HNRS 122 – 002
3 Credits / Spring 2018

20th and 21st Century Poetry from Around the World:
A ‘Hybrid’ Course in Creative and Critical Writing
MW 10:30-11.45 / Thompson Hall 2021

Instructor: Vivek Narayanan
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Office Hours: by appointment

Note: I will reply to all emails within 24 hours, except on weekends.

Course Description

In the 20th century, the art of poetry seems to become newly aware of itself on a planetary level, in a way that’s both intensely utopian and profoundly transnational—with translation helping those sparks to fly—but also impossibly vast, various and fragmented. Modern poetry, as you’ll soon see, is not one thing but many. The main point of this course is to give you a sense of those fascinating, deeply felt and sometimes crazy experiments with poetry that have happened over the past century or so. You will also, hopefully, finish with a new, wider sense of the possibilities available in recent and contemporary poetic traditions—but you’ll have to keep your mind open and ears alert.

Learning Outcomes

Through a series of short weekly assignments, in-class writing exercises, an extended book review and a final portfolio, students in the class will explore their own poetic practice inspired by the readings and refine ways to think and write about poetry. By exploring a series of debates—about what poetry is, what its obligations are, what makes a poem modern, the role translation has to play, and so on—we will also cautiously learn to see modern world poetry in its social and historical contexts.

Course Policies

* NO device use unless explicitly called for. I will often specifically require/allow you to use laptops and other devices in class—to follow or discuss a reading closely, or to participate in a collaborative writing process. But all other times, you will have to keep your phones, tabs, and laptops to the side. Please feel free to take general notes on paper. If I see that you are not fully ‘present’ with us in class—doing your chem homework, perchance, or answering a chat—then I will call on you to put your device away. Repeated infractions will have an adverse result on your class participation
grade. If you want to take an urgent call, leave the room.

* Students MUST use their Mason email account to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. Please make sure your Mason email is working properly and that you are checking it frequently. I regularly communicate important and urgent information over email. See http://masonlive.gmu.edu for more information.

* Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Deadlines each semester are published in the Schedule of Classes available from the Registrar's Website registrar.gmu.edu.

* Do not plagiarize any of your work submitted for this class. Plagiarism and cheating will result in disciplinary action at the university level and an F in this course. Please make yourself familiar with the University Honor Code, which can be found at http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code/. This website also provides you with information as to how to avoid violations of the Code and other resources.

* If you need academic accommodations for different learning, of course please come see me and/or contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474, http://ods.gmu.edu. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS.

Required and Recommended Texts

Required

-- One small complete book of poetry by a single author – to be decided in consultation with the instructor. I will walk you through your options soon.

--All other required texts will be provided via our course page on Blackboard.

Recommended

A number of the poems in our course have been sourced from the two anthologies below. They are an important purchase/keepsake for anyone who has developed a serious interest in the poetry that we cover in this class.

Assignments and Grading

--Class Participation (30%):
Class participation forms the single largest portion of your grade and will be based on the following factors: a) attendance—unexcused absences might have a drastic effect on your grade; b) clear evidence of your having done all the readings before class; c) the degree, enthusiasm and quality of your engagement with in-class discussions and exercises; and d) your attendance at one extra-curricular poetry reading from my approved list.

--Weekly Discussion Board Postings (20%)
A minimum of ten weekly postings over the course of the semester. Each week you’ll have a choice: write prose about poetry or write a poem according to a prescribed exercise—both possibilities will relate to that week’s readings. Turn in at least four poems and six short prose essays by the end of the semester.

--Book Review Essay – 5-7 pages (20%) – due before 11 pm, Tuesday March 20:
This will be a detailed essay on a book of poems by a single author, to be decided upon in consultation with the instructor. I will be walking you through a detailed list of options soon.

--Final Revised Portfolio (20%) – due before 11 pm, Tuesday May 5:
The portfolio may include short prose pieces on the readings—including a revised and expanded version of a discussion post—or relevant poems that have been previously submitted to the instructor. Whether prose or poetry, you will be partly evaluated on the productive effort you’ve put into revising your work, and/or the overall improvement of your work over the course of the semester.

--Final In-class Presentations (10%):
A performance—broadly construed—in a form of your choosing (which can include a short lecture or talk). I’ll explain this to you more as the semester goes on.

The readings for each class session usually include a mix of poems with some prose. Please note that poetry, although often short, can take more time to read. You might want to read every poem, at least every short poem, about three times to “get” it: first, to take in the sound and experience of it, letting it wash over you, and from the second reading on to begin to closely observe what the poem is doing.

