EN3K1-30 American Poetry: Modernity, Rupture, Violence

26/27

Department
English and Comparative Literary Studies
Level
Undergraduate Level 3
Module leader
Daniel Katz
Credit value
30
Module duration
20 weeks
Assessment
100% coursework
Study location
University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This survey module on American poetry will not be strictly delimited by historical period so as to remain supple and open to developments in the field, but will always feature a large 20th-century component. While “American” should be understand hemispherically, and works from beyond the United States might be included in certain iterations, the main focus will be on the United States. Intellectually it will be organised around three major concerns:

1. Modernity. This refers to the prevalent view in US. cultural self-theorisation that the U.S. is in some ways on the advance-guard of history, for example, as an early democracy, as a nation founded on a cultural identity that cannot be traced in linear fashion to antiquity, as a state based on the principle of ethnic and cultural diversity, and as the bleeding edge of capitalist metamorphoses and liberalism.
2. “Rupture” refers to discourses of American exceptionalism, often as derived from the considerations mentioned in point (1) above, but also to the long U.S. history of cultural opposition and critique of those very discourses. It is in this light that we can examine the specific characteristics of U.S. avant-gardes, or transnational avant-gardes with strong links to the U.S.
3. Violence. Here, we will examine the particular histories of violence that are characteristic to

U.S. history—both those mystified and mythified as foundationally and archetypally “American,” and those repressed and erased. Obvious examples include, slavery and segregation, the genocide of indigenous peoples, anti-immigrant and nativist violence, economic violence, and legal and symbolic violence against women, gays, queers, trans and other forms of sexual dissidence.

Module aims

To provide students with an introduction to major figures, works, tendencies, and critical questions in the history of American poetry, with a special emphasis on the 20th century.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

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Representative Sample Syllabus:

Term 1
Week 1: introduction
Week 2: Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass (1855) (Whitman's "Preface," "Song of Myself," "The Sleepers," "I Sing the Body Electric").
Recommended Reading: B. Erkkila, " Leaves of Grass and the Body Politic."
Week 3: Emily Dickinson, selected poems (from Final Harvest): “I never lost as much but twice,” “I’m ‘wife--I've finished that,” “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” “I held a jewel in my fingers,” “There’s a certain Slant of light,” “I felt a Funeral in my Brain,” “The Soul selects her own Society,” “I know that He exists,” “After great pain, a formal feeling comes—,” “Rehearsal to Ourselves,” “I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--” “I started Early-Took my Dog--” “Mine--by the Right of the White

