

ENGL 330 – Modern American Poetry
Fall 2023, Hendrix College

Dr. Alex Vernon
office hours: MWF 11-12; TTh by appt (Teams)
I do not hang out on MS Teams...

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“As to Twentieth century poetry, and the poetry which I expect to see written during the next decade or so, it will, I think, move against poppy-cock, it will be harder and saner, it will be what Mr. Hewlett calls “nearer the bone.” It will be as much like granite as it can be, its force will lie in its truth, its interpretative power (of course, poetic force does always rest there); I mean it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot. We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it. At least for myself, I want it so, austere, direct, free from emotional slither.”

--Ezra Pound, [*Prolegomena*](#) (1912)



Saw, Stuart Davis (1923)

1	Wed, 23 Aug	Course Introduction In class: <i>Etudes des mouvements à Paris</i> , J. Ivens (1927)
2	Fri, 25 Aug	<i>Looking Backward to Look Forward:</i> ◇ Rich, "Vesuvius at Home"; Whitman, " I Hear America Singing "; Ginsberg, " A Supermarket in California " ◇ writing assignments
3	Mon, 28 Aug	Sandburg, " Chicago ," " Chicago Poet ," " Gargoyle "; Robinson, " Miniver Cheevy ," " Richard Cory "; Williams, " The Yachts "
4	Wed, 30 Aug	◇ " One True Podcast: Barbara Will on Gertrude Stein " ◇ Stein, "Sacred Emily"
5	Fri, 1 Sep	Stein, "Lifting Belly" for the curious: " Composition as... "
	Mon, 4 Sep	LABOR DAY
6	Wed, 6 Sep	T.S. Eliot, " The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock " For the curious: " Tradition... "
7	Fri, 8 Sep	Cummings, [in Just-], [O sweet spontaneous], [Buffalo Bill's], ["kitty"], " the Cambridge ladies "
8	Mon, 11 Sep	Williams, <i>Spring and All</i> , through end of VII (≈p.38)
9	Wed, 13 Sep	Williams, <i>Spring and All</i> , VIII through end of XVII (≈p.71)
10	Fri, 15 Sep	Williams, <i>Spring and All</i> , to end
11	Mon, 18 Sep	HD, " Oread ", " Helen "; Monroe, " The Fish "
12	Wed, 20 Sep	Pound, " Portrait d'une Femme "; Williams, " Portrait of a Lady "; Cummings, [my sweet old etc]; Dunbar-Nelson, " I Sit and Sew "
13	Fri, 22 Sep	Stevens, Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird , Anecdote of the Jar , Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock , Of Modern Poetry
14	Mon, 25 Sep	Stevens, Peter Quince at the Clavier , Emperor of Ice-Cream
15	Wed, 27 Sep	Stevens, Sunday Morning
16	Fri, 29 Sep	Stevens, Idea of Order at Key West , Plain Sense of Things
17	Mon, 2 Oct	Robert Frost, " After Apple-Picking " & " Birches " For the curious: " The Figure a Poem Makes "
18	Wed, 4 Oct	Garrett Hongo
19	Fri, 6 Oct	◇ Garrett Hongo class visit ◇ Engagement midterm grade & one-page writeup due
20	Mon, 9 Oct	◇ Hughes, " The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain " ◇ Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art" ◇ Van Vechten, Introducing Langston Hughes...
21	Wed, 11 Oct	Hughes, Proem , The Negro Speaks of Rivers , The Weary Blues , Lenox Avenue: Midnight , Harlem Night Club , Danse Africaine , Epilogue
	Fri, 13 Oct	Fall Break

