

LT140 Close Reading: Poetry and Poetics

SPRING 2020



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
Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits
Course Times: Mon & Wed 17:30 - 19:00
Email: p.festa@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: By appointment—probably the hours directly before and after class.

Requirements

Passing the course requires submission of both papers and two Week 14 presentations.

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 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance, etc.

- Two 90-minute absences, no penalty. Each additional absence, 0.3 is deducted from the semester course grade unless excused by leave of absence from the registrar or made up as described below.
- You may make up as many as three unexcused absences by giving a ten-minute presentation at your subsequent appearance that covers the reading, including handouts. The presentation should cover the basics of the material along with your own take on it, and you'll answer questions from the group. Credit is awarded on a scale of 0.0 – 0.3: a score of 0.3 cancels the absence, and 0.0 leaves the penalty intact.
- Eight and a half 90-minute absences—excused, made-up, or otherwise—amount to more than 30 percent of the course, and Bard does not award credit. Consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.
- These policies apply equally to sessions missed during the add-drop period.
- Lateness is billed in 30-minute increments (so 5 min. late = 1/3 attendance). Be ready to start writing at 5:30 p.m. sharp. Your writing prompt and questions will be awaiting you.
- Lack of required texts—paper copies—equals 1/2 attendance.
- No electronic devices. It is no less conspicuous in your lap. Phones powered off or in airplane mode; with rare exceptions, LT140 is on a digital fast.

Assignments

20% in-class writing and review	→ 5 – 10 min. of writing, sometimes read aloud, along with basic factual questions about the reading. Preserve these brief writings as potential seeds of the midterm and final essays. → You are responsible for all vocabulary and references in all lyrics (<i>Paradise Lost</i> is another story). → As part of your review, you'll develop throughout the semester a glossary of technical terms and a list of close reading techniques. I'll look at these twice during the term.
10% discussion & memorization	Memorize two sonnet-length poems (or equivalent) that you intend to write on, one for the midterm and one for the final. Due with the prospectuses (see directly below)
30% midterm essay	1500 words (prospectus due 7 March ; paper due 14 March ; extended deadline 21 March).

40% final essay

2500 words (prospectus due **25 April**; paper due **9 May**; extended deadline **13 May**).

- Papers due at midnight via email. I probably won't notice the timestamp if it's in my in-box when I'm up the next morning.
- Papers submitted under the extended deadline will be read with lidded eyes, will receive little to no written commentary, and had better be good.
- Papers accepted only
 - Via email as an attachment (not a link to a Google document);
 - As a Word document (.doc or .odt only—please no pdf, .pages or other formats, which make it difficult for me to excerpt and comment on your work;
 - Conforming to style and formatting guidelines included in the packet and via email. → You'll save everyone grief if you use the essay template.
→ Papers that flout the guidelines will be returned.

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* (“*Sounds*”)
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*
- Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry*

In-class book check

- [Monday, 10 February]
- [Monday, 10 February]
- [Monday, 3 February]
- [Monday, 10 February]
- [Monday, 17 February]
- [Monday, 3 February]

- Packet [Monday, 27 January]
 - Syllabus, p. 1
 - Writing guidelines, p. 16
 - Essay template, p. 19
 - Poet timeline, p. 21
 - Poetry; prose about poetry, p. 25

- Binder
 - Glossary
 - Close reading toolkit
 - In-class writing & quizzes
 - Hand-outs

Additional text(s)

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 or poets virtually every session, plus prose about poetry. For this reason, the course packet essentially serves as an anthology—with inevitable and shocking omissions (see WEEK 14 “THE POETS ARE THUS LIBERATING GODS”).

The required texts 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 to 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 old and grey, you’re probably not going to be settling into a bath 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, probably a little paperback 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

Monday, 27 January: WHAT IS A POEM?

PROSE Helen Vendler, "What Is Lyric?" from *Poems, Poets, Poetry*, p. 25

Wednesday, 29 January: WHAT IS CLOSE READING?

