

**Issues In American Literature & Culture: Tradition and Innovation in  
American Poetry**  
**AML 2410, Section 3698**  
**Monday, Wednesday & Friday, Period 6 (12:50)**  
**Rinker Hall (RNK), Room 225**

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### **Course Description:**

The term “poetics” can refer to theories about the compositional dynamics of poetry and about the *purpose* and *practice* of poetic writing. What does verse accomplish that prose cannot? How does the rhythm and arrangement of words construct or alter their “literal” meanings? What does it mean to describe something as “poetic”? While these lines of inquiry span all kinds of literary writing (and indeed, all writing in general), this course will offer students a chance to engage these questions through a particular history of American poetry—namely, its rich tradition of avant-garde and experimental writing.

### **Course Objectives:**

In teaching this class, my agenda is twofold:

1. I want to immerse you (“my” students) in the long and diverse history of avant-garde American poetry. The idea is to introduce you to a variety of both canonical (well known) and obscure (lesser-known) poets, in part for the purpose and pleasure of general exposure. But I also want to pose these poets as questions about *what counts* as poetry and about how notions of poetic writing changes both chronologically (throughout time) and laterally (between contemporaries). In other words, I want to continually attempt to articulate how these poets work in ways that *unite* and *differentiate* themselves from one another. We’ll call this the “comparative reading” aspect of the class.
2. I want us to both *write about* and *write* the poets we’ll be reading. *Writing about* these poets is relatively self-explanatory: You’ll craft analytical essays that argue and offer *ways of reading* particular poems or poets. But more importantly (to me, anyway), and less self-explanatory, I want us to *write* these poets. This will take on a variety of forms: re-writing poems (according to a variety formulae), imitating the “voice” or style of poets by re-writing poems or writing poems of your own, and creating an original *concept* of and for poetic writing. In short, I want to write, a lot. I won’t grade all of your writing, and I won’t expect you to present all of it. But I do want to

experiment with many different *kinds* of writing—not just with traditional “academic essays.” We’ll call this the “poetic” aspect.

I want us to leave this class with a specific understanding of some key works and ideas surrounding experimental American poetry; I also want us to leave with a more nuanced and developing sense of “meaning making” dynamics in writing. Achieving this will mean continually deconstructing (in practice and theory) the reader/writer dichotomy that separates textual studies from textual production.

## **Required Texts:**

*Coeur De Lion* by Ariana Reines  
*Where Shadows Will* by Norma Cole  
*Nest* by Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge  
*Selected Poems* by Louis Zukofsky  
*Selected Poems* by Ezra Pound  
*ABC of Reading* by Ezra Pound  
*The Descent of Alette* by Alice Notley  
*Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein  
*Uncreative Writing* by Kenneth Goldsmith

Anthologies:

*The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* edited by Donald Allen

## **Assignments:**

### **Gordon Rule Writing Assignments:**

There are essentially four writing assignments for this class. The first three derive from terms that Ezra Pound coins in *ABC of Reading*. Each term represents, for Pound, a *kind* of poetry. Each assignment therefore responds to Pound’s classifications with examples from our class readings. We don’t have to agree with Pound’s categories, and our analysis may resist his ideas or how he defines them. But regardless of how we respond, we must demonstrate that we *understand* what the ideas mean.

**Phanopoeia Analysis (1500-1750 words)**

**Melopoeia Analysis (1500-1750 words)**

**Logopoeia Analysis (1500-1750 words)**

### **Conceptualism (2500 words)**

The fourth assignment is the “final paper.” This essay will attempt to define and argue for an original *way of reading* poetic works. A “conceptualism” may be an idea that you derive from a series of readings; it may be a response or *counter point* to another concept. Either way, this paper will pose an argument based on original research. This work must clearly demonstrate and argue for the usefulness of your

conceptualism through examples from other texts (both poetic and critical).

### **Non-Gordon Rule Writing Assignments:**

These assignments are “completion” based, meaning I grade the extent to which they meet expectations.

### **Reading Notes**

We will take notes on all our readings. My expectation is that we write about 100 words for every four pages of the assigned reading. Basically, divide the number of pages in the assigned reading by four—that’ll be the amount of notes you will write (for example, if the text is 80 pages, we’ll write 20 notes). When division results in a decimal, round down to the nearest note (if the text is 87 pages, don’t write 21.75 notes, just write 21). Space these notes however you see fit; you don’t need to write them every four pages. Indeed, I’d rather you save your notes for passages or pages you find particularly note-worthy.

