

LT140 Close Reading: Poetry and Poetics



Gertrude Stein, Basket, and Alice B. Toklas in *LIFE Magazine*. Photo: Carl Mydans

We now had our country house, the one we had only seen across the valley and just before leaving we found the white poodle, Basket. He was a little puppy in a little neighbourhood dog-show and he had blue eyes, a pink nose and white hair and he jumped up into Gertrude Stein's arms. A new puppy and a new ford we went off to our new house and we were thoroughly pleased with all three. Basket although now he is a large unwieldy poodle, still will get up on Gertrude Stein's lap and stay there. She says that listening to the rhythm of his water drinking made her recognise the difference between sentences and paragraphs, that paragraphs are emotional and that sentences are not.

—Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

Seminar Leader: Paul Festa
Course Times: Tue 15:45-19:00
Email: p.festa@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: By appointment—probably the hours directly before and after class.

Course Description

Requirements

Passing the course requires submission of both papers, two Week 14 presentations, and an end-of-term self-assessment.

Attendance, etc.

- Two absences (three hours of class time), no penalty. Each additional 90-minute absence, 0.3 is deducted from the semester course grade unless excused by leave of absence from the registrar.
- Eight and a half 90-minute absences, excused or otherwise, amount to more than 30 percent of the course, and Bard does not award credit. Do consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.
- Lateness is billed in 30-minute increments (so 5 min. late = 1/3 attendance). Be ready to start writing at 3:45 p.m. sharp. Your writing prompt will be awaiting you.
- Lack of required texts—paper copies—equals 1/2 attendance per 90-minute session.
- No electronic devices, not even in your lap. Phones off or on airplane mode. Poetry is holy.

Assignments

10% in-class writing	5 – 7 min. of writing, sometimes read aloud
20% discussion & memorization	Memorize one couplet per week from the reading, plus one sonnet-length poem, on or off the syllabus, by TUESDAY, FEB. 26.
30% midterm essay	1500 words (prospectus due SATURDAY, MARCH 9 ; paper due SATURDAY, MARCH 23).
40% final essay	2500 words (prospectus due SATURDAY, May 4 ; paper due TUESDAY, MAY 14).

- Papers due at midnight via email. I probably won't pay too much attention to the timestamp if it's in my in-box when I'm up the next morning.
- Papers accepted only
 - via email
 - as a Word document (.doc or .odt)
 - conforming to style and formatting guidelines: use the template.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Note 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.*

Again, I'm not nickel-&-diming you on a 4 a.m. submission. But once the sun is up it's time for you to go to bed and for me to start reading.

Grade Breakdown

See above. Participation counts your daily writing and contributions to the discussion; attendance is calculated separately. See above.

A	4.0	3.86-4.00 (14)
A-	3.7	3.46-3.85 (39)
B+	3.3	3.16-3.45 (29)
B	3.0	2.86-3.15 (29)
B-	2.7	2.46-2.85 (39)
C+	2.3	2.16-2.45 (29)
C	2.0	1.86-2.15 (29)
C-	1.7	1.36-1.85 (49)
D	1.0	0.51-1.35 (84)
F	0.0	0.00-0.50 (50)

Library and Book Purchase Policies

Required texts

- Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style*
- Jane Hirshfield, *Nine Gates* (henceforth “9G”)
- Jane Hirshfield, *Ten Windows* (“10W”)
- Robert Pinsky, *The Sounds of Poetry* (“Pinsky”)
- Packet
 - Syllabus
 - Essay template
 - Glossary
 - Poem(s) to memorize
 - Poet timeline
 - Poetry; prose about poetry

Recommended texts

LT140 is a semester-long sprint through the astonishingly rich landscape of English poetry from the late 16th century to the present. We look at a new poet virtually every session, plus prose about poetry. For this reason, the course packet essentially serves as an anthology—

mr u will not be missed
who as an anthologist
sold the many on the few
not excluding mr u

E. E. Cummings

—that reflects what seemed to me a particularly stimulating path, despite inevitable and shocking omissions (see WEEK 14 “THE POETS ARE THUS LIBERATING GODS”).

The required books—Strunk & White’s invaluable writing manual, and three prose books on poetry written for lay readers by the American poets Robert Pinsky (former poet laureate of the United States, and LT251 guest artist) and Jane Hirshfield—will prove lasting, friendly guides to any of you who continue to read poetry with some seriousness, or even not very much seriousness.