22	Mon, 16 Oct	McKay, " A Midnight Woman to the Bobby ," " Invocation ," " The Harlem Dancer "; Eastman, " Introduction "
23	Wed, 18 Oct	McKay, The Negro Dancers , The Barrier , After the Winters , A Capitalist at Dinner , The Little Peoples , A Roman Holiday , If We Must Die
24	Fri, 20 Oct	McKay, Author's Word , America , The Tropics in New York , The White City , Outcast , The Lynching , Dawn in New York
25	Mon, 23 Oct	<i>Minor Notes</i> : prep day
26	Wed, 25 Oct	<i>Minor Notes</i> : Georgia Johnson & David Cannon
27	Fri, 27 Oct	<i>Minor Notes</i> : Anne Spencer & Angelina Weld Grimké
28	Mon, 30 Oct	Brooks, A Street in Bronzeville
29	Wed, 1 Nov	Brooks, "The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith"
30	Fri, 3 Nov	Brooks, "Gay Chaps at the Bar"
31	Mon, 6 Nov	NO CLASS: The Waste Land
32	Wed, 8 Nov	◇ The Literate, Episode 14
33	Fri, 10 Nov	◇ BBC: In Our Time episode
		for the curious: Better Craftsmen, Not Gods online exhibit slideshow
34	Mon, 13 Nov	Inkling & Waste Land briefs due
35	Wed, 15 Nov	Ginsberg, " Howl ," " Footnote to Howl " in class: animation
36	Fri, 17 Nov	O'Hara, "Music," "A Step Away from Them"
37	Mon, 20 Nov	O'Hara, "The Day Lady Died," "Poem" (28), "Naphtha"
	22 – 24 Nov	Thanksgiving
38	Mon, 27 Nov	O'Hara, "Personal Poem," "Poem" (78), your favorite?
39	Wed, 29 Nov	Rich, Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law
40	Fri, 1 Dec	Last class / course evaluations.
	Mon, 4 Dec	Reading Day
	Thurs, 7 Dec	Final Essay due at 2:00 on Teams



Jacob Lawrence, *The Photographer* (1942)

"Poetry possesses the power of worriation. Poetry can both delight and disturb. It can interest folks. It can upset folks. Poetry can convey both pleasure and pain. And poetry can make people think. If poetry makes people think, it might make them think constructive thoughts, even thoughts about how to change themselves, their town and their state for the better. Some poems, like many of the great verses in the Bible, can make people think about changing all mankind, even the whole world. Poems, like prayers, possess power."

--Langston Hughes (1965)
qtd. in E. Alexander,
["The Black Poet as Canon-Maker"](#)

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the poetry of American modernism—chronologically speaking, roughly the first half of the 20th century—as well as a sampling of its carryover in the following decades. Given the extent and richness of the subject, the course will be suggestive rather than thoroughly representative. One aspect of this course, then, will be an exploration of what exactly the term *modernism* might signify. Beyond the goals of the [Literary Studies learning domain](#), the course aims to:

- (1) increase your understanding of this period of literary history;
- (2) foster your interpretation of literary texts, especially from the modernist era, through reflection, discussion, investigation, and writing; and
- (3) substantively engage with the course material.

In order to gain as much from this course as possible, you must actively engage the content. While short lectures by the professor will certainly occur, student interaction—with the poems and supplementary reading material, with classmates, with the instructor, with your own imaginations and critical eye—will constitute the primary course activity.

In terms of pages, your reading amount is far less than in a prose-based course. You will need to attend to the poems. Reread them; study them. Come to class with ideas about the poems, however tentative. You are expected to familiarize yourself with our primary poets ahead of class discussion (poetryfoundation.org, poets.org, modernamericanpoetry.org).

This course does not fulfill a writing requirement, but we will work on your writing skills.

Course Work

Course Engagement (20 pts): This is the “ungraded” portion of the course.

Because I only have access to your attendance, verbalized class participation, and communication with me outside class, I can’t appreciate the full extent of your engagement with the material. You will assign your own Course Engagement grade. You’ll do this twice—at midterm and at the end of the semester. The end of the semester grade must include whether you completed the Course Evaluation.

