Fall 8-15-2004


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English 2011G Literature, the self, and the world: poetry
Fall 2004
Office hours: WF: 2-3; M: 2-4
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Texts: Ramazani, Ellmann, and O’Clair, The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry (3rd ed); Gillan and Gillan, Unsettling America; Roberts, Writing about Literature

Goals: The main aim of the class is to deepen your understanding of and appreciation for poetry. I’m hoping that among the many poets we read, you’ll find one or two with whom you can really connect, and that you go out of the class more likely to keep reading poetry in the future.

The course’s title (Literature, the self, and the world) implies that reading poetry will also help you locate yourself more clearly in relation to the world. Throughout the semester, I’d like to focus on the idea of “America.” By reading some of the ways in which poets have defined what it means to be American, I’m hoping we can all figure out which of these ways we, as individuals, feel comfortable with, and which we might want to change, and how others’ versions of “America” might differ from our own. Even as they play with language and sound, creating imaginative universes of great beauty and intricacy, poets also attack, praise, and tell us how to live. I hope you’ll listen to these poets with an open mind, agree with some, argue with others, and perhaps come, by the end of the semester, to a new understanding of what being “American” means.

This is a writing-intensive class. You may submit a paper from this class as part of your EWP. For more information, visit the assessment website: www.eiu.edu/~assess

Policies: English Department statement on plagiarism:
Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the assigned essay and a grade of NC for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.

Plan to hand in papers on time. If you're having problems, let me know. In-class writing, brief homework assignments, and on-line assignments must be done for the assigned class to be acceptable.

Essays a week or more late will not be accepted at all.

Regular attendance is expected. More than four unexcused absences will result in a grade of 0 for participation.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Requirements/grades

Brief at-home writing assignments: 10%
At least eight on-line responses to reading: 10%
Midterm and final: 25% (10/15)
3 essays (3-4 pp. each): 35% (10/10/15)
Participation, in-class writing assignments, group presentation: 20%

Essay grades will be based on Guidelines for Evaluating Writing Assignments in EIU’s English Department. I plan to use number rather than letter grades; this will convert into your final grade as
follows: 91-100=A; 81-90=B; 71-80=C; 65-70=D; below 65=F. Because I grade on a 100-point scale, missing assignments (which receive a 0) affect the grade tremendously. Any paper may be rewritten within a week of its being returned to you; if substantially improved, it will receive a new grade which will be averaged in with the first.

Responses: Most weeks, I'd like each of you to write a response to one of the assigned poems (a paragraph or so) on the Web CT bulletin board, on-line (If this is inaccessible, give me a 1-page typed response in class instead). The response should reflect your thoughts and questions on the poems due in class BEFORE class discussion. I will not give credit for responses entered after the class period in which the relevant assignment has been discussed, though of course you're welcome to make additional comments then. Begin your posting by responding to any relevant earlier postings. Then make whatever points strike you: comment on what you like or didn’t like about the poem, what it’s about, connections you see, or questions you have. Please keep comments respectful and on-topic. I will not grade these individually; a grade will be given for your collected contributions based on the thoughtfulness, precision, depth, and punctuality of your comments.

Class participation/involvement: It’s nearly impossible to read a poem alone. Reading well requires rereading, reading aloud, discussing, and interaction. It’s crucial that you read the assigned poems before coming to class: carefully, more than once, aloud, with a dictionary. To encourage careful preparation, a substantial portion of your grade is based on class participation and on-line responses to the poems. Class participation is hard to evaluate, but here’s my advice:
For an A: comment frequently in ways that advance the conversation. This could be bringing up some aspect of the poem we’ve forgotten, disagreeing with a student or with me, or asking a question of a student or me. Hardly ever miss class. Be a leader in group discussions and presentation.
For a B: attend consistently, look alert, and speak occasionally. Do a good job with group discussions and presentation.
For a C: say nothing and skip class occasionally. Participate in group discussions and presentation, but minimally.
Below a C: skip class often and contribute nothing.
Because presence in class is essential to involvement, unexcused absences will count directly against this portion of your grade. More than 4 unexcused absences will result in a grade of 0 for participation.

Group presentation: In groups of 3-4, I’ll ask you to select a contemporary poet represented in at least one of our anthologies and find out everything you can about him/her. Read all the poems you can find by that person, and then lead a class on him/her at the end of the semester. Groups presenting should provide a hand-out that lists your poet’s major accomplishments provides an annotated bibliography.

Tentative Syllabus

Tremendously valuable website on modern American poetry: http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/
Mon August 23: Introduction to the class.
for Wed 25: Reading free verse; annotating a poem: diction, syntax, lineation, imagery
F 27: Whitman in Norton, “Song of Myself” pp. 4-9 (through section 7). Read my welcome message on WebCT.

