

Fall/Winter 2017-2018

AP/EN 4315 3.0A (F)

Modern American Women Poets

Course Director:

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Delivery Format:

Seminar

Time:

Lecture: Tuesday 2:30-5:30pm

Description:

Don't be put off by the lacklustre title for the course (an administrative choice, not the instructor's)—there is nothing ordinary or mundane about the poetry written by Emily Dickinson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Marianne Moore, H.D., Mina Loy, Angelina Grimké, and Elizabeth Bishop. Just the opposite. Their works constitute some of the most innovative poetry written between the 1860s and the 1940s—writing “aslant,” in Dickinson’s term, or what H.D. proclaimed to be “the unwritten book of the new.” We will consider the diversity of their experiments in verse, how they challenge everything from genre and form to metrical conventions and norms of reading. Consideration will also be given to how the poems interrogate gender norms—how femininity and masculinity are surveyed and sometimes reconstituted in their poems. Historical contexts will also be explored: poetry as it intersects with post-Civil War America; the “new” (20th) century of possibilities; the Harlem Renaissance; the Depression; World War II.

Poetry is language in performance, both visually and aurally; attention must be paid to the physical properties of the spoken word (rhythm, stress, accent, tone), the grammatical and semantic potential of written language, and the visual play of signs on the page. Poetry demands that we return to the materiality of language—how and why it de-forms and re-forms our regular linguistic practices. This particular investigation of poetic discourse focuses on the emergence of “modern” and “modernist” practices in the late 19th and first half of the 20th century. We will also discuss some of the factors—including gender, genre, race, “the burden of modernity”—that complicated and controlled poetic utterance at that time. Individually and collectively, poets such as Dickinson, H.D., and Loy changed the way in which poetry is written and read.

How will the course be taught?

This is an honours seminar: weekly classes will focus on textual analyses and the exchange of ideas. Students are expected to attend each week having already carefully read and prepared the assigned materials.

Instructional priorities

Our specific priorities and objectives include:

- analyzing a variety of poems in terms of their techniques and innovations (including, the politics of “free verse”; generic hybridity; updating poetry in relation to popular culture);
- developing a more expansive definition of “Modernism”;
- developing knowledge about a significant group of American authors and their canons;
- expanding students’ knowledge of American literary history from the 1860s to the 1940s;
- enhancing students’ ability to engage in seminar discussions; and
- refining students’ critical, verbal, and writing skills.

Category:

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Area:

N/A

Period:

N/A

Historical Requirement:

N/A

Requirements:

Essay 1: close reading exercise, 600 words (15%) Tuesday, October 3

Essay 2: research project, 2000 words (35%)

 Step 1: thesis statement & annotated bibliography (5 items)

 Tuesday, November 7

 Step 2: submission of essay Tuesday, November 21

Class presentation, 15 mins. (15%)

Class participation (10%)

Final in-class text, 25% Tuesday, November 28

Reading List:

Emily Dickinson, *Collected Poems*, ed. R. W. Franklin (Belnap Press); Edna St. Vincent Millay, selected poems (PDF provided by instructor); Angelina Weld Grimké, selected poems (PDF provided by instructor); H.D., *Collected Poems*, ed. Louis Martz (New Directions); Marianne Moore, *Complete Poems* (Penguin); Mina Loy, selections from *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux); Elizabeth Bishop, *The Complete Poems: 1927–1979* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux).

Secondary readings (available on the Internet or provided in class handouts) will focus on critical responses to the poets’ work.

Open To:

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