In other words, please allot at least four hours a week in your schedule to do the readings. I do NOT expect you to “understand” every poem before you come to class, I only expect you to have given it an earnest read/listen, making a note of a few things—say a few words or lines—that you find striking.
COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Monday, Jan. 22

Introduction – what to expect from this class.

Wednesday, Jan. 24: Origin Myths

Required Reading: Robert Frost: “The Figure a Poem Makes” (prose)

Optional Reading in pdf packet (we’ll look at these in class):

[Please DO read the commentary, wherever provided.]


Les Murray - "Poetry and Religion";
See: http://www.lyrikline.org/de/gedichte/poetry-and-religion-333#.WIvFgVMrJEY

To listen to the Doc Reese prison song go to:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk4G5a1-4oA

Monday, January 29: The Turning


Wednesday, Jan 31: New or Really Old (i)

Monday, February 5: New or Really Old (ii)


Wednesday Feb 7: Manifestoes and Madness

Note: A good reading of the original Spanish of the opening canto of Altazor here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TD96blkq4-Y


Huidobro, from Altazor -original Spanish of selection above; Apollinaire – original French of poems translated above.

Monday February 12: Heteronyms

The heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa

--Richard Zenith, Introduction to The Selected Prose of Fernando Pessoa

--Alberto de Caiero, “The Startling Reality of Things”

--Fernando Pessoa – “Autopsicografia”. Note: see website for 13 different translations of this poem.

--Ricardo Reis, Two Poems

--Alvaro De Campos, from “Triumphal Ode”

--Fernando Pessoa – Sonnet written in English

Wednesday Feb 14: Duende: Consciousness and Mystery

-- Jibananda Das—“The Orange”; “Bombers at Dawn, 1942”; “The Moon Atop the Field”; “Suchetana”

-- Raul Zurita on Huidobro and Vallejo (prose)

---Vallejo, “Los Heraldos Negros, “Trilce IX” + commentary
-- For everyone, even if you don’t know Spanish: for the Vallejo poem “Los Heraldos Negros” / “The Black Heralds” please listen to this recording of both the Spanish and the English translation (the latter read by the translator, Clayton Eshleman) here: [https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Eshleman/12-9-06/Eshleman-Clayton_02_The-Black-Heralds_Milwaukee_12-9-06.mp3](https://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/authors/Eshleman/12-9-06/Eshleman-Clayton_02_The-Black-Heralds_Milwaukee_12-9-06.mp3)

-- Lorca: from “Night Suite, for Piano & Poet’s Voice” + commentary by Rothenberg & Joris

-- Lorca: Theory and Play of Duende (prose)


-- Lorca, from “Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías”; “Dreamwalker Ballad” + commentary on those poems by Gareth Walters.

-- For the first section of Lorca’s lament that begins “At five in the afternoon…” please also watch its recital by the flamenco dancer Lola Flores: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xceIzwmIWU&index=4&list=PL8349FA1A39E167DF](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xceIzwmIWU&index=4&list=PL8349FA1A39E167DF)

[ Flores has also done other Lorca poems. ]

-- Spanish Originals of the Lorca and Vallejo poems

**Monday, February 19: Other Kinds of Duende**

--Mandelstam – Poem No. 286 (On Stalin), and “If our antagonists take me…” in “LAST POEMS”, Commentary

-- Hagiwara Sakutaro – “Chair”, “Spring Night” + Commentary

--Wallace Stevens, “The Emperor of Ice Cream”

--excerpts from the prose of Rilke

--Rilke, five poems, translated by Stephen Mitchell
Wed Feb 21: DADA, Merz and Zaum

Important: Please open the following urls in separate tabs:

http://www.ubu.com/sound/schwitters.html
and http://www.merzmail.net/ursonatepdf.pdf

--Have a look at the score for Ursonate and listen to the full first batch of sound files without interruption -- Schwitter's original recording of Ursonate -- total listening time about 45 mins:

Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948)
einleitung und erster teil: rondo (21:58)
zweiter teil: largo (3:12)
dritter teil: scherzo - trio - scherzo (2:24)
vierter teil: presto - ablosung - kadenz - schluss (13:36)

This and Khlebnikov's essay below are the main readings for this session.