PROSE Francine Prose, from *Reading Like a Writer*, p. 27
John Crowe Ransom, from *Criticism, Inc.*, p. 29
BCB Core Faculty, "Short Republic 7 Essay" instructions, p. 37

POETRY **Lawrence Ferlinghetti** (American, b. 1919)
• Berlin, p. 38

WEEK 2

Monday, 3 February: INFLUENCE

PROSE Oscar Wilde, from *The Critic As Artist: A Dialogue*, p. 41
Harold Bloom, from *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 43
Anne Carson, "Flaubert Again," p. 49
Alexander Pope, from "An Essay on Criticism," p. 52
Isaiah 35, p. 52

POETRY **John Milton** (English, 1608 – 1674)
• *Paradise Lost*, Book I, 76 – 270, p. 53

William Wordsworth (English, 1770 – 1850)
• From the preface to "The Excursion" (1814), p. 54

Wednesday, 5 February: POETS OF THE (AMERICAN) PEOPLE

PROSE Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry*, p. 54 – 87
10W, p. 209 – 242

POETRY **Walt Whitman** (American, 1819 – 1892)
• A Noiseless Patient Spider, p. 55
• America p. 56
• I Sing the Body Electric p. 57
• Long, too long America p. 63
• Song of Myself/ 35, p. 64
• Song of Myself/ 36, p. 66
• When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer, p. 67
• When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd, p. 68
Langston Hughes (American, 1902 – 1967)
• The Weary Blues, p. 75
• The Negro Speaks of Rivers, p. 76

- I, Too, p. 77
- Dreams, p. 78
- Dream Variations, p. 79
- Harlem, p. 80

WEEK 3

Monday, 10 February: LOVE, SEX, and PARADOX

PROSE Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox," from *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*, p. 81

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

- Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed, p. 88
- The Flea, p. 90

Adrienne Rich (American, 1929 – 2012)

- Twenty-One Love Poems [(The Floating Poem, Unnumbered)], p. 91

Gwendolyn Brooks (American, 1917 – 2000)

- A Lovely Love, p. 92

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

- come a little further—why be afraid—, p. 93

MUSIC **Ernst Krenek** (Austrian, later American, 1900 – 1991)

- The Flea, Op. 175 (1960) p. YouTube

Wednesday, 12 February: SHAKESPEARE

PROSE 9G, p. vii – ix, p. 1 – 22
Sounds, p. 3 – 24

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

- Sonnet 18: Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?, p. 94
- Sonnet 30: When to the sessions of sweet silent thought, p. 95
- Sonnet 33: Full many a glorious morning have I seen, p. 96
- Sonnet 73: That time of year thou mayst in me behold, p. 97
- Sonnet 104: To me, fair friend, you never can be old, p. 98
- Sonnet 116: Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments, p. 99
- Sonnet 129: The expense of spirit in a waste of shame, p. 100
- Sonnet 130: My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun, p. 101

WEEK 4

Monday, 17 February: THE ROMANTICS I: KEATS

PROSE Cleanth Brooks, "Keats's Sylvan Historian: History Without Footnotes," from *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (1947), p. 102
Sounds, p. 25 – 49 "Syntax and line"

- POETRY **John Keats** (English, 1795 – 1821)
- Ode on a Grecian Urn, p. 112
 - Ode to a Nightingale, p. 114
 - On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, p. 117
 - To Autumn, p. 118

Wednesday, 19 February: STORYTELLERS

PROSE Louise Glück, from *American Originality*: “Story Tellers,” p. 119
9G, p. 22 – 32

- POETRY **Robert Pinsky** (American, b. 1940)
- At Pleasure Bay, p. 128
 - Gulf Music, p. 130
 - Keyboard, p. 132
 - Other Hand, p. 133
 - Poem of Disconnected Parts, p. 134
 - Samurai Song, p. 136

Stephen Dobyns (American, b. 1941)

- Oatmeal Deluxe, p. 137

WEEK 5

Monday, 24 February: THE HATRED OF POETRY

PROSE Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry* (complete)

POETRY Claudia Rankine

- *Citizen*

Ben Lerner (American, b. 1979)

- [The bird's-eye view], p. 138
- [By any measure . . .], p. 139
- [jumpsuits], p. 140
- [The predictability of these rooms], p. 141

Marianne Moore (American, 1887 – 1972)