These notes are important for three reasons. First they *compel us* (a pretty way of saying *force us*) to pay careful attention to the text. Second, they help us remember thoughts and ideas about the text, which is especially helpful when we discuss the works in class or when you’re drafting an essay. And third, they insure that we’re constantly writing which will help us get comfortable with our own words and with writing about poetry.

### **Poetic (Re)Writings**

These assignments involve us essentially *rewriting* some of the poems we’ll be reading. There are countless ways of doing this, and I’ll eventually expect some ideas from you. Until then, what I have in mind are “translation” exercises. The translations will involve us rewriting a poem according to the style of another poet. How we define both poets’ *styles* will have everything to do with our translation. There’s no right or wrong translation—just make it good. While I won’t expect everyone to read their translation out loud (though I’d always like you to), I do expect us to explain the kinds of decisions we made. Thoughtfulness and attentiveness to stylistic detail is most important.

### **Participation**

“Participation” is a catchall for non-graded work that nonetheless affects your final grade. No matter how they’re defined, “participation points” are always somewhat arbitrary and you cannot appeal them like written assignments. To be clear, I don’t like the idea of “participation points.” I see “participation” as the most important expectation of any class, and *quantifying* this expectation in terms of “points” makes participating in class more oppressive than liberating. But I do, however, want to stress that class participation is just as important as any assignment. Really, *your* success in this class (what you get out of it) will ultimately depend on the successfulness of the class itself, and that depends entirely on our collective participation.

I want to therefore address this matter in detail the first week of class. It's important that we reach some kind of agreement about the ways we can meaningfully involve ourselves in this class. For example, I see "participation" to include regularly asking questions, responding to classmates, and contributing ideas to a discussion. But again, we must address and agree upon what this looks like.

### Assignment Point Totals

Phanopoeia Analysis (1500-1750 words)	100 Points
Melopoeia Analysis (1500-1750 words)	100 Points
Logopoeia Analysis (1500-1750 words)	100 Points
Conceptualism (2500 words)	200 Points
Reading Notes	100 Points
Poetic Rewrites	100 Points
Participation	300 Points
 Total:	 1000 Points

### Grading Scale

A	930-1000	C	730-760
A-	900-920	C-	700-720
B+	870-890	D+	670-690
B	830-860	D	630-660
B-	800-820	D-	600-620
C+	770-790	E	0-590

### Grade Meanings & How I Grade

I don't agree with the institution of grading, and I'll happily go into detail as to why. But the short of it is, I find that grades impair a student's ability to take risks and develop as critical thinkers, reader and writers. On the one hand, grades are always a reason to do as little work as possible; they incentivize short cuts and "safe" ideas. On the other hand, there's a tyranny to "the grade" that always overshadows individual achievement and oppresses development. This is especially true with writing, and I therefore do not assign grades to individual assignments.

In place of grades, I give detailed feedback on every assignment along with concrete advice as to how I'd like to see you improve. I track your improvement closely and on an individual basis. Consistent conferencing is a crucial facet to how I evaluate your work (I elaborate on conferencing expectations below). So long as you meet the core requirements of each assignment, *I evaluate how hard you work toward achieving what you set out to achieve*. You may not actually achieve it, but I won't punish you for trying.

The following "grade meanings" therefore reflect your *final grade*. Below is essentially a list of the possible ways that you may earn *less* than an "A" grade in this class.

A You did what the assignments ask for at a high quality level, and your work shows originality and creativity. You clearly articulate, in class and in conferences, what your work is attempting to achieve. In each assignment, it's clear that you took pains to make your work meaningful.

You attended class regularly (no more than two absences). You consistently participated in class discussions by asking questions, expressing ideas/opinions and by responding to the questions and opinions of your classmates. You kept up with all note taking and non-Gordon rule writing assignments.

An A- grade will reflect all of these qualities, but likely means that you missed too many classes, had to re-write several assignments, were inconsistent with class participation, or were otherwise less-than-regular with abiding by class standards.

B You did what the assignments asked of you, but you did not always take strides to optimize your work. You would heed some of my advice, but applied it inconsistently. You did not always come prepared to conferences with clear ideas or completed drafts. You were inconsistent with attendance, participation and note taking.

C You did what the assignments asked of you but hardly ever took strides to develop your work. You missed several classes and rarely ever participated in class. You completed most of your work but never seemed to take it that seriously.

D You rarely did what the assignments asked of you. You missed several classes and hardly ever participated.

E An E is usually reserved for people who don't do the work or don't come to class. This grade also applies to students who turn in work that fails to meet the basic requirements of multiple assignments.

In my experience, most students fall short of an A grade because they missed too much class or were lackluster about participation. I hardly ever accept assignments that I'm not prepared to see as "A" work. I give my students multiple opportunities for rewrites, and failing to make good on those opportunities will also regularly result in a lower grade.