In this packet:


-- Kurt Schwitters, “Desire”, Portrait of Herwarth Walden”

-- Hugo Ball, Sound Poems

-- Tristan Tzara, “from DADA Manifesto”

-- Francis Picabia, “Portrait of Tristan Tzara”

Readings for Monday, February 26: Troubled Visions, Social Dreams

-- Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, “Read” and “The Three Birds”


-- Amos Tutuola – “Television-handed Ghostess” + editors’ commentary
--Paul Celan, “A Death Fugue” (Vol.2, pp.24-25) – please read this along with the Poetry Foundation biography of Celan here: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/paul-celan

--Aimé Césaire, opening paragraph of “Return to my Native Land”; “Macumba Word”, “Laguna Calendar”, “Emmett Till”, “It is Myself, Terror, It is Myself”]

--Leopold Senghor (prose) – “Speech and Image: an African Tradition of the Surreal” (Vol.1, pp. 564-5)

--[Aime Césaire, original French of “Macumba Word” and “Laguna Calendar”]

Readings for Wednesday Feb 28: Troubled Visions, pt. 2

-- Langston Hughes, “Montage of a Dream Deferred” + editors’ commentary

--Gwendolyn Brooks, “We Real Cool” & “The Lovers of the Poor”

--Rules for writing a Golden Shovel

--Terrance Hayes, “The Golden Shovel”

--Léon Damas, “Just Like the Legend” & “S.O.S.” ; also read the short Wikipedia article on Léon Damas.

--Muriel Rukeyser, “The Speed of Darkness”. Also, please read the Wikipedia article on Rukeyser.

--Adil Jussawalla, from Missing Person. Also read the introduction to Jussawalla here.

Monday, March 5: Language Events

--Monica de la Torre, “Into the Maze: OuLiPo” (prose). Find at: https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/maze-oulipo


Important note on above: Queneau’s work essentially consists of ten sonnets where every line is interchangeable. However, this presents problems for the English
translator. Beverley Rowe has added two more sonnets (nos. 11 and 12) that she has written herself originally in English. If you don't have French, to understand this project better, make sure to explore lines from those two last sonnets first.

-- Surrealists: Language Events 1 & 2

-- Inger Christensen, from Alphabet [+ commentary by editors]

--Christian Bok, from Eunoia

Wednesday, March 7: Documentary and Matters of the Soul

--Robert Creeley, “I Know a Man”

--Elizabeth Bishop, “Crusoe in England” – please read this while listening to her 1979 recording of the poem (with Susan Howe and Charles Ruas) on this page: http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe-Pacifica.php

-- George Oppen, “Psalm” + editors’ commentary on Oppen

--Muriel Rukeyser, “The Dam” + editors’ commentary

--Charles Reznikoff, “Testimony”, sections 1 & 2

--Robert Frost, “A Roadside Stand”

Monday March 19: New Old-fashioned Forms

On the Internet:

Rhyming innovations in rap music (12 minute video):

In this Packet

--Vikram Seth: “All You Who Sleep Tonight”; “Dubious”

--Philip Larkin: “Money”; “This Be the Verse”

The Villanelle
-- Introduction to the villanelle form (from Wikipedia)

-- Villanelles by William Empson, Dylan Thomas, Theodore Roethke, Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath.

-- A.E. Stallings, “Blackbird Etude”

**Tuesday, March 20**

By 11 pm: *book review essay due*

**Wednesday, March 21: Prophecy and Play**

From the Internet:

Please listen to the recording of Ginsberg reading “Howl” while reading along with the published text in a separate tab.

Read “Howl” here: [https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/49303](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/49303)

Listen to “Howl” here (26 mins) *while reading along on the page*: [http://www.openculture.com/2013/06/hear_the_very_first_recording_of_allen_ginsberg_reading_his_epic_poem_howl_1956.html](http://www.openculture.com/2013/06/hear_the_very_first_recording_of_allen_ginsberg_reading_his_epic_poem_howl_1956.html)

from Soumitra Mohan, “Luqman Ali”


-- Allen Ginsberg, “Notes Written on Finally Recording Howl” (prose)

**Monday March 26: Playful & Tender**

-- John Ashbery, “Composition”; “Interesting People of Newfoundland”

-- Kenneth Koch, “To Piano Lessons”; “To Driving”; “To Friendship”; “To Marijuana”

-- Frank O’Hara, “A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island”; “Having a
Coke with You”

--Edwin Morgan, “Strawberries”

--John Ashbery, “The Instruction Manual”

Wednesday March 28: What is Translation? Part 1

--Jack Spicer, from After Lorca

--Clayton Eshleman, notes on the sources of After Lorca

--3 translations of the same ancient Tamil poem

-- Haikus of Netsen Tsubouchi, translated by Joe Pan and Martin Rock

Mon Apr 2: What is Translation? Part 2

Note: Except for the Nicanor Parra, you have been given multiple translations of each author below. When you read the poems, compare the translations, and perhaps choose the translation you prefer.