- Poetry (1924), p. 142
- Poetry (1967), p. 143

Wednesday, 26 February: E. E. CUMMINGS

PROSE Cummings introductions (*Poems 1923 – 1954*), p. 144
Sounds, p. 51 – 78, “Technical terms and vocal realities”

POETRY **E. E. Cummings** (American, 1894 – 1962)
is 5 (1926)

- One
 - XIII: it really must, p. 149

- XXXIII: voices to voices, lip to lip, p. 150
- Five
 - V: if I have made, my lady, intricate, p. 152

W [ViVa] (1931), p. 153

- I: ,mean-, p. 154
- II: oil tel duh woil doi sez, p. 155

No Thanks (1935), p. 156

- dedication, p. 157
- 16: may i feel said he, p. 158

50 Poems (1940)

- 1: !blac, p. 159
- 2: fl, p. 160
- 42: love is more thicker than forget, p. 161; 92nd St. Y: 43:10

1 x 1 [One Times One]

- XIV: pity this busy monster, manunkind; p. 162; 92nd St. Y: 0:50
- XXXIX: all ignorance toboggans into know, p. 162; 92nd St. Y: 13:05

MUSIC **Béla Bartók**, Violin Concerto (1937 – 38), p. YouTube.
N.B. the microtonal approach to the cadenza, near the end of the first movement.

WEEK 6

Monday, 2 March: GERTRUDE STEIN

PROSE **Gertrude Stein**

- From *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, p. 163
- Interview with WJZ Radio, 12 November 1934, p. 210

Sounds, p. 97 – 116, “Blank verse and free verse”

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

- *I is he in him and him*, p. 219
- *Four Saints in Three Acts*, p. 220
- If I Told Him, A Completed Portrait of Picasso, p. 232
- Matisse, p. 235

MUSIC **Virgil Thomson** (American, 1896 – 1989)

- *Four Saints in Three Acts*

Wednesday, 4 March: : THE HIDDEN

PROSE Ben Lerner, *The Hatred of Poetry*, p. 46 – 52
10W, p. 93 – 119, “Poetry and the Hidden”
Sounds, p. 79 – 96, “Like and unlike sounds”

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

- Success is counted sweetest, p. 238
- Wild nights—Wild nights!, p. 239
- I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, p. 240
- I'm Nobody! Who are you?, p. 241
- 'Hope' is the thing with feathers, p. 242
- A Bird, came down the Walk, p. 243
- Because I could not stop for Death, p. 244
- My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun, p. 245
- Tell all the truth but tell it slant, p. 246
- I heard a Fly buzz—when I died, p. 247
- I died for Beauty—but was scarce, p. 248
- A narrow Fellow in the Grass, p. 249
- This World is not Conclusion, p. 250

MIDTERM PROSPECTUS & MEMORIZATION DUE
SATURDAY, 7 MARCH, 23:59

WEEK 7

Monday, 9 March: RECITATION AND PROSPECTUS PARTY
Recite your poem to the group and workshop your prospectus.

Wednesday, 11 March: SELF-PORTRAIT IN A CONVEX MIRROR

PROSE 9G, p. 33 – 53

POETRY **John Ashbery** (American, 1927 – 2017)
Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror

- As One Put Drunk into the Packet-Boat, p. 251
- Worsening Situation, p. 253
- Forties Flick, p. 255
- Poem in Three Parts
 1. Love, p. 256
 2. Courage, p. 257
 3. I Love the Sea, p. 257
- Farm, p. 259
- Farm II, p. 260
- Farm III, p. 261

1500-WORD MIDTERM PAPER DUE
SATURDAY, 14 MARCH, 23:59

WEEK 8

March 16 & 18: JOHN MILTON

PROSE Packet: Samuel Johnson, A Study of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, p. 262

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

- *Paradise Lost*
 - outline of the poem, p. 266
 - prefatory material, p. 273
 - Book IX, p. 281

MIDTERM EXTENDED DEADLINE
SATURDAY, 21 MARCH, 23:59

WEEK 9

March 23 & 25: THE ROMANTICS II: WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE

PROSE William Wordsworth, "Observations Prefixed to *Lyrical Ballads*," p. 317
Samuel Taylor Coleridge, from *Biographia Literaria*, p. 336

