Tan Lin, *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004: The Joy of Cooking* (2010), which is available both in print and [online for free as a high-quality PDF](#).

All our books are on reserve at Lamont. 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, attendance, presentations	20%
Short assignments	10%
Book review and microreview	20%
Research paper	50%
– Proposal plus bibliography	– 10%
– Outline or excerpt	– 10%
– Rough draft	– 10%
– Final draft	– 20%



## POLICIES

*Submission.* **Submit all assignments through Canvas.** With the exception of the final draft of your research paper, **all written assignments are due by the midnight before our meeting.** If you turn in your work on time, you will receive it back within three days. Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade per day, except for the final paper, which must be turned in by the due date. **Students who fail to turn in a final paper will fail the tutorial.**

*Extensions.* Short, one-to-two-day extensions may be granted in certain circumstances—ask before the day of. For extensions longer than two days, show Chris a note from HUHS or your dean. **No extensions on the final paper.**

*Attendance.* Your attendance is vital to your own success and to the tutorial’s success. So is your attendance in Junior Tutorial General Meetings and at other required events. **Everyone can have one “free” absence—no explanation necessary. Any subsequent absence decreases your participation grade, and excessive absence could result in failing the course.**

*Disability accommodation.* Students with disabilities are encouraged to request accommodation, as soon as possible, through Harvard’s [Accessible Education Office](#) (AEO). Here’s AEO: “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 . . . . Failure to do so may result in the Course Head’s inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.”

*Gadgetry.* Laptops and tablets are allowed for reading ebooks, taking notes, and looking up things. If you use them for social media or time-wasting, you will be noticed, and your participation grade will go down. **Exception:** during our meeting on social media, the reverse is true: you must Tweet in class to participate fully that day; if you need a device to Tweet with, one will be provided for you.

*Academic honesty, collaboration, citation.* Plagiarism is the use of another person’s ideas or writing without giving them proper credit.<sup>2</sup> Consequences of plagiarism can range from failing grades on assignments, to dismissal from the course, to 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

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<sup>2</sup> Full disclosure: I copied-and-pasted this sentence from a syllabus written by Prof. Andrew Warren, who deserves a. my gratitude and b. a proper citation. If you don’t yet know how to do b., ask me.

community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

For the microreview, and possibly for other assignments, you will collaborate with another student on a graded assignment. If you have questions about what constitutes proper collaboration, or about how to cite sources and peers, ask me. **Exception:** during our meeting on appropriation, you do not need to cite or tell the truth about sources for your appropriated poem (but once the meeting ends, you do).

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week Readings, assignments

- 0 Introductions. One handout with poems from that year's [Pulitzer Prize winner](#), that month's [Poetry magazine](#), that week's [New Yorker](#), that day's [Poem-a-Day](#) on poets.org. Another handout with teasers of poets to review.
- 1 **Poetry:** Frank Bidart, *Metaphysical Dog* (2013) [print].  
**Review:** Robert Boyers, "Deliriums and Descents," *The Nation*, 15 May 2013 [\[online\]](#).  
**Topic: What makes poetry "contemporary"?:** Langdon Hammer, "Frank Bidart and the Tone of Contemporary Poetry," *Southwest Review* 87, no. 1 (2002): 75–89 [\[online\]](#).  
**Assignment:** Pick a poem from our first class or from *Metaphysical Dog*, and in around 500 words explain why or why not it strikes you as "contemporary" (whatever that means).
- 2 **Poetry:** Lucie Brock-Broido, *Stay, Illusion* (2013) [print].  
**Review:** Helen Vendler, "A Dazzling Poet," *New York Review of Books*, 5 February 2015 [\[online\]](#).  
**Topic: Creative writing and institutionalization:** Chad Harbach, "MFA vs NYC," *MFA vs NYC* (2014) [handout].  
**Assignment:** Have a get-to-know-you meeting with Chris; come with ideas of books for your book review (due week 5).
- 3 **Poetry:** Terrance Hayes, *How to Be Drawn* (2015) [print]; Christian Bök, *Eunoia* (2002), "Chapter E" [\[online\]](#).  
**Review:** Dan Chiasson, "Sense of Self," *New Yorker*, 11 May 2015 [\[online\]](#).  
**Topic: Form and genre:** Stephen Burt, "Sestina! or, The Fate of the Idea of Form," *Modern Philology* 105, no. 1 (2007): 218–41 [\[online\]](#).

**Assignment:** Identify a poetic form or genre invented since 2000 (by someone other than Hayes). In no more than 500 words explain the form or genre, its origins, conventions, and characteristic effects.

