

The American Lyric

AMST 385W-3
MW 4:00-5:15pm
Callaway Center S420
Spring 2019

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Office hours: M 3-4pm, and by appointment

About This Class

Claudia Rankine's repeated use of the subtitle "An American Lyric" for books that are not obviously poetry—first with *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* (2004) and then with the celebrated *Citizen* (2014)—forces the question: what is an American lyric? As we will discuss in this course, it can be as challenging to define "lyric" as it is to pin down what's "American" about a text. We know that the word "lyric" derives from "lyre," an instrument used to accompany the songs of ancient Greek poets, and modern traditions of the lyric tend to link the term to the literary traditions of Greeks and Romans. Is there a comparable lyric tradition in American culture? If we can come to agreement about "lyric," then what makes an American lyric "American"? How do American lyrics depend on or diverge from other notions of the lyric? And what role does the concept of the lyric play in American verse culture—is it a discrete genre, is it really just a synonym for "poetry," or is it something else, maybe even something more?

To explore these questions, this course will examine the relationship between the lyric and a nation, analyzing American poems and other writings by US authors who responded to and against concepts of the lyric. Attentive reading, extensive writing, and vigorous participation are required for success in this class.

Required Materials

- ◇ A journal or notebook for in-class writing assignments
- ◇ *The Oxford Book of American Poetry*, eds. David Lehman and John Brehm
- ◇ *Blacks*, Gwendolyn Brooks
- ◇ *Lunch Poems*, Frank O'Hara
- ◇ *Citizen: An American Lyric*, Claudia Rankine

Recommended Materials

- ◇ *The Weary Blues*, Langston Hughes
- ◇ *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa
- ◇ *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*, Terrance Hayes

Library Resources

- ◇ *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Greene and Cushman, 4th ed. (online)
- ◇ *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams (on reserve)
- ◇ *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, Ross Murfin (on reserve)
- ◇ *The Book of Forms: A Handbook of Poetics*, Lewis Turco (on reserve)
- ◇ See additional resources on our Canvas site

Additional readings and handouts will be made available on the course Canvas site. **You are required to make hard copies of PDFs and bring them to class on the days we discuss them.**

Course website at <https://canvas.emory.edu/>

Course Requirements and Policies

Attendance

You are expected to attend every class meeting. You are expected to come to class on time, having completed all assigned reading for that day and with the relevant course textbooks, printed PDFs, and pen and paper for taking notes. Computers will not be allowed in the classroom except during special circumstances or by prior arrangements with me.

There will be a sign-in sheet at each class meeting; you are responsible for making sure you sign the sheet. Missing class more than **two** times in the term will result in reduction of your final grade by 1/3 of a letter grade for each absence (an A becomes an A-). If you are late for more than **two** class sessions, the third late arrival will be considered an absence, and every late arrival after that will be considered an absence. Disrespectful behavior (sleeping, personal conversations during class, disrespecting others' points of view, using your cell phone) will result in your being counted absent that day; I will not interrupt the class to confront you about this behavior, I will simply count you absent.

Documented illness and personal emergencies are excused absences: you will not be penalized for an excused absence. If you are ill, contact me in advance of any missed class to touch base and find out what you will need to make up before next class.

Attendance and Religious Practice

I recognize the value of religious practice and strive to accommodate your commitment to religious traditions whenever possible. When conflicts between holy days or other religious practice and academic scheduling arise, every effort will be made to allow you to adhere to your tradition, including, when possible, excusing class absences and allowing make-up work. A student anticipating the need to miss a class for religious reasons should alert me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may determine the next course of action.

Grading

The percentage ranges below will earn the following final grades. I will occasionally issue an A+ based on exceptional class performance in addition to a grade of over 98%.

93-100 (A), 90-92.99 (A-), 87-89.99 (B+), 83-86.99 (B), 80-82.99 (B-),
77-79.99 (C+), 73-76.99 (C), 70-72.99 (C-), 67-69.99 (D+), 63-66.99 (D),
60-62.99 (D-) lower (F)

Final grades are established as follows:

Participation	10%
Journal	10%
Poem Presentation, Discussion, Essay	15%
Poem Kit	15%
Close Reading Essay	20%
Research Essay	
Abstract	2%
Annotated Bibliography	4%
Intro and Outline	4%
Final Draft	20%

Assignments

Both in-class and take-home work will be counted toward your final grade in this course. Work to be prepared in advance of class, including assigned reading, is listed on the Course Schedule. You will also be expected to participate fully during class meetings, which may include discussions, activities, and workshops.

