Winter 2001

English 348
American Poetry & Poetics
T Th 2:30-4, HH 150

Instructor: Kevin McGuirk/ Office HH 263/ phone x2419
Office hours: T Th 1-2; by appointment; and by chance

This course will aim to cut a path through a vast, diverse field of activity
called American poetry & poetics. We will consider our subject historically
(how it has developed in distinctive ways). We will attend to some "major" as
well as not so major figures, and to avant-garde as well as popular poetry.
And we will pursue some theoretical questions about the nature and purpose of
poetry itself as these are explored in the American context.

Texts:
Six American Poets, ed. Joel Connaroe
Lunch Poems, Frank O'Hara
courseware

Schedule (all readings in courseware except where noted):

Jan 4 introduction

Jan 9, 11 Whitman
from Preface to Leaves of Grass/ Song of Myself (SAP - Six American Poets) as
well as selection in CW/ from I Sing the Body Electric (SAP)/ When Lilacs Last
in the Dooryard Bloom'd (SAP)

Jan 16, 18 Ginsberg & co.
Ginsberg, from Howl/ A Supermarket in California/ America/ from Wichita Vortex
Sutra/ When the Mode of the Music of Changes, the Walls of the City Shake/
Notes Written on Finally Recording Howl

Jan 23, 25 performing poetry
hooks, Performance Practice as a Site of Opposition
Bernstein, Thelonious Monk and the Performance of Poetry
Sanders, from Some Observations on the Public Performance of Investigative
Poets
Rothenberg, from New Models, New Visions
Heron, The Revolution Will Not Be Televised// Morris, Project Princess/
Gaines, Please Don't Take My Air Jordans// Harjo, For Anna Mae Pictou/
Cortez, I See Chano Ponzo// Waldman, Makeup on Empty Space// Creeley, For
Love// Baraka, Wailers// Nash, Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man// Service,
The Cremation of Sam McGee/ Pullman Porter// Rothenberg, The 13th Horse Song
of Frank Mitchell// Cassius Clay, I am the Greatest (audio)// Duprez, Lasca
(audio)// Poe, The Raven (audio)

Jan 30, 31 "Nation Language" in the US and Caribbean
McKay, If We Must Die// Cullen, Yet Do I Marvel// Louise Bennett, Noh Lickle
Twang/ Independence/ Pass fe White// Brathwaite, Nation Language// John Agard,
Listen Mr Oxford Don// Baraka, Ka'ba, Black Art// Linton Kwesi Johnson, New
Craas Massakah// Sonny's Lettah/ Reggae Sounds/ Reggae fi Dada// Antony
McNeil, Ode to Brother Joe// Cruz, Areyto

Feb 6, 8 toy medium: modern lyric
Shklovsky, Art as Technique// Eliot, Hamlet// Pound, from A Retrospect//
Agamben, Idea of Prose// Hejinian, from The Rejection of Closure
poems by Stein, cummings, Williams, Pound, Niedecker in courseware
+ handout
Feb 13, 15 soul substance
Dickinson (poems in SAP)

*** winter break ***

Feb 27, March 1 love re-coded
Mina Loy, Songs to Johannes, Feminist Manifesto
Adrienne Rich, Twenty-One Love Poems, Women and Honor

March 6, 8 wise guys
Stevens, Anecdote of the Jar/ Peter Quince at the Clavier/ The Idea of Order at Key West/ Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself (SAP)
Of Modern Poetry/ [Prose Statement]/ The Course of a Particular (CW)
Frost, Mending Wall/ Birches/ Two Tramps in Mud Time

March 13, 15 testimony
Rich, Frame// Lorde, Power// Harjo, For Anna Mae Pictou//Tillie Olsen, I Want You Women Up North to Know// Duncan, Up Rising// Reznikoff, from Testimony// Rukeyser, from Book of the Dead

March 20, 22 tools for conviviality: Frank O'Hara
Lunch Poems// Personism: a Manifesto

March 27, 29 what it means to be avant-garde
Cage, 2 pages, 122 Words on Music and Dance/ from Themes & Variations/ 25 Mesostics R and Not Re Mark Tobey
Antin, what it means to be avant-garde

April 3 conclusion

Assignments & values:

essay 1, due Feb 16 (before winter break): 15%
essay 2, due March 23: 30%
group presentation: 15%
exam: 30%
participation: 10%

Assignments explained:

essay 1 will take one of the following forms (a more detailed explanation will follow):

i) a close reading of a poem of 800-1000 words from a selection indicated by me;

ii) a concise, thorough, rigorous, and thoughtful essay on poetics or a poet's statement of poetics, also about 800-1000 words;

iii) a short poem modeled on or responding to poems on the course and accompanied by informed and rigorous reflection of at least 500 words on the original poem and your own.

Essay 2 (2500 words). Topics will be distributed but I encourage you to develop your own in consultation with me. The paper should develop an argument about a text, texts, or topic on the course, and it must include some reference to and/or use of secondary material. This does not necessarily mean, though I encourage you to explore it, literary criticism. It can mean historical, cultural, theoretical, or personal writing that is pertinent to or supports your discussion, as well as writing by the poets themselves. SEE ME! You may build on material developed in your group presentation.

The official due date is March 23; papers will be accepted until Friday March 30, and NO LATER, unless you provide documentation with positive proof
of incapacitation. If you hand in your paper on the official due date, I will try to have it back to you by April 3.

Group presentation (20 minutes; 30 minutes, including discussion): Your presentation in a group of, optimally, 3 students will develop an argument about a text or texts on the course which is relevant to the topic of the week in which you present. You must show evidence of research and you must attend to particular passages of poetry. Beyond that you have a relatively free hand. You can use performance; you can explore the context of a single poem and show how various issues, knowledge, or experience inform the poem in interesting or surprising ways; you can summarize a debate among scholars about a poem or poet; you can present the work of a poet represented slightly on the syllabus more fully; etc. I recommend that you do not take on too large a topic. You will be evaluated according to the clarity and organization of your presentation, the accuracy and interest of your analysis, and the aplomb with which you engage the class. Don’t hesitate to see me.

Participation: Your participation will contribute to the quality of learning in the classroom. Minimally, this means attendance. Maximally, it means attendance, preparedness, comments, questions, responses to group presentations, as well as reading poems under discussion aloud with care. I should emphasize that I value highly the quality of your response to your peer’s presentations.

Exam: the two-hour exam will consist of essay questions on material covered in class. Questions will be distributed at the end of classes (probably at our last meeting, but depending on the date of the exam) and you will have the opportunity to prepare the essays that you will write during the exam period.