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Class: Mon & Weds, 2:30-3:45, Lovejoy 103  
Office Hours: Mon 10:30-1:30, Thurs 12-4, Miller 218

**English 347**  
**Modern American Poetry:**  
**Freedoms and Constraints**



This class is an introduction to modern American poetry. The class will be split into four units—“natural” language, forms and reforms, experiment, and imagination and reality—and we will focus not only on individual poets, but on the forms, trends, and concerns that unite them. Throughout the semester we will ask questions such as: What makes a poem “modern”? What is the relationship between modern poetry and its literary forebears? What is free verse, and are our poets writing it? What do terms such as “experimental” and “traditional” mean in a time of great innovation? What are the relationships between modern poetry and other art forms of the period? How are social realities (gender, race, class) figured by modern poetry? What kind of (American) self emerges in the first half of the twentieth century? We will explore these questions and many others in poems and prose by Pound, H.D., Williams, Toomer, Frost, Eliot, Moore, Millay, McKay, Cummings, Stein, Hughes, Stevens, Loy, and Brooks.

**Texts:**

*Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (Volume 1), 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (978-0393977912)

*Tender Buttons*, Gertrude Stein (978-0486298979)

PDFs available on Moodle

**Learning Goals:**

- Identify major trends in modern American poetry
- Identify individual styles of modern American poets
- Understand the relationship between poems and their historical, cultural, and aesthetic context

- Develop close reading skills particularly attuned to form
- Develop argumentation skills based on close reading of both poetry and prose works by poets

**Assignments and Grading:**

- Paper 1 (6-7) pages: 20%
- Paper 2 (6-7) pages: 25%
- Short Assignments: 25%
- Concept Map: 10%
- Participation: 20%

You will receive separate handouts that include guidelines for all of your assignments.

**Short Assignments:** You will have a total of seven short assignments throughout the semester. Two of these will be related to our museum and archive visits. For the other assignments, you are required to upload a 400-500 word close reading on the course website on Moodle **FIVE TIMES** throughout the semester. Your responses may be on any of the material that we are reading that week (NOT on something we've read already discussed in class; your response should be forward-looking). You may submit your five responses any week you'd like; your assignments on the archive and museum will be due the Monday after our visits.

I will often use reading responses as a jumping off point for class discussion, and will likely share responses in class. In your response, you may identify the major issues and concerns of a text and/or do close readings. **Please end each response with at least one question;** this may be a question that you have about the text or a question that you think will spur class discussion. Your responses are due at **9pm on the Sunday** before class. Late responses will not be allowed. Plan accordingly.

**Paper Policy:** Papers are due via the course website by the time and date marked on the syllabus. You may submit your paper as a Word document (.doc or .docx) or as a PDF. If you send me a corrupted file or a file that I cannot open, your paper will count as late until I receive a workable file. Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A to A-) for each late day. I will return your papers to you via the course website. I may grant extensions in extenuating circumstances; when in doubt, come and talk to me.

**Concept Map:** Instead of a final exam, you will submit a concept map of the course that you will create in Coggle (coggle.it). Sign up for a Coggle account earlier rather than later; I recommend that you work on your map throughout the semester rather than leaving its creation until December. You will receive a separate handout that details the expectations for this project.

**Participation:** This is a very small class and its success depends on active dialogue between students. Please come to class fully prepared to discuss the material. If you have trouble speaking in class, you might want to consider bringing prepared questions and/or comments with you. You cannot participate in class if you are not actually in class. More than one unexcused absence will have a negative effect on your participation grade.

**Office Hours:** I will hold walk-in office hours on Mondays from 10:30-12:30 and Thursdays from 12-4. I am also available at other times by appointment. I will hold extra office hours during the week before papers are due.

**Format of Papers:** All papers should include your name, my name, the class title and number, and date. They should be formatted in size 12 font, with 1 inch margins. They must include a Works Cited page.

**Email Policy:** Please feel free to contact me via email at [jwardam@colby.edu](mailto:jwardam@colby.edu) with questions or concerns throughout the semester. I will respond to emails within 24 hours during the week; my email responses may take longer over the weekend. I will not respond to any questions about papers 24 hours before each of the papers is due, nor will I read entire drafts of your paper. If you have long or complicated questions, I suggest that you meet with me during office hours. Meeting in person is usually much more productive than exchanging emails.