But if that’s the end of your poetry-book-buying this term, you will leave this course without something that has proved to be one of the great gifts of innumerable college educations, which is a small stack of poetry volumes. I do not refer to files on your electronic device. I mean the ability to hold the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in your hand, with its radiant reproductions of Blake’s color plates; or to leaf through *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* and find the Ashbery works that speak to you as permanently as the ones I have selected here did me in my twenties. We all want to travel light. But I’ve gotten more out of some of those little paperbacks, over the years, than I did out of whole semesters of school. And let’s face it—when you’re forty, you’re probably not going to be curling up in your favorite chair with the LT140 reader.

For this reason, one requirement of the course is to purchase a volume of poetry which you will present to the class in Week 14. One great thing you can do is purchase an old edition of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry*. It’s probably too big for the bath or even the U-Bahn, but it is a staggering treasury, a cornerstone of your humanism (by weight alone it qualifies). Just don’t neglect the lovely little paperbacks like *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*—83 inexhaustible pages, lifelong friend. Whatever you choose, be prepared in Week 14 to tell us why you chose it, where you found it, and a little bit about what you found within.

Schedule

WEEK 1 Jan 29

Session A WHAT IS A POEM?

Session B WHAT IS CLOSE READING?

Texts Helen Vendler, "What Is Lyric?" from *Poems, Poets, Poetry*, p. 20
John Crowe Ransom, from *Criticism, Inc.*, p. 23

WEEK 2 Feb 5

Session A INFLUENCE & AESTHETICISM

Session B POETS OF THE PEOPLE

Texts Harold Bloom, from *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 31
Oscar Wilde, from *The Critic as Artist*, p. 37

Poets **Langston Hughes** (American, 1902 – 1967)
Walt Whitman (American, 1819 – 1892)

Hughes

- The Weary Blues, p. 39
- The Negro Speaks of Rivers, p. 40
- I, Too, p. 41
- Dreams, p. 42
- Dream Variations, p. 43
- Harlem, p. 44

Whitman

- A Noiseless Patient Spider, p. 45
- America, p. 46
- I Hear America Singing, p. 47
- I Sing the Body Electric, p. 48
- Long, too long America, p. 54
- Tan-Faced Prairie-Boy, p. 55
- Song of Myself/ 35, p. 56
- Song of Myself/ 36, p. 58
- When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer, p. 59
- When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd, p. 60

WEEK 3 Feb 12

Session A IMAGE / EMOTION / SEX

Session B SHAKESPEARE

Text Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox," from *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*, p. 67

Poet **John Donne** (English, 1572 – 1631)

- The Canonization, p. 74
- Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed, p. 76
- The Flea, p. 78
- The Good-Morrow, p. 79

Text Pinsky, 3 – 24

Poet **William Shakespeare** (English, 1564 – 1616)

- Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?, p. 80
- Sonnet 30: When to the sessions of sweet silent thought, p. 81
- Sonnet 33: Full many a glorious morning have I seen, p. 82
- Sonnet 73: That time of year thou mayst in me behold, p. 83
- Sonnet 104: To me, fair friend, you never can be old, p. 84
- Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments, p. 85
- Sonnet 129: The expense of spirit in a waste of shame, p. 86
- Sonnet 130: My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun, p. 87

WEEK 4 Feb 19

Session A THE ROMANTICS I: KEATS

Session B TESS GALLAGHER

Text Cleanth Brooks, "Keats's Sylvan Historian: History Without Footnotes," from *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947), p. 88

Poet **John Keats** (English, 1795 – 1821)

- Ode on a Grecian Urn, p. 98
- Ode to a Nightingale, p. 99
- On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, p. 101
- To Autumn, p. 102

Poet **Tess Gallagher** (American, b. 1943)

- Black Silk, p. 103
- Refusing Silence, p. 104
- Love Poem to Be Read to an Illiterate Friend, p. 105
- Now that I am Never Alone, p. 107
- Disappearances in the Guarded Sector, p. 108

- Riji, p. 110

WEEK 5 Feb 26

Session A E. E. CUMMINGS

Session B GERTRUDE STEIN

Texts Pinsky, 97 – 116

Cummings introductions (*Poems 1923 – 1954*), p. 112

Poet **E. E. Cummings** (American, 1894 – 1962)

