

LT144 Theory of the Lyric

Seminar Leader: Francesco Giusti

Course Times: Tue & Thu 15:45-17:15

Email: f.giusti@berlin.bard.edu

Office Hours: By appointment—probably the hours directly before and after class.



Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (1881)

Course Description

What is a lyric poem? How does the lyric work? This course introduces students to the history and theory of the lyric as a literary genre in the European tradition from Ancient Greece to the current era. Poems from other traditions across world literature will also be discussed in order to trace connections, similarities, and variations. Through a journey across European poetry (in English translation) from Sappho and Catullus, through Dante, Petrarch, Pierre de Ronsard, John Keats and Rainer Maria Rilke, up to Wallace Stevens and Seamus Heaney, the course will also expose students to different theoretical approaches to the lyric and familiarize them with the current debates on the topic (Jonathan Culler's *transhistoricism*, Virginia Jackson's *historicism*, Jahan Ramazani's *transnationalism*). Pairs of poems will be discussed in class together with articles or book excerpts representative of specific critical approaches. By confronting their close readings of selected poems with diverse theoretical perspectives, students will learn to analyze lyric poems from different epochs both in their context of production and in their long-term reception. Poems will be understood as instances of a particular discursive mode, as cultural objects that require a certain way of experiencing them, and as words available for repetition in different historical contexts and with different meanings.

Requirements

Students are required to attend all classes, to come to class prepared and with the relevant materials and textbooks. Participation consists in contributing productively to class discussion in a respectful manner, and in demonstrating a sound knowledge of the texts assigned.

Course Readings

Students are required to purchase the following text:

Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*. Harvard University Press, 2015. ISBN 9780674979703

All other readings (poems and critical writings) will be in the course reader.

Use of Electronics

Please note that in seminars we will work on printed texts: NO COMPUTERS OR TABLETS allowed in class. Texts which are made available in digital format should be printed for use in class. The use of electronic devices during class time is only allowed for disability accommodation. If you have a disability accommodation please inform your instructor at the beginning of the course.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

Attendance

Please note that attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Late arrival or leaving during class time will count as an absence. Missing more than 30% of all sessions may result in failing the course. Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Writing Assignments

Midterm essay (2000 words), due **23:59 Friday October 18**

Final essay (3000 words), due **23:59 Friday December 20**

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

From the Student Handbook on the submission of essays:

Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the

deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Grade Breakdown

Participation 30%
Midterm essay 30%
Final essay 40%

Schedule

Week 1

Tuesday, September 3 – Historicism vs. Transhistoricism

Readings: Virginia Jackson, Yopie Prins, “Genre Theory” and Gérard Genette, “The Architext,” in Virginia Jackson, Yopie Prins (Eds.), *The Lyric Theory Reader*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. 11-30 (Reader)
Jonathan Culler, “Introduction” and ch. 1: “An Inductive Approach,” in *Theory of the Lyric*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015 (Textbook)

Thursday, September 5 – Transferability: Sappho and Catullus

Readings: Sappho 31, Catullus 51 (Reader)
Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, ch. 2: “Lyric as Genre” (Textbook)
Paul Allen Miller, ch. 5 “A Poet’s Place”, in *Lyric Texts and Lyric Consciousness: The Birth of a Genre from Archaic Greece to Augustan Rome*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994. 79- 100 (Reader)

Week 2

Tuesday, September 10 – Transferability: Sappho and Catullus

Readings: Sappho 31, Catullus 51 (Reader)
Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, ch. 3: “Theories of the Lyric” (Textbook)
Klaus W. Hempfer, “Theory of the Lyric: a Prototypical Approach,” in *JLT* 11.1 (2017), 51-62 (Reader)

Thursday, September 12 – Transferability: Folquet de Marselha and Giacomo da Lentini

Readings: Folquet de Marselha, “A vos, midontç [To you, madam]”; Giacomo da Lentini, “Madonna, dir vo voglio [My lady, I want to say to you]” (Reader)
Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, ch. 5: “Lyric Address” (Textbook)

Week 3

Tuesday, September 17 – Transferability: Folquet de Marselha and Giacomo da Lentini

Readings: Folquet de Marselha, “A vos, midontç [To you, madam]”; Giacomo da Lentini, “Madonna, dir vo voglio [My lady, I want to say to you]” (Reader)
Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, ch. 5: “Lyric Address” (Textbook)

Thursday, September 19 – Celebration: Dante’s *Vita nuova*

Readings: Dante, *Vita nuova*, I-III (Reader)

Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Body of Beatrice*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988. Ch. 1 and 2 (Reader)

Week 4

Tuesday, September 24 – Celebration: Dante's *Vita nuova*

Readings: Dante, *Vita nuova*, XXVI (Reader)

Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, ch. 6: "Lyric Structures" (Textbook)

Thursday, September 26 – Petrarch

Readings: Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, 1 and 90 (Reader)