-- Tomas Tranströmer, “Solitude (1)”; “Midwinter”

-- Eugenio Montale, “The Sunflower”; “Motet 1”

-- Nicanor Parra, “Young Poets”; “Ponchartrain Causeway”; “Warnings”; “Chronos”

-- Shrikant Verma: “Anonymous in Avanti”

-- Pablo Neruda, “Ode to a Pair of Socks”; “Ode to the Artichoke”

Wed Apr 4: What is Translation? Part 3


-- Francis Ponge – “The Pleasures of a Door” (3 translations); “The Oyster” (translations by Cid Corman, Benji Frank) + commentaries on problems in the translation by Benji Frank.

-- Carlos Drummond de Andrade – “Seven Sided Poem” (translations by Richard Zenith and Elizabeth Bishop)

-- Elizabeth Bishop – multiple drafts of “One Art”

-- Sylvia Plath – “Sheep in Fog” – final version and manuscript with revisions

**Mon Apr 9: Cultures and Lives of 20th C. Poetry**

-- Edwin Morgan, “Seven Decades”

-- Kent Johnson, “33 Rules of Poetry for Poets 23 and under”


-- Adrienne Rich, “The Location of the Poet” (essay)

**Wednesday April 11: The Ghazal Before and After Agha Shahid Ali**

-- Agha Shahid Ali, “Basic Points About the Ghazal”; “Of Light”

-- Patricia Smith, “Hip Hop Ghazal”

-- Forrest Gander, “Moon and Page Ghazal”

-- Natasha Tretheway, “Miscegenation”

-- Lorca, “Ghazal of the Terrible Presence”

-- Versions of Ghalib’s poem 111 by Vijay Seshadri, Adrienne Rich and Agha Shahid Ali

Optional reading – to learn more about Agha Shahid Ali and the ghazal coming to America:

[https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/51652#guide](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/resources/learning/core-poems/detail/51652#guide)
Mon Apr 16: Further Adventures in Form

1. In this packet:

-- Raul Zurita, from *Purgatory*
-- Aram Saroyan, 9 minimalist poems
-- Darren Wershler-Henry, from *Nicholodeon*
-- Lyn Hejinian, from *My Life* (pp. 664-5)
-- John Cayley, from *Reveal Code* (pp. 827-8)
-- Tom Phillips, "A Hummument"

2. To Watch on Youtube:

-- “The Poem Prints of Ian Hamilton Finlay” (6.5 minutes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OFKJzcu_a1g
-- On Finlay’s Little Sparta (4.5 minutes): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fn2c1g0m1bU

Wed Apr 18: Poets With & Without History, Part 1 – Modern Poets’ Movements


2. Chinese: The “Misty” Poets and After

-- Bei Dao – “The Answer” (several different translations); “The August Sleepwalker”; “He Opens a Wide Third Eye…”

-- Gu Cheng, “A Generation” (2 line poem)

-- Introduction to Ouyang Jianghe, by Austin Woerner and Wolfgang Kubin
-- Ouyang Jianghe, “Between Chinese and English”; “Key to Sunday”; “Mother, Kitchen”

-- Xi Chuan, “Notes on the Mosquito”; “A Sanskrit Brick from Nanzhao”; “After Wang Ximeng…”

**Mon Apr 23: Poets With and Without History, Part 2**

-- Derek Walcott – “The Antilles: Fragments of an Epic Memory” (essay)

-- Marina Tsvetayeva – “Poets With and Without History” (essay)

**Wed April 25: Poetry, Music, Performance**

-- Jeremy Cronin, “Insurgent South African Poetry” (prose)

On the Internet:

--Black Star (feat. Common): “Respiration” – video -
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeTnog5RQ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeTnog5RQ0)
; lyric transcription - [https://genius.com/Black-star-respiration-lyrics](https://genius.com/Black-star-respiration-lyrics)

-Mutabaruka, “Dis Poem”

--Songs and performances suggested by students in the class.

**Monday April 30 & Wed May 2: Catching Up / Student Presentations**

**Tuesday, May 5: Before 11 pm – Final Portfolio Due**

**Wednesday May 6: Final Exam period (will be used to finish student presentations).**