- 4 **Poetry:** Patricia Lockwood, *Motherland Fatherland Homelandsexuals* (2014) [print].  
**Review:** Lauren O’Neal, “A Woman Reviews Patricia Lockwood,” *The Toast*, 11 June 2014 [\[online\]](#). (O’Neal links to other reviews and interviews—feel free to read those too.)  
**Topic: Social media:** Lockwood’s Twitter, [@TriciaLockwood](#).  
**Assignment:** Make a Twitter account for this course (do not use a preexisting one). Before our meeting, follow at least 20 poets, critics, and poetry bots; tweet 20 tweets, poetry or criticism or self-promotion or snark; be prepared to show the tutorial what you’ve done, and to live-tweet our meeting.
- 5 **Poetry:** D. A. Powell, *Useless Landscape, or A Guide for Boys* (2012) [print].  
**Review:** Adam Plunkett, “Bodies in Pain,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 22 February 2012 [\[online\]](#).  
**Topic: Place:** Jeremy Richards, “A Shifting Sense of Place,” Poetry Foundation, 19 January 2011 [\[online\]](#).  
**Assignment:** Book review. Include texts at least three poems—at least one you mention in your review, at least one you don’t—for the rest of the tutorial to read.

#### *BOOK-REVIEW WORKSHOP*

- 6 **Poetry:** Poems from books under review.  
**Review:** Our reviews!  
**Assignment:** Read your peers’ reviews, reread your own, and be prepared to workshop them. Single out areas that should be preserved, and areas that could be deleted, for the microreview.  
**Trip:** Woodberry Poetry Room.  
**Topic: 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?” [\[online\]](#).
- 7 **Poetry:** Juan Felipe Herrera, *Notes on the Assemblage* (2015) [print].  
**Review:** Rigoberto González, “Juan Felipe Herrera’s Global Voice and Vision,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 23 September 2015 [\[online\]](#).  
**Topic: Multilingualism:** Juliana Spahr, “Multilingualism in Contemporary American Poetry,” *The Cambridge History of American Poetry* (2014) [handout].  
**Assignment:** Microreview.  
**Trip:** Woodberry Poetry Room event.

- 8 **Poetry:** Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) [print].  
**Review:** Read or listen to at least two: [Artforum](#), [Bookforum](#), [Boston Review](#), [Guardian](#), [New Yorker](#), [New York Review of Books](#), [New York Times Book Review](#), [NPR](#), [Los Angeles Review of Books](#), [Slate](#), [Bookworm podcast](#), [Radio Open Source podcast](#).  
**Topic: Occupy poetics:** Selected poems by Jericho Brown, Ross Gay, Juan Felipe Herrera, Danez Smith, Juliana Spahr [handout].  
**Assignment:** Two-page proposal plus bibliography.
- 9 **Poetry:** Tan Lin, *Seven Controlled Vocabularies and Obituary 2004: The Joy of Cooking* (2010) [print or [online](#)].  
**Review:** Kristen Gallagher, “Cooking a book with low-level durational energy: How to read Tan Lin’s ‘Seven Controlled Vocabularies,’” *Jacket2*, 27 May 2011 [\[online\]](#).  
**Topic: Appropriation:** Marjorie Perloff, “Poetry on the Brink,” *Boston Review*, 18 May 2012 [\[online\]](#).  
**Assignment:** Using only language you did not write—poetry and criticism we read for class is fine, as is just about anything else—uncreatively write a poem. Put your name on it.
- 10 **Poetry:** Cathy Park Hong, *Engine Empire: Poems* (2012) [print].  
**Review:** John Yau, “At Play in the Fields of Language: The Poetry of Cathy Park Hong (Part Two),” *Hyperallergic*, 2 December 2012 [\[online\]](#).  
**Topic: Identity and the avant-garde:** Cathy Park Hong, “Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde,” *Lana Turner* 7 (2014) [\[online\]](#); Dorothy Wang, “Introduction: Aesthetics Contra ‘Identity’ in Contemporary Poetry Studies,” in *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (2013) [handout].  
**Assignment:** Outline or excerpt.
- 11 **Poetry:** Juliana Spahr, *That Winter the Wolf Came* (2015) [print].  
**Review:** David W. Pritchard’s November 2015 [review](#) of Commune Editions’ first three titles and Jeff T. Johnson’s December 2015 [“review”](#) of *That Winter the Wolf Came*, both in *Tarpaulin Sky* [online].  
**Topic: Ecopoetics:** Christopher Arigo, “Notes Toward an Ecopoetics: Revising the Postmodern Sublime and Juliana Spahr’s *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*,” *HOW2*, 2008 [\[online\]](#).  
**Trip:** Non-Harvard poetry reading or performance.
- 12 **Poetry:** Rachel Zucker, *Museum of Accidents* (2010) [print].  
**Review:** Stephen Burt, “Smothered to Smithereens,” *Boston Review* (January

2010) [\[online\]](#).

**Topic: Anthology case study: Gurlisque:** Introduction and selected poems from *Gurlisque: the new grrly, grotesque, burlesque poetics*, ed. Lara Glenum and Arielle Greenberg (2010) [handout].

**Assignment:** Rough draft.

13 **Poetry:** Selected poems from research papers.