Week 5

Tuesday, October 1 – Women Petrarchists: Vittoria Colonna and Gaspara Stampa

Readings: Vittoria Colonna, "Mentre l'aura amorosa e 'l mio bel lume [O when the tender breeze and my sweet light]" (Reader)

Gaspara Stampa, "Voi ch'ascoltate in queste meste rime [You who hear in these troubled rhymes]" (Reader)

Virginia Cox, "Sixteenth-Century Women Petrarchists and the Legacy of Laura," in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35.3 (Fall 2005). 583-606 (Reader)

Thursday, October 3 – Federal Holiday

Week 6

Tuesday, October 8 – About Writing: Sidney and Shakespeare

Readings: Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, 1 (Reader)

William Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, 21 (Reader)

Thursday, October 10 – Encounters: Ronsard and Baudelaire

Readings: Pierre de Ronsard, *Sonnets Pour Helene [Sonnets for Helen]* Book I, IX; Charles Baudelaire, "À une passante [To a Passerby]" (Reader)

Week 7

Tuesday, October 15 – A Lyric Gesture: Dante and Rilke

Readings: Dante, "Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare [Such sweet decorum and such gentle grace"; Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies I* (Reader)

Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, ch. 7: *Lyric and Society* (Textbook)

Thursday, October 17 – A Lyric Gesture: Rilke and Brecht

Readings: Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies I*; Bertolt Brecht, "Über die Gedichte des Dante auf die Beatrice [On Dante's Poems to Beatrice]" (Reader)

Midterm essay due 23:59 October 18

Week 8

Tuesday, October 22 – The Crisis of a Gesture: T.S. Eliot

Reading: T.S. Eliot, “Portrait of a Lady” (Reader)

Thursday, October 24 – The Crisis of a Gesture: John Ashbery

Readings: John Ashbery, “And *Ut Pictura Poesis* is Her Name” (reader)

Fall Break

Week 9

Tuesday, November 5 – Transhistorical Contacts: Horace and Heaney

Readings: Horace, *Odes* I, 34; Seamus Heaney, “Anything Can Happen” (Reader)

Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013. 68-71 (Reader)

Thursday, November 7 – Transhistorical Contacts: Cavalcanti and Caproni

Readings: Guido Cavalcanti, “Perch’i’ no spero di tornar giammai [Because I do not hope to turn again]” (Reader)

Giorgio Caproni, “Ultima preghiera [Last Prayer]” (Reader)

Week 10

Tuesday, November 12 – Modernist Mythologies: Pound and Stevens

Readings: Ezra Pound, “Canto I” (Reader)

Wallace Stevens, “The World as Meditation” (Reader)

Thursday, November 14 – Modernist Mythologies: Pound and Stevens

Readings: Ezra Pound, “Canto I” (Reader)

Wallace Stevens, “The World as Meditation” (Reader)

Week 11

Tuesday, November 19 – Animation: Cavalcanti and Keats

Readings: Guido Cavalcanti, “Noi siàn le triste penne isbigotite [We are the stunned and mourning quill]” (Reader)

John Keats, “This living hand” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (Reader)

Thursday, November 21 – Repetition: Keats and Wordsworth

Readings: John Keats, “This living hand” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (Reader)

William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey” (Reader)

Week 12

Tuesday, November 26 – Transnational Encounters: Yuan Zhen and Gabriela Mistral

Readings: Yuan Zhen, *An Elegy* I, II, III (Reader)

Gabriela Mistral, *Los sonetos de la muerte* (Reader)

Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics*, ch. 4: *Nationalism, Transnationalism, and the*

Poetry of Mourning. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009. 71-93
(Reader)

Thursday, November 28 – Transnational Encounters: Yuan Zhen and Gabriela Mistral

Readings: Yuan Zhen, *An Elegy* I, II, III (Reader)

Gabriela Mistral, *Los sonetos de la muerte* (Reader)

Week 13

Tuesday, December 3 – A Myth of the Lyric: Rewriting Sappho

Readings: Lord Byron, “Equal to Jove that youth must be” (Reader)

Percy Bysshe Shelley, “To Constantia, Singing” (Reader)

Alfred Tennyson, “Fatima” (Reader)

Thursday, December 5 – A Myth of the Lyric: Female voices

Readings: Michael Field, “Why should I praise thee, blissful Aphrodite?”, “Love, fatal creature, bitter-sweet”, and “Maids, not to you my mind doth change” (Reader)

Week 14

Tuesday, December 10 – Lyric Gestures

Readings: Simmias of Rhodes, “Hatchet” (Reader)

John Hollander, “Swan and Shadow” (Reader)

Thursday, December 12 – Lyric Poetry and The Lyric

Readings: Daniel Tiffany, “Lyric,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Literary Theory* (online)

Week 15 – Completion Week

Final essay due 23:59 December 20