**Electronics Policy:** Please silence your electronic devices during class. In the interest of encouraging attentive, focused, and open class discussions, **laptops, tablets, kindles, etc. will NOT be allowed in class.** You will not need them. If you need to use one of these devices because of a disability, please speak with me.

**Academic Honesty:** Honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility are cornerstones of a Colby education and provide the foundation for scholarly inquiry, intellectual discourse, and an open and welcoming campus community. These values are articulated in the Colby Affirmation and are central to this course. Students are expected to demonstrate academic honesty in all aspects of this course. Any violations of academic honesty will be referred to the Coordinator of Academic Integrity; sanctions may include suspension or expulsion.

According to Colby (<http://web.colby.edu/farnham-writerscenter/academic-honesty/>), academic dishonesty includes more than just the purposeful submission of another's material as one's own without citation. Academic dishonesty also includes:

- **double-submitting**, or using the same work to meet assignments in two or more courses;
- **insufficient paraphrasing**, or representing someone else's language too closely as your own;
- **pirating ideas**, or using the thoughts, concepts, and analysis of someone else—even those of a friend or roommate in casual conversation—as your own;
- **incomplete citation**, or failing to include all necessary elements of documentation in your citations (for example, omitting either in-text citations or a Works Cited pages when both are required);
- **under-documentation**, or combining several sources into a single one.

For more, see page 9 of your student handbook on "Academic Honesty" (<http://www.colby.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Colby-College-Student-Handbook-2-16.pdf>). If you have any questions about plagiarism, don't hesitate to contact me! I am happy to talk through any concerns you may have about academic honesty.

**Athletic Participation:** While Colby College is supportive of athletic participation by its students, academics takes priority over athletics. Both NCAA and Colby rules prohibit missing class for practices. In the case of overlapping commitments between class and athletic competitions, you must meet with me as soon as possible to discuss these overlaps. You may request permission to miss class and make up the missed work, but I have the final authority either to grant or to withhold permission.

**Religious Holidays:** Colby College is supportive of the religious practices of its students, faculty, and staff. The College is committed to ensuring that all students are able to observe their religious beliefs without academic penalty. If you observe a religious holiday that will impact your work in this course, please see me at the beginning of the term. We will then work to find a reasonable accommodation that will allow you to complete the academic work.

**Sexual Misconduct/Title IX Statement:** Colby College prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct or gender-based discrimination of any kind. Colby is legally obligated to investigate sexual misconduct (including, but not limited to sexual assault and sexual harassment).

If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact Colby Counseling Services (207-859-4490) or the Director of the Gender and Sexual Diversity Program, Emily Schusterbauer (207-859-4093).

Students should be aware that faculty members are considered responsible employees; as such, if you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a faculty member, they have an obligation to report it to Colby's Title IX Coordinator. "Disclosure" may include communication in-person, via email/phone/text, or through class assignments. To learn more about sexual misconduct or report an incident, visit <http://www.colby.edu/sexualviolence/>.

## Reading Schedule

### Week 1

Wed Sep 6: Introduction

### Week 2

Mon Sep 11: A Glance Back

- Robert Browning, "My Last Duchess"\*
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life"\*
- Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," "Song of Myself 1-14"
- Emily Dickinson, "Wild Nights—Wild Nights!" "There's a certain Slant of light," "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," "Much Madness is divinest Sense—," "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died," "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—"

## "NATURAL" LANGUAGE

Weds Sep 13: Ezra Pound

- "A Pact," "In a Station of the Metro"
- "A Retrospect" (prose)

### Week 3

Mon Sep 18: Ezra Pound

- "The River-Merchant's Wife: A Letter," "Lament of the Frontier Guard," "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance"\*

Weds Sep 20: H.D.

- "Oread," "The Pool," "Sea Rose," "Mid-Day," "Garden," "Sea Violet," "Helen," "Fragment Sixty-Eight," "Epitaph," "The Wind Sleepers,"\* "Sheltered Garden,"\* "Sea Poppies,"\*

#### **Week 4**

Mon Sep 25: William Carlos Williams

- "The Young Housewife," "Sympathetic Portrait of a Child," "Queen-Anne's Lace," "The Widow's Lament in Springtime," "The Great Figure," "Spring and All," "To Elsie," "The Red Wheelbarrow," "This is Just to Say," "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus"

Weds Sep 27: Jean Toomer

- "Her Lips are Copper Wire," "Gum," "Reapers," "Portrait in Georgia," "Song of the Sun," "Storm Ending"