Election!”, “The Heart asks Pleasure--first--,” “To fill a Gap,” “The Brain--is wider than the Sky--” “I cannot live with You-,” “Me from Myself--to banish--,” “Pain--has an Element of Blank--,” “One need not be a Chamber--to be Haunted--” “Essential Oils--are wrung--” “Publication--is the Auction,” “Because I could not stop for Death--” “Renunciation--is a piercing Virtue--” “My Life had stood--a Loaded Gun--” “A loss of something ever felt I-” “The Missing All – prevented Me,” “Title divine – is mine!” Letters: (on handout).
Recommended Reading: W. M. Decker: "A Letter Always Seemed to Me Like Immortality: Emily Dickinson"
Week 4: Imagism and Transatlantic Modernism: H. D., William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound. Williams: “The Young Housewife,” “Sympathetic Portrait of a Child,” “By the road to the Contagious Hospital,” “The Pure Products of America,” “So much depends,” “Young Sycamore”; Pound: “The Garden,” “A Pact,” “In a Station of the Metro,” “Les Millwins,” “Tame Cat,” “Alba,” “The Return,” HD: “Oread,” “Garden,” “Sea Violet,” “Sea Poppies,” “Storm,” “Sea Iris,” “The Pool.”Texts on poetics: Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect" and excerpts from Gaudier Brzeska: A Memoir .
Recommended Reading: P. Peppis, "Schools, Movements, and Manifestoes," in The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry (available as e-text through Warwick Library portal).
Week 5: High Modernism: T. S. Eliot: "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," "The Waste Land"; E. Pound, Canto II (Library of America anthology), Canto 14 (handout). Texts on Poetics: T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"and " Ulysses , Order and Myth."
Recommended Reading: Maud Ellmann, "A Sphinx without a Secret" (in course reader)
Supplementary Reading: Peter Nicholls, "The Poetics of Modernism" in The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry (e-text through Warwick Library portal).
Week 6: Reading Week
Week 7: Alternative Modernisms: Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens. Marianne Moore: “To a Steam Roller,” “Critics and Connoisseurs,” “The Fish,” “Black Earth,” “When I Buy Pictures,” “Poetry,” "A Grave," “He Digesteth Harde Yron.” Wallace Stevens: "Sunday Morning," “Peter Quince at the Clavier,” “Disillusionment of Ten O’Clock,” “Sea Surface Full of Clouds,” “The Idea of Order at Key West,” “Poetry is a Destructive Force,” “The Poems of Our Climate,” "Study of Two Pears," “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself." Texts on Poetics: Marianne Moore: "Hymen, "Well Moused,Lion," "A Poet of the Quattrocento," "The Cantos." Wallace Stevens: "About One of Marianne Moore's Poems."
Recommended Reading: C. Miller, " 'Inquisitive Intensity' in Marianne Moore" ; D. Ayers, "Wallace Stevens and Romantic Legacy."
Week 8: Sites (1) New England and National Mythology: Robert Frost, Robert Lowell, Wallace Stevens. Frost: “Mending Wall,” “Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening,” “Birches,” “The Road Not Taken,” “Out, Out—,” “The Most of It,” “The Witch of Coos,”; Lowell, “Skunk Hour,” “The Public Garden,” “For the Union Dead” (handout), Stevens, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” “The Snow Man,” “The River of Rivers in Connecticut.”
Recommended Reading: P. Giles, "From Decadent Aesthetics to Political Fetishism."
Week 9:Sites (2) The Harlem Renaissance and Minority Culture. Fenton Johnson, “Tired,” “Aunt Hannah Jackson,” “The Minister”; Claude McKay, “The Lynching,” “The Harlem Dancer,” “The Tropics in New York,” “Harlem Shadows,” “If We Must Die,” “Dawn in New York,” “Outcast,” “Jasmines,” “Negro Spiritual”; James Weldon Johnson, “O Black and Unknown Bards”; Angelina Weld Grimke, “Tenebris,” “A Mona Lisa,” “Epitaph on a Living Woman”; Anne Spencer, “At the Carnival,” “Lines to a Nasturtium"; Langston Hughes (from Selected Poems): "Afro-American Fragment," "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "Aunt Sue's Stories," "Danse Africaine," "The Weary Blues," "I,Too." Additional poems by Arna Bontemps, Sterling Brown, Countee Cullen (handout):

S. Brown: "Long Gone," "Scotty Has His Say," "Ma Rainey"; A. Bontemps: "Reconnnaissance," "Southern Mansion," "Dark Girl," "A Black Man Talks of Reaping," C. Cullen: "Yet Do I Marvel," "Atlantic City Waiter," "Incident," "Heritage." Texts on Poetics: Langston Hughes, "The Negro Poet and the Racial Mountain."
Recommended Reading: Peter Brooker, "Modernism Deferred: Harlem Montage"; Marisa Parham, "Hughes, Cullen, and the In-Sites of Loss"; James Smethurst, "American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance," Cambridge Companion to Mode rn American Poetry (e-book available through library portal).
Week 10: Modernist Translation and the Language of the Tribe: Ezra Pound, H. D., Louis Zukofsky. Ezra Pound: “The Seafarer,” “Fan-Piece, For Her Imperial Lord,” “The RiverMerchant’s Life: A Letter,” “Lament of the Frontier Guard,” “Alba,” all excerpts from “Homage to Sextus Propertius,” Canto XXXVI, alternate translation of "Donna me pregha" (handout); H. D. : “Hyppolytus Temporizes,” “Fragment 113,” “Trance”; “Hermes of the Ways” (photocopy), L Zukofsky (with Celia Zukofsky), selections from "Catullus" (photocopy). Texts on Poetics: Pound: "Notes on Elizabethan Classicists" and "How to Read" (handout).
Recommended Reading: S. Yao,"Every Allegedly Great Age: Modernism and the Practice of Literary Translation," S. Spender, review of "Homage to Sextus Propertius" (handout).
Term 2
Week 11: Objectivism, Projective Verse, Black Mountain School: Post/Late Modernism. Charles Olson, 'I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You," "Letter 3," "Maximus, to himself"; Robert Creeley, "After Lorca," "A Form of Women," "The Rain," "For Love," "The Language," John Cage, "25 Mesostics Re and Not Re Mark Tobey"; G. Oppen, Thus/Hides the," “Who comes is occupied" (handout); WC Williams, from Paterson: " The Delineaments of the Giants." Texts on Poetics: C. Olson, "Projective Verse'; R. Creeley, "To Define," "Form"; W. C. Williams, "The Poem Paterson " and "Projective Verse."
Recommended Reading: "Mark Scroggins: “From the Late Modernism of the ‘Objectivists’ to the Proto-postmodernism of ‘Projective Verse” in Cambridge Companion to American Poetry since 1945 (available as e-resource through library portal). P. Nicholls, "Beginning Again".
Week 12: "The Homosexual in Society": Robert Duncan, Frank O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, Gertrude Stein, Adrienne Rich. O’Hara: “Meditations in an Emergency,” “Personal Poem,” “A Step Away from Them,” “Ave Maria,” “Steps,” “Poem” ("Lana Turner has collapsed!"); Duncan, “The Torso Passages 18”; Stein from “Lifting Belly” (in LOA anthology); Ginsberg: “Howl,” “A Supermarket in California”, “On Neal’s Ashes,” “America”; Adrienne Rich, “Splittings” (handout). Texts on Poetics and Sexuality: R. Duncan, "The Homosexuality in Society" (listed under "Faas"; Duncan's essay begins on p. 319; the preceding pages are Faas' account of its publication and consequences);Frank O'Hara, "Personism: A Manifesto"; Ginsberg, "Notes for Howl and Other Poems '; A. Rich: "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence."
Recommended Reading: M. Damon, "Dirty Jokes and Angels."
Week 13: Music and (minority) National Culture (1): Langston Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred; Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), "Swing: From Verb to Noun" (listed under "Jones").
Recommended Reading: Robert O'Brien Hokanson, "Jazzing It Up: The Be-Bop Modernism of Langston Hughes."
Week 14: Eco-Poetics: Philip Whalen, “Sourdough Mountain Lookout”; Larry Eigner (all the selections in Postmodern American Poetry); Gary Snyder, “Hay for the Horses,” “Riprap,” “As for Poets,” “Right in the Trail,” “No Shadow”; Joanne Kyger, “Destruction,” “1986,” “1987” (handout); Michael McClure (all the selections in Postmodern American Poetry); Ed Roberson, “Urban Nature,” “Open/ Back Up,” “Monk's Bird Book,” “The Counsel of Birds”; Mei-mei Berssenbrugge,

