

ENGL2131.01: Studies in Poetry
Eric Weiskott
Spring 2023, T/R 12:00–1:15pm
Office hours: T 10:00–11:00am (Stokes S407) or by appointment

This course is a general introduction to poetry and poetics. The goals of the course are close reading of poetry, developing the student's ability to ask questions which open poems to analysis, and writing lucid interpretive papers. This section of Studies in Poetry is organized around significant poetic traditions, from alliterative meter to iambic pentameter to free verse, with an emphasis on the twenty-first-century United States. We ask what it means for a poem to belong to a tradition, how traditions gain momentum, and why they endure or disappear.

Note: This section of Studies in Poetry has a creative writing component. Our reading of contemporary poetry and our composition of original poems explore poetry as a living practice.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BC Bookstore)

Edgar Garcia, *Skins of Columbus: A Dream Ethnography* (Fence, 2019)
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf, 2014)
Elizabeth Willis, *Address* (Wesleyan, 2011)

RECOMMENDED TEXT (available at the BC Bookstore)

The Norton Anthology of Poetry, ed. Margaret Ferguson *et al.* (6th ed.) (Norton, 2018)

Note: All page numbers in parentheses refer to the *Norton Anthology*. Apart from the required texts, items without a hyperlink are available as PDFs under Files on Canvas.

SCHEDULE

Why poetry?

Jan 17 Introduction to prosody and poetics
Dickinson, "The Brain Is Wider than the Sky" on For Better for Verse
(prosody.lib.virginia.edu/prosody_poem/the-brain-is-wider-than-the-sky)

Tetrameter and ballad meter (nineteenth century)

Jan 19 Melville, "Shiloh: A Requiem (April, 1862)" (1134)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/45906)
Warner, "What Like a Bullet Can Undeceive?" (excerpt)
Jan 24 Dickinson, poems 314 ("['Hope' is the thing with feathers]"), 340 ("[I felt a Funeral, in my Brain]"), 479 ("[Because I could not stop for Death]"), and 591 ("[I heard a Fly buzz - when I died]") (1176–77, 1178, 1181–82, 1183)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/42889)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/45706)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/47652)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/45703)
Carroll, "Jabberwocky" (1191)

*Discussion post 1 due on Canvas

*Introductory meter assignment: “Jabberwocky” on For Better for Verse
(prosody.lib.virginia.edu/prosody_poem/jabberwocky)

Pentameter and the sonnet (fourteenth century to twenty-first century)

- Jan 26 Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, “The General Prologue,” ll. 1–34 (24)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/43926) [first two stanzas only]
Shakespeare, sonnet 130 (280) (poetryfoundation.org/poems/45108)
Agbabi, “Prologue (Grime Mix)” (and watch: [youtube.com/watch?v=-U-ozgiZfjQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-U-ozgiZfjQ))
- Jan 29 *Carson lecture at Museum of Fine Arts Boston (2:00–3:00pm, Auditorium 161)
- Jan 31 Bradstreet, “The Author to Her Book” (493–94)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/43697)
Cavendish, “Of Many Worlds in This World” (531)
Eliot, “I Grant You Ample Leave” (poetryfoundation.org/poems/47458)
*Creative assignment 1 due
- Feb 2 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, sonnet 1 (1000)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/43733)
Robert Browning, “My Last Duchess” (1061–62)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/43768)
*Intermediate meter assignment: E. Barrett Browning, “Sonnets from the Portuguese #7” on For Better for Verse
(prosody.lib.virginia.edu/prosody_poem/sonnets-from-the-portuguese-7)
- Feb 7 Stevens, “The Idea of Order at Key West” (1328–29)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/43431)
Brooks, “my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell” (1668)
(poetryfoundation.org/poems/43315)
*Discussion post 2 due on Canvas
- Feb 9 Hayes, “Sonnet”
Willis, *Address*, p. 47 (“Sonnet”)
Watch Watts, “Beats That Defy Boxes” ([youtube.com/watch?v=BdHK_r9RXTc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdHK_r9RXTc))

Triple meters and the limerick (eighteenth century to twentieth century)

- Feb 14 ?Murray, “Lines, Written by a Lady,” etc.
(bostonliteraryhistory.com/chapter-3.html) [click “Chapter Index” and navigate to the fifth item]
Poe, “Annabel Lee” (1020) (poetryfoundation.org/poems/44885)
*Creative assignment 2 due
- Feb 16 Brooks, “We Real Cool” (1669–70)
(poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/28112)
Gorey, *The Listing Attic*

Alliterative meter (tenth century to fourteenth century)

- Feb 21 Langland, *Piers Plowman* C.9, trans. Economou
Langland, *Piers Plowman* C.9.70–87 (original Middle English)

Eric's One-Page Guide to Middle English Alliterative Meter

*Paper 1 due (4 pp.)

- Feb 23 *Wulf and Eadwacer*, trans. Liuzza
The Wife's Lament, trans. Liuzza (compare 11-12)
The Seafarer, trans. Pound (compare 13-17) (poetryfoundation.org/poems/44917)

Free verse (nineteenth century to twentieth century)

- Feb 28 Whitman, "Song of Myself," parts 1, 5, 6, 11, 13, 24, and 52 (1108-14)
 (poetryfoundation.org/poems/45477) [link contains more than is assigned]
 Ginsberg, "America"
 *Discussion post 3 due on Canvas
- March 2 Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation*, stanzas 2 and 13
 (poetryfoundation.org/poems/47978)
 (poetryfoundation.org/poems/47979)
 Lawrence, "Bavarian Gentians" (1354)
- March 14 Stevens, "The Snow Man" (1320) (poetryfoundation.org/poems/45235)
 Hayes, "Snow for Wallace Stevens"
 Willis, "My Stevens"
 *Creative assignment 3 due
- March 16 Levertov, "Intrusion"
 Rich, "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" (1852-53)
- March 21 Baraka [as LeRoi Jones], "Snake Eyes"
 Baraka [as LeRoi Jones], "A Poem for Speculative Hipsters"
 O'Hara, "Having a Coke with You"
 O'Hara, "Personal Poem"