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

- My Heart Leaps Up, p. 343
- Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood, p. 344
- Surprised by Joy, p. 349

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (English, 1772 – 1834)

- The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, p. 350
- Kubla Khan, p. 367
- Dejection—An Ode, p. 369

WEEK 10

Monday, 30 March: Brooks & Gallagher

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

- We Real Cool, p. 373
- kitchenette building, p. 374
- my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell, p. 375
- Boy Breaking Glass, p. 376

Tess Gallagher (American, b. 1943)

- Refusing Silence, p. 378
- Love Poem to Be Read to an Illiterate Friend, p. 379
- Now that I am Never Alone, p. 381
- Disappearances in the Guarded Sector, p. 382
- Rijl, p. 384

April 1: PARADOX REDUX

PROSE 10W, p. 151 – 180; p. 273 – 300

POETRY **Elizabeth Bishop** (American, 1911 – 1979)

- One Art, p. 386
- Poem, p. 387
- The Fish, p. 388
- Late Air, p. 389
- The Moose, p. 390

SPRING BREAK



“Every year, back comes Spring, with nasty little birds yapping their fool heads off
and the ground all mucked up with plants.”
— Dorothy Parker

WEEK 11

Monday, 13 April: FEDERAL HOLIDAY, CLASS DOES NOT MEET

Wednesday, 15 April: ALLEN GINSBERG: FACING THE LION

PROSE 9G, p. 153 – 175

POETRY **Allen Ginsberg** (American, 1926 – 1997)

- A Supermarket in California, p. 395
- America, p. 396
- Howl, p. 399
- Footnote to Howl, p. 406
- The Lion For Real, p. 407

WEEK 12

Monday, 20 April: INDIRECTION

PROSE 9G, p. 107 – 126

POETRY **Jane Hirshfield** (American, b. 1953)

- Ants' Nest, p. 409
- A Blessing for Wedding, p. 410
- A Hand, p. 411
- I sat in the sun, p. 412
- In a kitchen where mushrooms were washed, p. 413
- In Daylight, I Turned on the Lights, p. 414
- Let them not say, p. 415
- My Life Was The Size Of My Life, p. 416
- On the Fifth Day, p. 417
- Souvenir, p. 419

Wednesday, 22 April: WRITING AND THE THRESHOLD LIFE

PROSE 9G, p. 197 – 224

Louise Glück, "Education of the Poet," "The Best American Poetry 1993: Introduction,"
from *Proofs & Theories: Essays on Poetry* (1994), p. 421

POETRY **Louise Glück** (American, b. 1943)

- A Summer Garden, p. 434
- Aboriginal Landscape, p. 438
- An Adventure, p. 440
- Anniversary, p. 442
- Archaic Fragment, p. 443

FINAL ESSAY PROSPECTUS & MEMORIZATION DUE
SATURDAY, 25 APRIL, 23:59

WEEK 13

Monday, 27 April: RECITATION AND PROSPECTUS PARTY II

Recite your poem to the group and workshop your prospectus.

Wednesday, 29 April: YEATS

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

- Lake Isle of Innisfree, p. 444
- The Second Coming, p. 445
- Sailing to Byzantium, p. 446
- When You Are Old, p. 448
- Leda and the Swan, p. 449
- Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven, p. 450

WEEK 14

May 4 & 6: “THE POETS ARE THUS LIBERATING GODS”

PROSE Packet: Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Poet*, p. 451

Session A: Present an English-language poem of your choosing, which we have not read. Please submit to me by Sunday 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, T.S. Eliot, Heaney, Pound, Poe, Browning, Emily Brontë, Tennyson, Auden, Dryden, Ruefle, Frost, Dylan Thomas, D.H. Lawrence, Robert Lowell, Merrill, Plath, Hughes, Crane, Larkin, Cowper, William Carlos Williams, Lorde, Longfellow, Wayne Koestenbaum, Blake, Shelley, Byron, 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.

2500-WORD FINAL ESSAY DUE
SATURDAY, 9 MAY, 23:59

FINAL ESSAY EXTENDED DEADLINE
WEDNESDAY, 13 MAY, 23:59