

# LT208 Poetry and Community

Seminar Leader: Francesco Giusti

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

Email: [f.giusti@berlin.bard.edu](mailto:f.giusti@berlin.bard.edu)

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



Nikias Painter, Symposium Scene (Attic red-figure bell-krater, c. 420 B.C.) © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Common

## Course Description

From choral poetry in archaic Greece, through medieval love songs and Renaissance sonnet writing, up to modern elegy and contemporary poetry of protest, poems are linked to communal practices not only insofar as these practices can provide the content of a poem, but more importantly through the performance and experience of the poem itself. Indeed, poetry seems to invite repetition even across diverse socio-cultural contexts, which make for different meanings and provide different ends. Moreover, repetition appears to be relevant not only at the level of words (diction), but also at the deeper level of gestures (action). The course will explore notions and communal practices in Western and non-Western poems (in English translation) across history, while at the same time engaging with the role of poetry in contemporary theories of community, for example in the philosophical work of Maurice Blanchot, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière, and Giorgio Agamben. By reflecting on the repetition of language in poetry, the course will engage with theoretical approaches to a specific literary genre, to its peculiarities with respect to other literary genres, and to various processes of community formation. The course will also ask to what extent poetry allows us to think critically about the functions of verbal repetition in society.

## 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:

Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*. Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 2000.

ISBN-13: 9781581771046

All other readings (poems and theoretical writings) will be shared on Google Classroom.

## 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, March 13**

Final essay (3000 words), due **23:59 Friday, May 15**

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 – Lyric and Society

Tuesday, January 28 – Theodor Adorno, “Lyric Poetry and Society,” in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 37–54

Thursday, January 30 – Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), ch. 7: “Lyric and Society,” 296–348

### Week 2 – Historical Communities: Ancient Greece

Tuesday, February 4 – Derek Attridge, *The Experience of Poetry: From Homer’s Listeners to Shakespeare’s Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), ch. 2: “Archaic to Classical Greece: Festivals and Rhapsodes,” 35–54

Thursday, February 6 – Sappho

### Week 3 – Historical Communities: Ancient Rome

Tuesday, February 11 – Derek Attridge, *The Experience of Poetry*, ch. 4: “Ancient Rome: The Republic and the Augustan Age,” 85–105

Thursday, February 13 – Horace

### Week 4 – Historical Communities: The Troubadours

Tuesday, February 18 – Sarah Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), ch. 4: “Performance,” 132–170

Thursday, February 20 – Troubadours

### Week 5 – Historical Communities: Dante

Tuesday, February 25 – Justin Steinberg, “Dante’s First Dream between Reception and Allegory: The Response to Dante da Maiano in the *Vita nova*,” in *Dante the Lyric and Ethical Poet*, ed. by Z. G. Barański and M. McLaughlin (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2010), 93–118  
Dante, *Vita Nuova*, I-III

Thursday, February 27 – Dante, *Vita Nuova*, XXVI

**Week 6 – Historical Communities: European Petrarchism**

Tuesday, March 3 – 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

Thursday, March 5 – Petrarch, Philip Sidney, William Shakespeare, Pierre de Ronsard

**Week 7 – National and Transnational Communities**

Tuesday, March 10 – Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), ch. 8: “Patriotism and Racism,” 141–154

Thursday, March 12 – Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), ch. 4: “Nationalism, Transnationalism, and the Poetry of Mourning,” 71–93

**Midterm essay due 23:59 Friday, March 13**

**Week 8 – Community vs. Society**

Tuesday, March 17 – Jean-Luc Nancy, “Myth Interrupted,” in *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 43–70

Thursday, March 19 – Jean-Luc Nancy, “Myth Interrupted,” in *The Inoperative Community*, 43–70

**Week 9 – Community vs. Society**

Tuesday, March 24 – Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community* (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 2000), Part I: “The Negative Community”

Thursday, March 26 – Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, Part II: “The Community of Lovers”

**Week 10 – Between Theory and Poetic Practice**

Tuesday, March 31 – Jen Hui Bon Hoa, “The Disidentified Community,” *Angelaki*, 23:6 (2018), 33–51

Thursday, April 2 – Gerald L. Bruns, *On the Anarchy of Poetry and Philosophy: A Guide for the Unruly* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), ch. 4: “Poetic Communities,” 79–105

## Spring Break

### Week 11 – A Poetics of Community

Tuesday, April 14 – Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), ch. 2: “The Distribution of the Sensible: Politics and Aesthetics,” 7–14

Thursday, April 16 – Jacques Rancière, “The Hymn of Spiritual Hearts,” in *Mallarmé: The Politics of the Siren* (London: Continuum, 2011), 27–42

### Week 12 – Poetry and Resistance

Tuesday, April 21 – Giorgio Agamben, “What Is the Act of Creation?,” in *The Fire and the Tale* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 33–56

Thursday, April 23 – Giorgio Agamben, “Whatever,” “Example,” and “Tiananmen,” in *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993)

### Week 13 – Transtemporal Communities

Tuesday, April 28 – Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), ch. 5: “‘Context Stinks!’,” 151–185

Thursday, April 30 – Michael D. Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), ch. 3: “Jack Spicer’s *Billy The Kid*: Beyond the Singular Personal,” 126–167

### Week 14 – Poetry, Diction, and Social Identity

Tuesday, May 5 – Daniel Tiffany, “Lyric,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Literary Theory*

Thursday, May 7 – Language, Protest, Repetition (Final discussion)

### Week 15 – Completion Week

Final essay due 23:59 Friday, May 15