- *is 5* (1926)
 - One
 - XIII: it really must, p. 117
 - XVII: this young question mark man, p. 118
 - XXXIII: voices to voices, lip to lip, p. 119
 - Four
 - I: the moon looked into my window, p. 121
 - VII: since feeling is first, p. 122
 - XVIII: i go to this window, p. 123
 - Five
 - V: if I have made, my lady, intricate, p. 124
- *W [ViVa]* (1931), p. 125
 - I: ,mean-, p. 126
 - II: oil tel duh woil doi sez, p. 127
 - XLVIII: come a little further—why be afraid—, p. 128
- *No Thanks* (1935), p. 129
 - dedication, p. 130
 - 16: may i feel said he, p. 131
- *50 Poems* (1940)
 - 1: !blac, p. 132
 - 2: fl, p. 133
 - 42: love is more thicker than forget, p. 134
- *XAIPE* (1950)
 - luminous tendril of celestial wish, p. 135

GERTRUDE STEIN / FREE VERSE

Text Gertrude Stein, from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, p. 136

Poet **Gertrude Stein** (American, 1874 – 1946)

- *Four Saints in Three Acts*, p. 183
- *If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso*, p. 195
- *Matisse*, p. 198

WEEK 6 March 5

Session A SYNTAX & LINE

Session B MUSIC & RHETORIC

Text Pinsky, 25 – 49

Poet **Robert Pinsky** (American, b. 1940)

- Rhyme, p. 201
- Gulf Music, p. 203
- Keyboard, p. 205
- Other Hand, p. 206
- Poem of Disconnected Parts, p. 207
- Samurai Song, p. 209
- An Alphabet of my Dead, p. 210

Text 9G, vii – ix, 1 – 16

Poet **Gwendolyn Brooks** (American, 1917 – 2000)

- A Lovely Love, p. 215
- We Real Cool, p. 216
- kitchenette building, p. 217
- my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell, p. 218
- Boy Breaking Glass, p. 219

*****MIDTERM PAPER PROSPECTUS DUE SATURDAY, MARCH 9*****

WEEK 7 March 12

Session A THE HIDDEN

Session B ASHBERRY

Text 10W, p. 93 – 119

Poet **Emily Dickinson** (American, 1830 – 1886)

- Success is counted sweetest, p. 221
- Wild nights—Wild nights!, p. 222
- I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, p. 223
- I'm Nobody! Who are you?, p. 224
- 'Hope' is the thing with feathers, p. 225
- A Bird, came down the Walk, p. 226
- Because I could not stop for Death, p. 227
- My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun, p. 228
- Tell all the truth but tell it slant, p. 229
- I heard a Fly buzz—when I died, p. 230
- I died for Beauty—but was scarce, p. 231
- A narrow Fellow in the Grass, p. 232

- This World is not Conclusion, p. 233

Text 9G, p. 17 – 32

Poet **John Ashbery** (American, 1927 – 2017)

Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror

- As One Put Drunk into the Packet-Boat, p. 234
- Worsening Situation, p. 236
- Forties Flick, p. 238
- Poem in Three Parts
 1. Love, p. 239
 2. Courage, p. 240
 3. I Love the Sea, p. 240
- Farm, p. 242
- Farm II, p. 243
- Farm III, p. 244

WEEK 8 March 19

JOHN MILTON

Text Packet: Samuel Johnson, A Study of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, p. 245

Poet **John Milton** (English, 1608 – 1674)

- *Paradise Lost*: prefatory material; outline of the poem; Book IX, p. 249

*****1500-WORD MIDTERM PAPER DUE SATURDAY, MARCH 23*****

WEEK 9 March 26

THE ROMANTICS II: WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

Texts William Wordsworth, "Observations Prefixed to *Lyrical Ballads*," p. 300

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *Biographia Literaria*, p. 319

Poet **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** (English, 1772 – 1834)

- The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, p. 326
- Kubla Khan, p. 343
- Dejection—An Ode, p. 345

Poet **William Wordsworth** (English, 1770 – 1850)

- My Heart Leaps Up, p. 349
- Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood, p. 350
- Surprised by Joy, p. 355