Mon. Aug 30: Whitman, “Song,” sections 8-14 (pp. 9-12)
Wed Sept. 1: Whitman, “Song” sections 46-52 (pp. 13-17).
Fri 3: Read Whitman preface to Leaves, 865-70. Hand in brief writing assignment #1. Post response
Mon 6: No class
Wed 8: Dickinson, poems 49, 214, 249, 258 (pp. 32-34)
Fri 10: Dickinson, poems 280, 303, 341, 435, 465. Post response mw, or f

Mon 13: Dickinson poems 585, 632, 657, 754, 1129

Wed 22: Stevens, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (244-6)
Fri 24: “Snow Man” (247), “The Emperor of Ice Cream” (248). Post response mw, or f

Wed. 29: McKay, “America” (503); Hughes, “I, Too, Sing America” (hand-out); “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (687-8)
Fri Oct 1: Hughes, “The Weary Blues” (688-9), Sylvester’s Dying Bed” (693), from “Montage of a Dream Deferred” (700-704). Post response mw, or f

Mon Oct 4: Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (964-67)
Wed 6: Midterm.
Fri 8: no class

Mon 11: Norton vol 2: Ginsburg, “A Supermarket in California” (1215), “America” (1216-18); “Notes on Howl” 1075-77
Fri 15: Rich, “Diving into the Wreck” (467-9). “When We Dead Awaken” 1086-95. Post response mw, or f

Mon 18: Rich.
Fri 22: Read Roberts, 139-152. Bring essay #2: comparison. Peer editing.

Mon 25: Hand in essay #2. Unsettling America: Chin, “We Are Americans” (10), Mora, “Elena” (11), Okita, “In Response” (44), Shapiro, “Tattoo” (34-5), Erdrich, “Dear John Wayne” (54-5);
Wed 27: Unsettling. Mora, “Immigrants” (119), Baraka, “Ka ‘Ba” (155-6), Nye, “My Father” (263-4), Anzaldua “Cultures” (300);
Fri 29: Unsettling. Geok-lin Lim, “I Defy You” (333); Creeley, “America” (361-2). Post response m,w, or f

Mon Nov 1: Bring Unsettling and Norton vol 2. Select poets for group presentations.
Wed 3: Conferences
Fri 5: Conferences

Mon 8: Group presentation #1
Wed 10: Group presentation #2
Fri. 12: Group presentation #3. Post response mw or f

Mon.15: Group presentation #4
Wed. 17: Group presentation #5
Fri. 19: Group presentation #6. Post response mw or f

Mon. 22-26: Thanksgiving Recess

Mon Nov 29: Group presentation #7
Wed Dec 1: Group presentation #8
Fri Dec 3: Group presentation #9 Post response mw or f

Mon 6: Bring essay #3. Peer editing
Fri 10: Review

There will be a final exam (not cumulative) during exam week.
Emerson:
From the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson

NATURE 1836 (1st "proclamation of New England Transcendentalism.")
To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. . . . The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. . . . Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God.

Man is conscious of a universal soul within or behind his individual life, wherein, as in a firmament, the natures of Justice, Truth, Love, Freedom, arise and shine . . . He is placed in the centre of being, and a ray of relation passes from every other being to him . . . The world is emblematic.

When I behold a rich landscape, it is less to my purpose to recite correctly the order and superposition of the strata, than to know why all thought of multitude is lost in a tranquil sense of unity.

THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR 1837
Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.

The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although in almost all men obstructed and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth and utters truth, or creates . . . The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius . . . they pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: The eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead . . .

I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds. What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and the gait of the body; show me the ultimate reason of these matters; show me the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking, as always it does lurk, in these suburbs and extremities of nature; let me see every trifle bristling with the polarity that ranges it instantly in an eternal law . . . and the world lies no longer a dully miscellany and lumber-room but has form and order; there is no trifle, there is no puzzle, but one design unite and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench.

Help must come from the bosom alone . . . The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature . . . in yourself slumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all; it is for you to dare all.

SELF-RELIANCE 1841
Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company in which the members agree for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and Customs.

Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist . . . Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind . . . No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature . . . I shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me.

. . . A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do . . . Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said to-day.

[inquiry into deepest self] leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct. We denote this primary wisdom as Intuition, whilst all later teachings are tuitions. In that deep force, the last fact behind which analysis cannot go, all things find their common origin . . . We first share the life by which things exist, and afterwards see them as appearances in nature, and forget that we have shared their cause . . . We lie in the lap of immense intelligence, which makes us receives of its truth and organs of its activity.