Poets of New England Syllabus

Overview

Instructor: William Moebius.

Weekly general meetings Thursday, 4:00-6:30 p.m.
Students at UMass Amherst are expected to have read and re-read the required readings and to have screened the video(s) in advance of the date on which a particular poet or poets will be discussed. Readings are 1) listed by title in the General Course Syllabus; 2) included under Course Readings on this website. Videos are available at W.E.B.Dubois Library, Learning Resource Center, 10th Floor.

Writing assignments: please see below for the specifics of writing and other assignments.

Course Schedule

INTRODUCTION

| September 8 | Course Introduction. What is poetry in New England? (Selected in-class readings from James Russell Lowell, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Archibald MacLeish, and a few surprises) |

I. DEFINING THE POET'S DIFFERENCE
### September
- **15** - Anne Bradstreet and Phillis Wheatley
- **22** - Emily Dickinson
- **29** - Robert Frost

### October
- **6** - Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell
- **13** - Monday class schedule.
- **20** - Adrienne Rich
- **27** - Sylvia Plath
  - *Class meets at the Neilson Library at Smith College*
  - **First paper due**

### November
- **3** - Cape Cod Poets: Mark Doty, Marge Piercy and Stanley Kunitz

### II. DIVIDED IDENTITIES
- **10** - Agha Shahid Ali
- **17** - Ron Welburn
  - Eugene Gloria
  - Presentation of student projects in final hour
- **1** - Martin Espada
- **8** - Dr. Seuss (Theodore Geisel) Presentation of student projects in final
Teachers And Learners (some background)

The original teaching staff for this course included faculty from several institutions. Each of these faculty had the opportunity to "teach" his or her specialty as it related to poets and poetry of New England (Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine). Each faculty member served as a designated "host," responsible for guiding discussion, establishing research and writing requirements, and evaluating student work at their individual campus sites. Each host faculty member contributed expertise to one or more of the interviews and commentaries on DVD that provide a focal point for most weeks’ readings. Although only one of the host faculty remains on board, some of those who participated in the past figure in the videos as either teachers or poets. Some UMass faculty poets, who are not responsible for guiding discussion on local campuses, may also contribute their expertise. From the Amherst campus alone, two poets (Martin Espada and Ron Welburn), who are also Professors of English, may be persuaded to join us.

Resources, Faculty And Otherwise

In addition to the outstanding poetry collections at the Amherst College (Frost), Smith College (Neilson Library, Mortimer Rare Book Room) and W.E.B. Du Bois Libraries, students may wish to consult the collection at the town library of Amherst (the Jones Library, located on Amity Street across from the former Amherst Cinema). Professor Moebius can be reached via telephone at 545-0929. Professor Moebius will hold office hours by appointment (call 545-0929) on Wednesday afternoons, 2:30-4:30 p.m.

Course Preparation And Attendance

Attendance is required, as is timely arrival in class. You should come to class prepared to discuss all of the assigned readings posted for the poet or poets of the week as well as the interpretations or emphases of particular poems offered by speakers on course DVD's. These DVD's are on reserve at the W.E.B. Dubois Library, Learning Resource Center, Tenth Floor.

Weekly Commentaries
Each week, except for December 1 and December 8, two students will offer a reading and then an interpretation, analysis of or commentary on a poem by that week's poet not assigned generally, or by a New England poet whose work is not included in the roster of assigned readings. Any exceptions to this expectation must have the instructor's approval one week in advance. Each reading/presentation should take about 15 minutes, and should allow time for class discussion. A signup sheet will be provided.

Writing Assignments

You will need to keep a journal of your responses to the assigned readings, the course DVD's, and our class discussions. Each journal entry should be dated, and should reflect a candid, open and thoughtful approach to the poems we read and talk about. You should discuss in some detail your experience of particular poems, and consider the possibility of commenting on the evolution of your understanding of a particular poem, and where appropriate, how a particular poem resonates with your personal experience. Your responses should be emailed to the instructor each week on Tuesdays before midnight.

Two critical essays are required, one due on October 27, the other on December 8. For each essay, you will need to select a few poems by a New England poet from among those shown on the Course Schedule (e.g. Frost, Dickinson, Bishop, inter alia) and a few poems by a New England poet not shown on the Course Schedule (e.g., Rhina Espaillat, James Merrill, Maxine Kumin, inter alia). The poems you select from each poet will depend on the critical framework and topic you choose for each paper. To help you choose a critical framework and a topic, we will discuss various possibilities in class, and you will be offered a set of sample research questions for further exploration. The framework and topic you choose should be submitted for approval by the instructor two weeks in advance of the paper due date: for the first paper, that date is October 13; for the final paper, that date is November 17.

Collaborative Research and Plagiarism

Your research should be guided but not determined by the sample research questions provided in separate sets of guidelines. You are encouraged to work with a fellow student in an area of common interest, to develop a research plan together, and to draw on each other's research for your paper. While some of the research findings will overlap in your essays, you will be responsible for undertaking original criticism and analysis. It is important that you recognize that you are responsible for crediting all sources of information you draw on in drafting your essays. Whether you are paraphrasing or quoting directly, you must provide appropriate citations for what you borrow. Academic discourse depends on collaboration and on the acknowledgement of that collaboration, even across centuries of writing.
Research beyond the assigned readings in class is required. Although research through electronic media is encouraged, research in bound paper volumes housed in the W.E.B. DuBois Library will be mandatory. With over a million volumes, the W.E.B. DuBois library is a campus resource not available to students at other sites that may participate in this course. You are especially encouraged to discover and discuss poets of New England whose poetry is written in languages other than English, whether published or recorded on video.

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