WEEK 10 April 2

THE ROMANTICS III: SHELLEY, BLAKE, BYRON

Poet **Percy Bysshe Shelley** (English, 1792 – 1822)

- To Wordsworth, p. 356
- Ozymandias, p. 357
- Ode to the West Wind, p. 358
- Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni, p. 361
- Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, p. 365

Poet **William Blake** (English, 1757 – 1827)

- *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, p. 368

Poet **Lord Byron (George Gordon)**; English, 1788 – 1824)

- Prometheus, p. 395

WEEK 11 April 9

Session A WAYNE KOESTENBAUM

Session B ALLEN GINSBERG: FACING THE LION

Text 9G, 33 – 53

Poet **Wayne Koestenbaum** (American, b. 1958)

- *Blue Stranger with Mosaic Background*
 - Investigation, p. 397
 - Possessiveness, p. 398
 - Faust's Dog, p. 400
 - Hot Scenes with Undead Hematologists, p. 402
 - Good Morning Marienbad, p. 404
 - Streisand Sings Stravinsky, p. 406
 - At the Grave of Renata Tebaldi, p. 408
- *Camp Marmalade*
 - #20 [thick book on mother-shelf pinnacled me o'er Tums], p. 409
 - #15 [imprisoned within Busby Berkeley or the ethereal phlox], p. 414
- Female Masculinity, p. 419

Text 9G, 153 – 175
Poet **Allen Ginsberg** (American, 1926 – 1997)

- A Supermarket in California, p. 420
- America, p. 421
- Howl, p. 424
- Footnote to Howl, p. 431
- The Lion For Real, p. 432

SPRING BREAK

WEEK 12 April 23

Session A INDIRECTION

Session B WRITING AND THE THRESHOLD LIFE

Text 9G, 107 - 126
Poet **Jane Hirshfield** (American, b. 1953) p. 400

- Ants' Nest, p. 434
- A Blessing for Wedding, p. 435
- A Hand, p. 436
- I sat in the sun, p. 437
- In a kitchen where mushrooms were washed, p. 438
- In Daylight, I Turned on the Lights, p. 439
- Let them not say, p. 440
- My Life Was The Size Of My Life, p. 441
- On the Fifth Day, p. 442
- Souvenir, p. 444

Text 9G, 197 – 224
Poet **Louise Glück** (American, b. 1943) p. 427

- A Summer Garden, p. 446
- Aboriginal Landscape, p. 450
- An Adventure, p. 452
- Anniversary, p. 454
- Archaic Fragment, p. 455

WEEK 13 April 30

A PARADOX

B YEATS

Text 10W, 151 – 180; 273 – 300

Poet **Elizabeth Bishop** (American, 1911 – 1979) p. 417

- One Art, p. 456
- Poem, p. 457
- The Fish, p. 459
- The Moose, p. 461

Poet **William Butler Yeats** (Irish, 1865 – 1939)

- Lake Isle of Innisfree, p. 466
- The Second Coming, p. 467
- Sailing to Byzantium, p. 468
- When You Are Old, p. 470
- Leda and the Swan, p. 471
- Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven, p. 472

*****FINAL ESSAY PROSPECTUS DUE SATURDAY MAY 4 *****

WEEK 14 May 7 “THE POETS ARE THUS LIBERATING GODS”

Text Packet: Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Poet*, p. 473

Session A: Present an English-language poem of your choosing, which we have not read. Please submit to me by Monday midnight so I can reproduce for the group. You may choose something by a poet we've read, but you could also think of this as an opportunity to help remedy the syllabus's shocking omissions, for example Chaucer, Spencer, Sidney, Joyce, Marianne Moore, T.S. Eliot, Heany, Pope, Pound, Poe, Browning, Emily Brontë, Tennyson, Auden, Dryden, Ruefle, Frost, Dylan Thomas, D.H. Lawrence, Robert Lowell, Merrill, Plath, Crane, Larkin, Cowper, William Carlos Williams, Lorde, Longfellow, Adrienne Rich, Wilfred Owen, Housman, Walcott, Berryman, Bidart, Merwin, Sandburg, Anne Bradstreet, the Beowulf poet, and—why not?—you.

Session B: Present a volume of poetry that you have purchased over the course of the term. tell us why you chose it, where you found it, and a little bit about what you found within.

*****FINAL ESSAY DUE TUESDAY MAY 14 *****