**Assignment:** Presentation. Email Chris any handouts or poems you wish to share.

Reading period **Assignment:** Final draft (date TBD).

BOOKS SINCE 2012 TO READ, WRITE ON, THINK ABOUT

- Aaron Kunin, *Cold Genius* (2014)  
 Ada Limón, *Bright Dead Things* (2015)  
 Ange Mlinko, *Marvelous Things Overheard* (2014)  
 Angie Estes, *Enchantée* (2013)  
 Aracelis Girmay, *The Black Maria* (2016)  
 August Kleinzahler, *The Hotel Oneira* (2013)  
 Brenda Shaughnessy, *So Much Synth* (2016)  
 C. D. Wright, *ShallCross* (2016)  
 Caki Wilkinson, *The Wynona Stone Poems* (2014)  
 Carmen Giménez Smith, *Milk and Filth* (2013)  
 Craig Dworkin, *Alkali* (2015)  
 Dan Chiasson, *Bicentennial* (2014)  
 Darcie Dennigan, *Palace of Subatomic Bliss* (2016)  
 Deborah Landau, *The Uses of the Body* (2015)  
 Diane Seuss, *Four-Legged Girl* (2015)  
 Donald Revell, *Drought-Adapted Vine* (2015)  
 Erin Belieu, *Slant Six* (2014)  
 Fanny Howe, *Second Childhood* (2014)  
 Gabby Bess, *Alone with Other People* (2013)  
 Gregory Pardlo, *Digest* (2014)  
 H. L. Hix, *American Anger: An Evidentiary* (2016)  
 Hailey Leithauser, *swoop* (2013)  
 Jennifer Foerster, *Leaving Tulsa* (2013)  
 Jennifer Moxley, *The Open Secret* (2014)  
 Jericho Brown, *The New Testament* (2014)  
 Jillian Weise, *The Book of Goodbyes* (2013)  
 John Ashbery, *Breezeway* (2015)  
 John Beer, *Lucinda* (2016)  
 Joseph Massey, *Illocality* (2015)  
 Joshua Mehigan, *Accepting the Disaster* (2014)  
 Joshua Weiner, *The Figure of a Man Being Swallowed  
by a Fish* (2013)  
 Joyelle McSweeney, *Percussion Grenade* (2012)  
 Kathleen OSSIP, *The Do-Over* (2015)  
 Kenneth Goldsmith, *Capital: New York, Capital of the  
20<sup>th</sup> Century* (2015)  
 LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, *TwERK* (2013)  
 Laura Kasischke, *The Infinitesimals* (2014)  
 Lucia Perillo, *Time Will Clean the Carcass Bones:  
Selected and New Poems* (2016)  
 Mark Bibbins, *They Don't Kill You Because They're  
Hungry, They Kill You Because They're Full*  
(2014)  
 Matthea Harvey, *If the Tabloids Are True What Are  
You* (2014)  
 Maureen N. McLane, *This Blue* (2014)  
 Michael Robbins, *Alien vs. Predator* (2012)  
 Monica Youn, *Blackacre* (2016)  
 Nada Gordon, *Vile Lilt* (2013)  
 Nathaniel Mackey, *Blue Fasa* (2015)  
 Nick Montfort, *#!* (2014)  
 Nickole Brown, *Fanny Says* (2015)  
 Noelle Kocot, *Soul in Space* (2013)  
 Ocean Vuong, *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (2016)  
 Olena Kalaytiak Davis, *The Poem She Didn't Write and  
Other Poems* (2014)  
 Peter Balakian, *Ozone Journal* (2015)  
 Peter Gizzi, *Archeophonics* (2016)  
 Peter O'Leary, *Phosphorescence of Thought* (2013)  
 Rae Armantrout, *Itself* (2015)  
 Robin Coste Lewis, *Voyage of the Sable Venus and  
Other Poems* (2015)  
 Robyn Schiff, *A Woman of Property* (2016)  
 Ross Gay, *Catalog of Unabashed Gratitude* (2015)  
 Saeed Jones, *Prelude to Bruise* (2014)  
 Sean Bishop, *The Night We're Not Sleeping In* (2014)  
 Shane McCrae, *Blood* (2013)  
 Sherman Alexie, *What I've Stolen, What I've Earned*  
(2013)  
 Stephen Burt, *Belmont* (2013)  
 Susan Wheeler, *Meme* (2012)  
 Thomas Sayers Ellis, *Skin, Inc.: Identity Repair Poems*  
(2013)  
 Tyehimba Jess, *Olio* (2016)

Most of these books (and thousands more) can be found in the Woodberry Poetry Room on the third floor of Lamont. Some I own and can lend out. If you want a review copy of a yet-to-be-published book, figure out the publisher and email its publicity department. (I can help with that.)

Many other recent books by these authors, and recent books by thousands of other authors, are probably fine, but ask first. Novels, plays, and song or rap lyrics are probably not fine, but you can ask anyway.