

Modern English Poetry (EL 501)

Fall 2026

Instructor: Dr. Cihan Yurdaun

Class: Tuesday, 2,3,4,5 TB 480

Office Hours: By appointment, TB 425

Course Description

This graduate seminar is a concept-led study of modern poetry in English, exploring the power of poetic representation across different historical periods and geographies, drawing on prominent examples, and focusing primarily on 20th-century modern poetry.

Starting with the sonnet form, tracing its historical development and introducing other forms such as the villanelle, elegy, ode, and epic over the first three weeks, it establishes the connection between form and content, showing how poets inherit, transform, and contest established forms and literary traditions.

Each week, a different concept groups the poems and generates discussion about modern poetry's capacity to represent the world and the self. As detailed in the weekly schedule, contrasting or complementary theoretical arguments are used to analyze poetry from a wide range of poetic styles and traditions, from Yeats to Lyn Hejinian. Poetry's engagement with emotions and the visual arts, its use as a method and means of philosophical inquiry, its invocation of political responsibility, the revitalization of mythology, and its unique way of problematizing gender and masculinity are addressed throughout the course.

Close reading of both the poems and the theoretical texts will be the principal method pursued. The seminar approaches poetry as a distinctive mode of thought through which questions of posthumanism, aesthetics, and ethics can emerge, offering new ways of seeing, evaluating, revealing, and aestheticizing the world and the self.

Course Requirements:

- 90% attendance is mandatory. Because all four weekly course hours are held on the same day, students may miss no more than one class meeting.
- All course materials will be available on Moodle.
- You are expected to come to class having read all the assigned weekly materials.
- Each student will choose a week, prepare a presentation, and then lead the class discussion using the discussion questions they have prepared.
- There will be three short responses (10% each) that you'll have to write.

- All written work will be submitted through Turnitin. Unauthorized use of generative AI may result in no credit for the assignment. Students may be asked to discuss their argument, sources, and writing process when questions concerning authorship arise.
- With a few exceptions, each class will begin with my introduction and a close reading of a poem(s), then continue with the designated student's presentation and discussion lead. Some weeks will end with in-class short responses.
- The catalog grading will be used.

Workload & Grading:

Participation: 10%

Presentations: 20%

Short Responses: 30%

Final Paper: 40%

*“This is a tentative reading list and may be revised during the semester.”

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1 (22 September)

The Sonnet Tradition

Dante, Petrarch, Renaissance Sonnet, Shakespeare, John Donne, Romantic Sonnet

Theoretical Readings: Paul Oppenheimer, selections from *The Birth of the Modern Mind*

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Week 2 (29 September)

The Modern Sonnet: Constraint, Inheritance, and Revision

Gerard Manley Hopkins, Claude McKay, St. Vincent Millay, W.H. Auden, Adrienne Rich,
Seamus Heaney

Theoretical Readings: Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”, T.
S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

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Week 3 (6 October)

Modern Villanelle, Elegy, Ode, and Epic: Form and Emotions

Dylan Thomas, Elizabeth Bishop, Mark Strand, Allen Ginsberg, John Keats, Bernadette
Mayer, Derek Walcott, H.D.

Theoretical Readings: Sara Ahmed, Introduction and selections from *The Cultural Politics of
Emotion*

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Week 4 (13 October)

Ekphrasis: Poetry and Other Art Forms

W.H. Auden, William Carlos Williams, Anne Sexton, John Berryman, Walter de La Mare,
Melih Cevdet Anday

Theoretical Readings: W.J.T. Mitchell, selections from *Picture Theory*

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Week 5 (20 October)

Poetry as Philosophical Inquiry

Wallace Stevens, R.S. Thomas, Mark Strand, Philip Larkin

Theoretical Readings: Maurice Blanchot, selections from *Work of Fire*, Merleau-Ponty,
“Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” selected passages.

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Week 6 (27 October)

Politics and Poetic Responsibility

Yeats, Derek Walcott, Sylvia Plath, Carolyn Forché, Seamus Heaney

Theoretical Readings: Carolyn Forché, “Not Persuasion, but Transport: The Poetry of Witness,” Theodor Adorno, selected passages from “Cultural Criticism and Society”

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Week 7 (3 November)

Reworking Mythology I: Women’s Voices and Counter-Memory

H.D., Carol Ann Duffy, Louise Glück, Margaret Atwood

Theoretical Readings: Alicia Ostriker, “The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking,” Judith Butler, “Contingent Foundations”

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Week 8 (10 November)

Reworking Mythology II: Masculinity, Heroism, and Male Authority

Yeats, Tennyson, T.S. Eliot, Thom Gunn, Tony Harrison

Theoretical Readings: Michael Kimmel, “Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity”, Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” from *Mythologies*

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Week 9 (17 November)

The Poetic Self: Speaker, Persona, and the Problem of the “I”

Edgar Lee Masters, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Sharon Olds

Theoretical Readings: T. S. Eliot, “The Three Voices of Poetry,” W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy”

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Week 10 (24 November)

Posthumanism I: Animals and Nature, the Limits of Human Perspective

Elizabeth Bishop, Ted Hughes, D.H. Lawrence, Marianne Moore, Mark Doty, Louise Glück

Theoretical Readings: Jacques Derrida, selections from *The Animal That Therefore I Am*; John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”; Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”

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Week 11 (1 December)

Posthumanism II: Objects and Material Resistance

William Carlos Williams, Charles Simic, Craig Raine, Gertrude Stein

Theoretical Readings: Viktor Shklovsky's "Art as Technique", selections from Bill Brown's "Thing Theory," and Jane Bennett's "The Force of Things"

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Week 12 (8 December)

Experimental Poetics: When Language Becomes the Subject

Gertrude Stein, Lyn Hejinian, Charles Bernstein, Ron Silliman

Theoretical Readings: Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation," Lyn Hejinian, "The Rejection of Closure," Bernstein, selected passages from "The Artifice of Absorption"