Once a week, we will begin class with a brief in-class **Journal Essay** based on the day's assigned readings. These essays are informal opportunities to process and reflect on readings, but they are also designed to measure how carefully you've read and thought about the material. To help you focus on your own writing, these essays will be closed book; however, you may use your own notes. All journal essays should be written in a journal or notebook reserved exclusively for this purpose. I don't mind if you use these journals for reading notes or class notes, but keep in mind that I will collect these, so you may not always have access to them. Each essay will be worth up to three points (indicated by ✓-, ✓, or ✓+). Make-up journal essays will not be offered, but I will drop your lowest score at the end of the semester.

All writing assignments (except Journal Essays) will be typed and submitted on paper. They must be stapled and double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1" margins. In the top left-hand corner, indicate your name, the name of the class, the date, and the name of the assignment. Number all pages after the first. Use MLA style for all other formatting and citation requirements. Other guidelines will be provided for individual assignments.

Please proofread and revise your written work – a good habit to get into. Sloppiness and mechanical errors will result in a lower grade.

Late assignments **lose one letter grade per day, including weekends and holidays**. You may ask for an extension if the assignment is due more than 72 hours (3 days) later, and the earlier the better. I may not grant the extension. In case of a looming or unexpected disaster, consideration will be given if you keep me in the loop and communicate in advance.

No make-up in-class assignments will be offered except in cases of documented emergency.

Honor Code and Academic Honesty

The Emory Honor Code is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, and to undertake any other form of academic misconduct. All work in this course must be entirely your own. Use of any ideas or words that are not your own—including your fellow classmates' or instructors'—must be properly documented. You may review the Honor Code policy at:

<http://catalog.college.emory.edu/academic/policies-regulations/honor-code.html>

Please familiarize yourself with the Code if you are not clear on what constitutes cheating or plagiarism. You are also welcome to contact me with any questions about your use of sources. I'm very happy to talk with you about this!

Access

Please tell me about any disabilities that will affect your participation in this course. I am committed to optimizing our course for everyone involved and am happy to work with you to provide accommodations as necessary, such as providing materials in alternative formats, assuring physical access to class sessions, or adjusting interactions and communications responsive to your sensitivities.

Course Content

Many of the texts we will read together this term deal with difficult issues and have troubling and disturbing content. Religion, sexuality, and politics will be in our reading and conversation; cruelty and violence are often present in stories concerning US culture and history. We will be thoughtful in taking up issues that can and should disturb us, as they raise special ethical, intellectual, and emotional challenges and questions.

An Additional Tool for Your Success

E-mail your classmates: In the space below, write down the e-mail contact information for at least two of your classmates. When you have a quick question about something we did in class, something on the syllabus, or an unclear assignment, you may wish to check with a classmate or two before you check with me.

1. Name: _____ E-mail: _____

2. Name: _____ E-mail: _____

By remaining in this course, you verify that you have read, understood, and agreed to abide by all information disclosed in this syllabus.

Course Schedule

Readings and assignments are due in class on the date listed. Scheduling, readings, due dates, and assignments are all subject to change at instructor's discretion.

Week 1 – Introductions

Date	Readings Due	Assignment Due
Wednesday, 1/16	<i>see Canvas for poems discussed during class</i>	

Week 2 – What is Lyric?

Monday, 1/21	NO CLASSES – MLK Holiday	
Wednesday, 1/23	Canvas – Three definitions – Johnson, “Lyric,”; Jackson, “Lyric,”; “Lyric, v., adj., n.” OED	

Week 3 – American Beginnings (I)

Monday, 1/28	<i>OBAP</i> – Poe, pp. 61-73 Canvas – Poe, “The Philosophy of Composition”	
Wednesday, 1/30	<i>OBAP</i> – Whitman, <i>Song of Myself</i> , pp. 84-131 Canvas – Whitman, 1855 Preface to <i>Leaves of Grass</i>	

Week 4 – American Beginnings (II)

