POETRY AND THE HUMAN

What is poetry and why do we do it? This three-quarter sequence examines the practice of poetry as a form of communication, linguistic innovation, and embodied presence. How is poetry as language and action different from other forms of activity? What is the role of poetry in society, in regard to memory, performance, storytelling, and history; ritual and creation; knowledge and formation of selfhood; institution and revolution? This course addresses these questions in the poetry of different eras and peoples, including works of Homer, Sappho, Catullus, Rumi, John Donne, Gwendolyn Brooks, Louis Zukofsky, Dahlia Ravikovitch, Anne Carson, N. Scott Momaday, Claudia Rankine, and others. It provides students with skills in the close reading of texts and performance and a grasp of the literary, philosophical, and theoretical questions that underpin the humanities. In the Spring students may take a third quarter of Humanities or shift into a related Arts Core course (CRWR 18200).

HUMA 18100 – POETRY AND THE HUMAN II

Winter: crisis, performance, politics

In Winter (crisis/performance/politics), we turn to questions of social rupture, breakdown, and reformation as we consider the ways that poetry revolts, reflects, and rebuilds in political crises. We will also look at poetry in performance, and performance as poetry, to consider how poetry is practiced in non-textual media such as spoken word, film, and dance.

Books and Course Reader

The following books – in order of when we will be reading them – are available at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore, 5751 S. Woodlawn Avenue or from amazon.com, and have also been put on reserve at the Regenstein Library.

• W. Benjamin, One-Way Street (Belknap Press)
• M. NourbeSe Philip, Zong! (Weslyan University Press)
• L. Long Soldier, Whereas (Graywolf Press)
• C. Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (Graywolf Press)

All other readings can be found in your Course Reader and on Canvas. Please purchase the Course Reader from Auxiliary Services (Social Sciences, basement).

• Event: TBD

• In Class and Poem Recitation

Attendance and participation are critical (10% of grade), since the quality of the course depends upon your expressing your ideas and hearing those of your classmates. Please speak up to voice your thoughts, no matter how incomplete they may be. Reading and other assignments must be completed carefully by class. Unexcused or repeated absences will adversely affect your grade. Absences will be excused only for sickness, emergencies, or truly unavoidable conflicts.

You should each memorize a short poem of your choice (c. 10–25 lines) and recite it in class (10% of grade, pass/fail). This poem can be from the syllabus or otherwise, but please choose a published poem.
Please sign up for your preferred day using the Canvas Scheduler, and confirm your poem with me at least two days before your recitation.

• On Canvas
By 10pm of the evening before each class meeting, please post a comment or question about a passage from the reading under the “Discussion” on our Canvas webpage (10% of grade), in response to a broadly stated question. There will be no formal requirement to respond directly to other posts, but you are strongly encouraged to take note of and engage with each other’s comments.

• Written Work and Writing Seminars
You will be required to complete three essays (20%, 20%, 20% of grade, respectively) this term. These are to be submitted as Word documents as uploads to Canvas, with a title that includes your last name. Work handed in after the due date may be penalized for lateness. Please upload all written assignments to our Canvas site as Word documents.

Schedule

Week 1: poetry and the broken world

class 1: Gwendolyn Brooks, “Boy breaking glass”
Adrienne Rich, “Tonight no poetry will serve,” “Serve” (epigraph)
Audre Lorde, “Poetry is not a luxury,” “A Litany for Survival”

class 2: Vladimir Mayakovsky, “Love,” “Conversation with a taxman about poetry,”
“At the top of my voice”
Aime Césaire, “In the Guise of a Literary Manifesto,” “Keeping Poetry Alive”
Slavoj Žižek, “The Poetic Torture-House of Language”

Week 2: poetry and the corrupted world

T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

class 2: T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land

Friday: short paper of close reading due by midnight

Week 3: poetry and the fragmented world

class 1: Walter Benjamin, One-Way Street

class 2: Paul Celan, “Psalm,” “Mandorla,” “Death fugue”

Week 4: poetry and the conflicted world

Sunday: first essay due by midnight.
class 1: Yehuda Amichai, “My child has the fragrance of peace,” “Wildpeace,” “An Arab shepherd is searching for his goat on Mount Zion”
Mahmoud Darwish, “On this earth,” “I belong there,” “Other barbarians will come,” “They would love to see me dead”

class 2: Dahlia Ravikovich, “A little woman made the world,” “Delight,” “Hovering at a low altitude,” “A deadly fear”
Taha Muhammad Ali, “Warning,” “Fooling the killers,” “The bell at forty: the destruction of a village”

Week 5: New York!

class 1: Walt Whitman, “I sing the body electric,” “Mannahatta,” “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry”

class 2: Allen Ginsberg, “Howl,” “Footnote to howl,” “A supermarket in California,” “City Midnight Junk Strains”
Frank O’Hara, “For Grace, after a party,” “Meditations in an Emergency,” “Why I am not a painter,” “Having a Coke with You”

Week 6: poetry and music

class 1: Bessie Smith, “Young Woman’s Blues”
Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit”
Claude McKay, “America” and “If We Must Die”

class 2: Nina Simone, “Mississippi Goddam,” “Strange Fruit,” “Images”
Robert Hayden, “Middle passage”

Week 7: poetry and document
Sunday: second essay due by midnight.

class 1: M. NourbeSe Philip, selections from Zong!

class 2: Layli Long Soldier, Whereas

Week 8: poetry and media

class 1: Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric

class 2: Tracie Morris, It all started, Too black, Project Princess, ICE Children

Week 9: poetry and ecology
class 1: Aldo Leopold, excerpt from *A Sand County Almanac*
Niedecker, “Traces of Living Things”
William Wordsworth, “Lines Written in Early Spring”
Richard Wilbur, “Advice to a Prophet”
W. S. Merwin, “The Last One”

class 2: Margaret Atwood, “Frogless,” “Marsh Languages”
Arthur Sze, “The Angle of Reflection Equals the Angle of Incidence”
Joy Harjo, “A Map to the Next World,” “When the World as We Knew It Ended”

Sunday: third essay due by midnight