Contemporary American lyric poetry (late twentieth century to twenty-first century)

- March 23 Charles d'Orléans, ballade 8
 Sappho, fragments 1, 31, 105, and 130, trans. Carson
 Jackson, "Who Reads Poetry?"
- March 28 Notley, "As Good as Anything"
 Sharma, "Fool's Purpose"
 Sharma, "Hermetic"
 *Paper 2 due (4 pp.)
- March 30 Ai, "Interview with a Policeman"
 (poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=36846) [3 pages]
 Sharif, "The Master's House"
 Javadizadeh, "In Between States"
- April 4 Herrera, "Blood on the Wheel"
 Weaver, "Inside the Blues Whale"
 *Creative assignment 4 due
- April 11 Carson, "Sumptuous Destitution" (2076)
 Carson, "Essay on What I Think about Most"
 Carson, "Lots of Guns: An Oratorio for Five Voices"

April 13	Chang, "Barbie Chang Can't Stop Watching" Ewing, "Jump / Rope"
April 20	Willis, <i>Address</i> Willis, "Golden Book of Birds" Hill, "'A Poem Argues for its Own Existence'"
April 24	*Agbabi talk at Harvard (5:00–6:30pm, Barker 110)
April 25	Lowell, "Man and Wife" (poets.org/poem/man-and-wife) Lowell, "Skunk Hour" (1662) (poetryfoundation.org/poems/47694/skunk-hour) Rankine, <i>Citizen</i> Rankine, [on Lowell]
April 27	<i>Citizen</i> , cont'd Schwartz, "Interview with Claudia Rankine" (triquarterly.org/issues/issue-150/interview-claudia-rankine)
May 2	Garcia, "from 'Cantares Mexicanos'" (poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/157723) Garcia, <i>Skins of Columbus</i> Garcia, "Obsidian Bits"
May 4	<i>Skins of Columbus</i> , cont'd Review session *Garcia Zoom visit (7:30–8:45pm) *Discussion post 4 due on Canvas *Paper 3 due (4 pp.)
May 9	*Portfolio of poems due (1–2 pp. + 4–15 pp.)
May 12	Final exam (12:30pm)

GRADING

Discussion posts 10%

Final exam 20%

Paper 1 (one line of poetry in context), 4 pp. 10%

Paper 2 (one literary effect in one poem), 4 pp. 20%

Paper 3 (one poem in one kind of history), 4 pp. 20%

Participation 10%

Portfolio of poems (meter/rhyme, sonnet, list, free), 1–2 pp. (statement) + 4–15 pp. (poems) 10%

OBJECTIVES

Over the course of the semester, you will encounter all the major poetic traditions practiced in the English language from the tenth century to the twenty-first, with special emphasis on the combination of form and genre that currently dominates the literary scene (free verse lyric). You will gain a practical understanding of the analysis of poetic form and poetic effects, and you will hone your ability to describe, in expository prose, how a poem means. You will also try your hand at composing poems yourself, which will give you an insider's understanding into the opportunities and resistances of poetic form.

ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussion posts should reflect your initial reactions to the course material. They can, but need not, articulate an argument about the material. Discussion posts 1–3 respond to assigned texts; Discussion post 4 is a brief reaction to one of the live events with contemporary poets (Carson in February, Agbabi in April, and/or Garcia in May). Students are encouraged to attend all three events! Discussion post assignments alternate with four creative assignments, graded cumulatively at the end of the semester after being revised and drawn together into a portfolio of poems. Each creative assignment is to compose a single poem: (1) a poem employing meter or a rhyme scheme or both, (2) a sonnet (meter and rhyme optional), (3) a poem that is or contains a list, and (4) a poem whose form you decide upon yourself. Note: creative work in this class is graded both for its intrinsic quality as poetry and for the light it throws onto your understanding of key terms and styles of poetry. The portfolio is accompanied by a one- to two-page expository statement. For the meter assignments, you will explore meter using the interface on For Better for Verse. Paper 1 is an exploration of the form and significance of a single line of poetry in context, selected from among our course readings up to that point. Paper 2 is an exposition of one literary effect in one poem from our course readings up to that point. Paper 3 is a contextualization of one poem, selected from among our course readings, in one specific kind of history, *e.g.*, the history of a poet's career, the history of a meter, the history of a language, or the history of a war.

EXAM

The final exam will consist of sixty multiple-choice questions about our course readings and key critical concepts from our discussions, followed by four short-answer passage identifications drawn from course readings.

PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend each class having completed the assigned reading. It will always be helpful to read poems aloud, more than once, and with pencil (or digital equivalent) in hand. Students should come to class prepared to actively discuss the language and rhetoric of the assigned texts. This is a discussion-based class, and you typically will not need laptops or smart phones.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Boston College places great value on academic integrity (bc.edu/bc-web/schools/mcas/departments/political-science/undergraduate/academic-integrity.html). I have a zero tolerance policy for intentional plagiarism. All quotations or paraphrases of sources must be cited parenthetically or in a footnote (examples: libguides.bc.edu/c.php?g=44446&p=281300).

ACCESSIBILITY

If you are a student with a disability seeking accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities.

TITLE IX MANDATORY REPORTING

Please be aware that as a Boston College faculty member, I am obligated to report to the Student Affairs Title IX Coordinator any case of sexual misconduct that any student discloses to me.