

Plumly

Senior Seminar 399

American Prosody

Modern Poems/A Norton Intro
eds. Ellmann, O-Clair
(2nd Edition)

American Poetry, like American English, has, almost from the beginning, spoken in its own peculiar voice--or voices, since so much of our writing is regional and personal and culturally diverse. This course will follow the development of our modern poetic idiom, our distinct prosody, as it has both separated from and absorbed classic English models, as it has accepted and transformed foreign influences, and as it has welcomed other American art forms, such as painting (Whistler, Homer, Eakins, Hopper) and music (hymns, blues, jazz, rock). Historical perspective as well as geographic and aesthetic differences will be emphasized. Whitman and Dickinson, although roughly contemporaneous, resist their English forebears in extremely various styles. Frost and Stevens, both masters of the New England blank verse line, could not be more different. Just as Langston Hughes must find a correlative public language for his Harlem "weary blues," so Sylvia Plath must discover forms to represent deeply conflicted inner states. Post-modern schools of American poetry--Black Mountain, Confessional, Deep-Image--will also be noticed.

Before we begin with Whitman, we will look at some English models and some older American examples.

We will write four short papers (500-700 wds) and one longer paper to finish. The short papers will address particular prosodic/thematic issues in particular poems. The longer paper will compare/contrast work between poets (or within the work of one poet). All the short papers will be duplicated so that all members of the class can share insights.

Please note: this is a senior seminar. You are expected at every class. If you miss you will need an excuse. Do not forget to inform me if you must miss. If you have a problem with absence it will be reflected in your grade, regardless of your performance on the papers.

The list below is in chronological order, based on the text. Classes will follow this order unless otherwise announced. There are two extended essays-- "Reading Poems" and "Modern Poetry in English"-- that you are also responsible for. They begin and end your text, respectively. (Note: a few of the poems below are not in your text and will be supplied.)

Whitman → When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer;
A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim
Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

Dickinson #216 (both versions)
258
341
465
632
986
1670

Frost Mending Wall
After Apple-Picking
Road Not Taken
Birches
Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening
Directive

Stevens Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird
The Snow Man
Emperor of Ice-Cream
The Man on the Dump
The Plain Sense of Things

Williams Spring and All
The Red Wheelbarrow
This Is Just to Say

Moore Poetry

Eliot The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

McKay if We Must Die
America
The Harlem Dancer

L. Hughes The Weary Blues
Morning After

Roethke My Papa's Waltz
Dolor
Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt, and Frau Schwatze

Bishop First Death in Nova Scotia
 In the Waiting Room
 Poem

Hayden Those Winter Sundays
 A Plague of Starlings

Lowell Memories of West Street and Lepke
 For the Union Dead

Brooks The Lovers of the Poor

Hugo Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg

Ginsberg A Supermarket in California
 America
 To Aunt Rose
 Mugging

O'Hara The Day Lady Died

Rich Yom Kippur

Plath Ariel
 Whiteness I Remember
 Daddy
 Blackberrying

Wakoski Thanking My Mother for Piano Lessons

Pinsky The Questions

Riosrto Madre-Sofia Husband

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American Prosody
The Norton Anthology of Poetry
(Shorter, 3rd Edition)

The following is a list of American poets in roughly chronological order. Historical perspective is a subtext of this course. The text is 'voices & visions' in American poetry, which is essentially a modern idiom, right from the start. Individual poems will be drawn from this list--that is, from the table of contents of the Norton. (See course description for further information.) Some poets will receive a great deal more attention than others

Bradstreet	Toomer	J. Wright
Taylor	H. Crane	Kinnell
Longfellow	L. Hughes	Merwin
Poe	Roethke	Rich
Whitman	Olson	Plath
Dickinson	Bishop	
Dunbar	Hayden	
Frost	Brooks	contemporaries
Stevens	Lowell	
Williams	Hugo	
Pound	Ammons	
H.D.	Ginsberg	
Moore	O'Hara	
Eliot	Ashbery	

Note: This course is about a process, a development of understanding, the acquisition of a reading skill as well as knowledge. You must be in class every class for the process to work. If you must miss you must tell me in advance or show up with a doctor's blessing.

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TuTh 11:00-12:15

AMERICAN PROSODY. American poetry, like American English, has, almost from the beginning, spoken in its own peculiar and particular voice--or "voices," since so much of our writing is regional and personal. This course will follow closely the development of our modern poetic idiom, our special prosody: as it has both separated from and absorbed classic English models; as it has accepted and transformed foreign influences; and as it has welcomed other American art forms, such as painting (Whistler, Eakins, Hopper, Larry Rivers) and music (hymns, blues, jazz, rock). Historical perspective as well as aesthetic and geographic differences will be emphasized. Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson, although roughly contemporaneous, rebel against their English forebears in extremely various styles. Frost and Stevens, both masters of the New England blank verse line, could not be more different. Just as Langston Hughes has to find a correlative public language for his Harlem "weary blues," so must Sylvia Plath discover forms to represent deeply conflicted inner states. Post-modern schools of American poetry--Black Mountain, Confessional, Deep-Image--will also be considered. Small analytical papers. Text: To be decided.

Pedagogical Addendum to Course Description
for Senior Seminar American Prosody (Fall, 1996)

For background examples we will be looking specifically at Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, and Keats, for English models, and at Bradstreet, Taylor, Longfellow, and Poe, for Anglo-American models. The course will focus on close readings of selections from Whitman, Dickinson, Frost, Stevens, Williams, Moore, Hughes, Bishop, Ginsberg, and Plath. (See Course Description.)

There will be four short papers (500-700 wds.) and one final, longer paper. The short papers will address particular prosodic problems in particular poems; the longer paper will concern the work of one poet or a comparison/contrast between two. The shorter papers are in lieu of class reports, in that each student shares them with the whole class--through duplication and class discussion. This method serves the salubrious function of concentrating attention on the quality of their critical prose as well as the content of their insights.

Stanley Plumly