“Alakanak Break-Up”; Will Alexander, “A Nexus of Phantoms”; Stephen Ratcliffe, “from REAL”; Cole Swensen “A Garden as Between,” “If a Garden of Numbers,” “Labyrinths and Mazes”; Harryette Mullen, from Urban Tumbeweed (handout); Forrest Gander, “from Late Summer Entry: The Landscapes of Sally Mann”; Juliana Spahr, from “Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another” (handout).
Texts On Poetics (in course reader or handout): Gary Snyder, “The Etiquette of Freedom” (excerpt); “Tawny Grammar” (excerpt); “Unnatural Writing” (excerpt); Evelyn Reilly, “EcoNoise and the Flux of Lux” (excerpt); Juliana Spahr, Things of Each Possible Relation Hashing Against One Another (afterword), Forrest Gander, “The Carboniferous and Ecopoetics” (excerpt), Ed Roberson, “Take Care.”
Week 15: Confession and Discretion: Sylvia Plath, “Lady Lazarus,” “Daddy,” “Cut” (handout), “The Munich Mannequins” (handout), “Edge.” Elizabeth Bishop, “At the Fishhouses,” “The Fish,” “The Armadillo,” “Sestina.”Marianne Moore, “Marriage”; Adrienne Rich, “Trying to Talk with a Man” (handout), “Diving into the Wreck.”
Recommended Reading: L. Keller and C. Miller, "Feminism and the Female Poet."
Supplementary Reading: Michael Thurston, "Psychotherapy and Confessional Poetry," in The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry (available as e-book through library portal).
Week 16: reading week
Week 17: Immediate Mediacy: John Ashbery, James Schuyler. John Ashbery: "Clepsydra," "Soonest Mended," "The Double Dream of Spring" (all on handout), "Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape." James Schuyler: "Hymn to Life" (handout), "Korean Mums."
Recommended Reading: Ben Lerner: "The Future Continuous: Ashbery's Lyric Mediacy."
Week 18: Music and National Counter-Cutlture (2): Amiri Baraka, “Duncan Spoke of a Process,” “Leadbelly Gives an Autograph,” “Ka ‘Ba,” “Leroy,” “The Rare Birds,” “J. said, ‘Our whole universe is generated by a rhythm,” AM/TRAK" (handout); Gwendolyn Brooks, “The Rites for Cousin Vit,” “We Real Cool,” “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till,” “The Blackstone Rangers,” “The Boy Died in My Alley” (handout); Bob Kaufman, (poems on handout); Stephen Jonas (poems on handout); Jack Spicer, “Song for Bird and Myself”; Frank O’Hara, “The Day Lady Died,” Robert Creeley, “I Know a Man.”
Baraka reads AM/TRAK--spoken word/jazz
Recommended Reading: Fred Moten, 'Round the Five Spot"
Week 19: L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E and beyond: L. Hejinian: “My Life” (excerpt); M. Palmer, “The Project of Linear Inquiry,” “I Do Not”; Bernadette Mayer, “Midwinter Day” (excerpt); B. Perelman, “Confession,” “Current Poetics”; S. McCaffery, “Apologia Pro Vita Sua,” “Suggestion but No Insult”; R. Silliman, “Tjanting” (excerpt); C. Bernstein, “Whose Language,” “This Line”; P. Gizzi, “In Defense of Nothing,”’ “A Panic That Can Still Come Upon Me”; S. Doris, “Love Letter (lament),” ; B. Lerner, “The Dark collects,” and “In My Day”; Lisa Robertson “The Weather” (excerpt, on handout). Text on Poetics: L. Hejinian, "The Rejection of Closure" (excerpt); S. McCaffery, “Language Writing: from Productive to Libidinal Economy”; C. Bernstein, “Introjective Verse.”
Recommended Reading: S. McCaffery, "Language Writing" in The Cambridge Companio n to American Poetry since 1945 (available as e-resource through library portal).
Supplementary reading: B. Watten, "Language Writing" in The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Poetry (e-resource, library portal).
Week 20: Harryette Mullen, Muse & Drud ge (in Recyclopedia), "Denigration" (in Postmodern American Poetry).
Recommended Reading: Mitchum Huehls, "Spun Puns (and anagrams): Exchange Economies, Subjectivity, and History in Harryette Mullen's Muse & Drudge ."