Monday, 2/4	<i>OBAP</i> – Dickinson, pp. 163-183 Canvas – Dickinson, letters 238, 261, 261, 265, 316	
Wednesday, 2/6	Canvas – Paul Laurence Dunbar, <i>Lyrics of Lowly Life</i>	Poem Kit Due

Week 5 – Ballads and Blues

Monday, 2/11	<i>OBAP</i> – Robinson, “Richard Cory,” “Miniver Cheevy,” “Cassandra,” “Eros Turannos,” p. 196-200 Canvas – Traditional Ballads, “John Henry,” “Sweet Betsy from Pike”; “The Beatles, “The Ballad of John and Yoko;” Warren, “School Lesson Based on Word of Tragic Death” Brooks, <i>Blacks</i> : “the murder,” “Ballad of Rudolph Reed”	
Wednesday, 2/13	Canvas – Langston Hughes, <i>The Weary Blues</i> , selections; Nina Simone, <i>Nina Simone Sings the Blues</i>	

Week 6 – Hymns and Odes

Monday, 2/18	<i>OBAP</i> – Julia Ward Howe, p. 79-80 Canvas – James Weldon Johnson, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,”; Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden”; Lee, “A Hymn to Childhood”	
Wednesday, 2/20	Canvas – Tate, “Ode to the Confederate Dead”; Lowell, “To the Union Dead”	Close Reading Essay Due

Week 7 – Sonnets

Monday, 2/25	<i>OBAP</i> – Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” p. 184; Millay, pp. 388-390; McKay, pp. 382-384; Bernadette Mayer, pp. 1017-1019	
Wednesday, 2/27	Canvas – Terrance Hayes, <i>American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin</i> , selections; “American Sonnet for the New Year”	

Week 8 – Free Verse

Monday, 3/4	Canvas – Cooper, “Free Verse”; Pound, “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” <i>OBAP</i> – Pound, “In a Station of the Metro,” p. 302; HD, “Oread” p. 315; Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow,” p. 285	Free verse lyric selection
Wednesday, 3/6	The Free Verse Free-For-All – <i>more information TBA</i>	

Week 9

Monday, 3/11	SPRING BREAK	
Wednesday, 3/13	SPRING BREAK	

Week 10 – Gwendolyn Brooks

Monday, 3/18	Gwendolyn Brooks, <i>Blacks, The Bean Eaters</i>	
Wednesday, 3/20	Gwendolyn Brooks, <i>Blacks, The Bean Eaters</i> Canvas - selections from <i>Conversations with Gwendolyn Brooks</i>	Abstract Due

Week 11 – Frank O’Hara

Monday, 3/25	O’Hara, <i>Lunch Poems</i> , pp. 1-52	
Wednesday, 3/27	O’Hara, <i>Lunch Poems</i> , pp. 52-82; “Personism: A Manifesto” (Canvas)	Annotated Bibliography Due

Week 12 – Gloria Anzaldúa

Monday, 4/1	Canvas – Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands/La Frontera</i> , selections	
Wednesday, 4/3	Canvas – Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands/La Frontera</i> , selections	

Week 13 – Anti-Lyric

Monday, 4/8	Canvas – Marjorie Perloff, “Language Poetry and the Lyric Subject”; Grenier, “On Speech”	
Wednesday, 4/10	Canvas – Susan Howe, <i>Articulations of Sound Forms in Time</i>	

Week 14 – Claudia Rankine

Monday, 4/15	Rankine, <i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> , pp. 1-79	
Wednesday, 4/17	Rankine, <i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> , pp. 80-169; interview with Rachel Zucker (Canvas)	Introduction and Outline Due

Week 15 – Jericho Brown

Monday, 4/22	Canvas - Brown, selections TBA	
Wednesday, 4/24	Canvas - Brown, selections TBA; Special Guest: Jericho Brown	

Week 16 – Slam

Monday, 4/29	Canvas – “What is a poetry slam?”; Patricia Smith, “Skinhead”; Williams, “Coded Language”; Frohman, “Abuela”; Porsha O., “Angry Black Woman”; “Danez Smith, “Genesissy”; Dang, “What Kind of Asian Are You”; Hernandez, Smith, Grant, “Concrete Gardens”	
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Exam Week

Wed., 5/8	Final Essay due on Canvas by 5:00pm	
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