Response Papers (potential 30 pts): See Writing Assignments. There are five due dates to submit one for 5 points each. The number you submit is up to you. Due on the shaded dates. Craft add-ons: For up to any three of the five, you can earn two additional points (each) by focusing on craft. Please let me know what craft focus you did. You can also submit an additional one at any point in the semester (for 4 points plus 2 craft add-on points).

Minor Notes (10 pts): We spend a week exploring some Black poets mostly forgotten by the vagaries of literary canonization. We conduct each session along the lines of a Murphy tutorial: A few students will offer a short piece of writing about the day’s poets to which the rest of class will respond, while the professor stays quiet. The grade is based both upon your short piece and your participation in the discussions.

The Waste Land brief (2 pts): For good or ill, T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) has become all but synonymous with literary modernism (William Carlos Williams abhorred it). In a week of no classes, you will familiarize yourself with the poem and write a two-page piece on what ideas from a couple of podcasts best helped you enter the poem and/or understand modernism.

Inklings brief (3 pts): Submit three pages indicating the objects and direction of your final essay. See Writing Assignments.

Essay (30 pts): See Writing Assignments.

There are 102/100 potential points here. A 100% of points for Engagement, Minority Notes, and the Final Essay, plus 5 points for the two briefs, and no extras for the response papers, will earn an A at 90%. An 80% for the three graded items, all 5 points for two briefs, and no extras for the response papers, it calculates to a 78. Secure a B by doing one craft add-on, or the extra response, or performing better than 80% on the graded items. Secure an A by doing more extras and performing better than 80%.

Other Policies

- ✘ All members of this community are expected to contribute to a respectful and welcoming environment. If you believe you have been the subject of discrimination, contact the Dean of Students Office (Mike Leblanc, leblanc@hendrix.edu 501-450-1222 or the Title IX Coordinator (Allison Vetter titleix@hendrix.edu, 501-505-2901). If you have ideas for improving the classroom experience, talk with me. See the [Hendrix non-discrimination policies](#) and the English [Department's statement on purpose and diversity](#).
- ✘ **Electronic devices:** E-readers for course material are permitted, except for cell phones. A few cautions: (1) Do not use e-readers for convenience at the expense of active reading. You are still expected to take notes, highlight passages, add comments, etc. (2) Laptops/tablets can be used in class as e-readers. Do not abuse this privilege. Keep in mind: You owe yourselves time away from a screen, and nothing is better for active reading than underlining and annotating paper copies, and taking notes by hand.
- ✘ The **syllabus** is subject to revision as the course progresses.
- ✘ **Disabilities:** Hendrix College accommodates students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law. Students should contact Julie Brown in the Office of Academic Success (505.2954; brownj@hendrix.edu) to begin the accommodation process. Any student seeking accommodation in relation to a recognized disability should inform the instructor as soon as possible.
- ✘ **Your Well-Being:** Many students face mental and/or physical health challenges. If your health status will impact attendance or assignments, please communicate with me as soon as possible. If you would like to implement academic accommodations, contact Julie Brown in the office of Academic Success (brownj@hendrix.edu). To maintain optimal health, utilize campus resources like Hendrix Medical Clinic or Counseling Services (501.450.1448). Your health and wellbeing are important. **Eat well, get sleep, and exercise!**
- ✘ **Email:** Email will be used to contact the entire class for communicating changes to the syllabus and other matters. Check your Hendrix account daily.
- ✘ **Academic Integrity:** High standards of honesty and fairness in academic pursuits are central to intellectual inquiry, character development, and community integrity. Familiarize yourself with the [statement of Academic Integrity](#). Frequently, errors in documentation and attribution are not deliberate attempts to pass off another's ideas and words as one's own, but rather misunderstandings of how to give that other person sufficient credit. Consult with me on potential confusion so we can avoid problems.
- ✘ **Late essays:** For Response Papers and the briefs, you will lose one point for every day one is late. The Final Essay cannot be late. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must consult me at least one week prior to the paper's due date (except in the case of actual emergencies, of course).