#### **Week 5**

Mon Oct 2: Robert Frost

- "Mending Wall," "Home Burial," "After Apple-Picking," "The Wood Pile," "The Road Not Taken," "Birches," "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," "The Gift Outright"
- "The Figure a Poem Makes" (prose)

### **FORMS and REFORMS**

Weds Oct 4: T.S. Eliot

- *The Waste Land*
- "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (prose)
- "Some Reflections on *Vers Libre*" (prose)\*

#### **Week 6**

Mon Oct 9: T.S. Eliot

- *The Waste Land*

Weds Oct 11: T.S. Eliot

- *The Waste Land*

#### **Week 7**

Mon Oct 16: [no class, fall break]

Weds Oct 18: visit to Marsden Hartley exhibit at Colby Art Museum

#### **Week 8**

Mon Oct 23: Edna St. Vincent Millay

- "First Fig," "Gazing upon him now, severe and dead.." "Love is not all.." "If I should learn..."\* "I think I should have loved you presently..."\* "I, being born a woman and distressed..."\* "What my lips have kissed..."\* "When we are old..."\*

**\*\*\*MON, OCT 23: PAPER 1 DUE 12 NOON\*\*\***

Weds Oct 25: visit to Millay archival materials in Miller Library

### **Week 9**

Mon Oct 30: Marianne Moore

- "To a Steam Roller," "The Fish," "Poetry," "To a Snail," "The Steeple-Jack," "The Pangolin," "The Paper Nautilus," "What are Years?" "The Plumed Basilisk," "When I Buy Pictures,"\* "A Grave,"\* "Silence,"\* "The Mind is an Enchanting Thing"

Weds Nov 1: Claude McKay

- "A Midnight Woman to the Bobby," "The Harlem Dancer," "If We Must Die," "The Lynching," "The Tropics in New York," "America," "The White City," "Outcast"

## **EXPERIMENT**

### **Week 10**

Mon Nov 6: Langston Hughes

- "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," "The Weary Blues," "Suicide's Note," "Cross," "Lament Over Love," "Po' Boy Blues," "Song for a Dark Girl," "Gal's Cry for a Dying Lover," "Bad Man," "Hard Daddy," "Drum," "Sylvester's Dying Bed"
- "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (prose)

Weds Nov 8: Langston Hughes

- "The Bitter River," "Morning After," "Madam's Past History," "Madam and Her Madam," "Blue Bayou," "Silhouette," "Life is Fine" "Dream Boogie," "Motto," "Dead in There," "Theme for English B," "Boogie: 1 AM," "Nightmare Boogie," "Dream Boogie: Variation," "Harlem"

### **Week 11**

Mon Nov 13: Gertrude Stein "Susie Asado," "If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso"\*

Weds Nov 15: selections from *Tender Buttons*, visit to Colby Art Museum

### **Week 12**

Mon Nov 20: e.e. cummings

- "in Just-," "O sweet spontaneous," "the Cambridge ladies who live in furnished souls," "next to of course god America I," "my sweet old etcetera," "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r," "may I feel said he," "anyone lived in a pretty how town," "pity this monster, manunkind," "I carry your heart,"\* "somewhere I have never travelled"

Weds Nov 22: [no class, Thanksgiving]

## IMAGINATION & REALITY

### Week 13

Mon Nov 27: Wallace Stevens

- "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock," "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," "Anecdote of the Jar," "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," "Study of Two Pears"
- selection from *Adagia* (prose)

Weds Nov 29: Wallace Stevens

- "The Idea of Order at Key West," "The Motive for Metaphor," "The Plain Sense of Things," "Reality is an Activity of the Most August Imagination," "Of Mere Being"

### Week 14

Mon Dec 4: Mina Loy

- "Songs to Joannes," "Brancusi's Golden Bird," "Gertrude Stein," "Parturition,"\* "Sketch of a Man on a Platform,"\* "Babies in Hospital,"\* "Lunar Baedeker"\*
- "Feminist Manifesto" (prose)

Wed Dec 6: Gwendolyn Brooks

- "kitchenette building,"\* "Sadie and Maud,"\* "of De Witt Williams on his way to Lincoln Cemetery,"\* "We Real Cool"

**\*\*\*FRIDAY DEC 8, 12 NOON, CONCEPT MAP DUE\*\*\***

**\*\*\*FRIDAY DEC 15, 12 NOON, FINAL PAPER DUE\*\*\***