Supplementary Reading: E. Shockley, "Complicating the Subject."

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Be able to prosecute a complex, extended argument of around journal article length, pertaining material covered in this module, conforming to high standards of academic practice regarding the use of critical sources, originality of argument, and research skills.
- Demonstrate an advanced knowledge of key movements and figures in the history of American poetry, and their relationship to their historical context.
- Show clear command of basic and specialised terms and methods of rhetorical and formal analysis of poetry, and be able to deploy them in critical readings of poems.
- Demonstrate familiarity with key current debates in the field of poetry and poetics, and be able to comment on them critically in terms of their relative strengths, weaknesses and implicit assumptions.

Indicative reading list

Reading lists can be found in Talis

Subject specific skills

Demonstrate an advanced knowledge of key movements and figures in the history of American poetry, and their relationship to their historical context.

Show clear command of basic and specialised terms and methods of rhetorical and formal analysis of poetry, and be able to deploy them in critical readings of poems.

Demonstrate familiarity with key current debates in the field of poetry and poetics, and be able to comment on them critically in terms of their relative strengths, weaknesses and implicit assumptions.

Be able to prosecute a complex, extended argument of around journal-article length, pertaining material covered in this module, conforming to high standards of academic practice regarding the use of critical sources, originality of argument, and research skills.

Transferable skills

Be able to prosecute a complex, extended argument of around journal-article length, pertaining material covered in this module, conforming to high standards of academic practice regarding the use of critical sources, originality of argument, and research skills.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 1 hour 30 minutes (9%)
Private study	273 hours (91%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

Reading and research

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Essay (1)	40%		Yes (extension)
All students must complete a 3,000 word essay worth 40%			
Reassessment component is the same			
Assessment component			
Essay (2)	60%		Yes (extension)
All students must complete a second essay of 4000 words, comprising 60% of the total mark.			
Reassessment component is the same			

Feedback on assessment

Tabula electronic coversheet and marginal comments on essays.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 4 of UENA-QQ00 Undergraduate English & Cultural Studies

This module is Optional for:

- Year 3 of UENA-Q300 Undergraduate English Literature
- Year 3 of UENA-QP36 Undergraduate English Literature and Creative Writing
- Year 4 of UENA-QP37 Undergraduate English Literature and Creative Writing with Intercalated Year
- Year 4 of UENA-Q301 Undergraduate English Literature with Intercalated Year
- Year 3 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History
- Year 4 of UENA-VQ33 Undergraduate English and History (with Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of UENA-QW35 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies with Intercalated Year
- Year 4 of UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 3 of UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics

This module is Core option list C for:

- Year 4 of UCXA-QQ38 Undergraduate Classics and English (with Intercalated Year)

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 3 of UCXA-QQ37 Undergraduate Classics and English
- Year 3 of UFIA-QW25 Undergraduate Film and Literature

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 3 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 3 of UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature
- Year 4 of UPHA-VQ73 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature with Intercalated Year