### **Absence and Tardiness Policy**

Because this course draws heavily on the dynamics of seminar discussions, consistent attendance is critical to successfully completing the semester. Each student is allowed **two unexcused absences**. Any unexcused absences beyond that point will reduce the overall participation points that student is capable of earning. An absence due to illness or family crisis may be excused if properly documented to the instructor's satisfaction. However, prolonged absences, even for medical reasons, will not be excused, as discussion of reading & writing assignments is a key part of the course content. In addition, if you participate in a university-sponsored event (athletics, music, theater, field trip), you must provide me with documentation from an appropriate authority, preferably before the missed class. **Students who miss more than six classes may not pass the course.**

**Repeated tardiness is unacceptable.** Any student arriving more than five minutes late for class will be considered tardy. Two episodes of tardiness will equal one absence.

## **Conferences**

Conferences are an excellent opportunity for you to receive direct feedback on your writing. The drafts you bring to conference should be complete—notes and outlines are not acceptable. My feedback is most helpful when it pertains to work that you see as finished.

Conference attendance is mandatory on class days specifically set aside for that purpose. Each student will sign up for one 15-20 min meeting during conference weeks. I will treat missed appointments as absences.

If you do not have a complete draft ready for conference, I may not grade the final version, and you will therefore receive zero points for that assignment.

## **Submission and Formatting**

All work to be turned in must be typed and multiple pages must be stapled. All papers must be in 12-point Times New Roman font and double-spaced. All work must be in MLA format.

Each assignment requires both a physical and digital submission. The print copy is due the day of class. The digital copy, submitted via Sakai, is due anytime before midnight the day the assignment is due.

If the print copy is late it will not be accepted. Exceptions to late work are awarded only for excused absences such as illness (see Attendance Policy for what counts as an excused absence). Forgetting to submit the electronic version on time may result in penalization toward the assignment's final grade.

Electronic copies must be in MS Word format.

## **Preparation**

You are expected to be prepared for every class, including completing all reading and writing assignments on time. Failure to be prepared for or to contribute to in-class activities and discussion will lower your participation grade. Papers and drafts are due at the beginning of class. Late papers will not be accepted. Failure of technology is not an excuse.

## **Final Grade Appeals**

Students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

UF has recently instituted minus grades. As a result, letter grades now have different grade point equivalencies. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

### **Statement of Composition (C) and Humanities (H) credit**

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggened.html>

### **Statement of Writing requirement (WR)—formerly Gordon Rule**

This course can satisfy the UF requirement for Writing. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggordon.html>

### **Student Disability Services**

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. For more information, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

### **Harassment and Classroom Behavior**

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

Please keep in mind that students come from diverse cultural, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Some of the texts we will discuss and write about engage controversial topics and opinions. Diverse student backgrounds combined with provocative texts require that you demonstrate respect for ideas that may differ from your own. Those who engage in inappropriate behavior may be dismissed from the course.

### **Academic Honesty**

All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

### **Class Schedule:**

**Note:** Conference days are—obviously—days devoted entirely to conferencing. But there’s no way I’ll be able to see everyone during the class time. So while I’ll have sign-up slots available during regular class time, I’ll also have several slots open before and after. If for some reason I can’t see you that day, I’ll always have openings on other, non-class days. Conferences are always mandatory.

### **Week 1**

Aug 21	Introductions
Aug 23	Syllabus Negotiations: We’ll discuss what I have planned and what we’d like to get out of this course. I’m open to any suggested changes to the syllabus, so long as they don’t break with UF’s rules and requirements. This is “my” class to the extent that it pertains to subjects I’m familiar with and to the extent that I’m ultimately the

“authority.” That said, this is *your* course, and my job is to help you get as much from it as possible. I’ll use my authority to keep our course decisions democratic.

**Week 2**

Aug 26

Read *ABC of Reading* (11-87)

Aug 28

Proposed syllabus revisions; introduction to Ezra Pound

Aug 30

Share notes, general responses *ABC of Reading*.

Get a hold of Pound’s three principle kinds of writing (Phanopoeia, Melopoeia, Logopoeia); attempt to trace these kinds of writing in Pound’s text. BRING: *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound*

**Week 3**

Sept 2

Read *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (96-137)

Sept 4

Holiday

Come to class prepared to read out loud. I suggest we familiarize ourselves with a particular Canto (practice reading it aloud several times) before reading it in class. Note the words you’re inclined to emphasize and the pauses you’re inclined to take. How we read the poem will be central to how we discuss it.

Sept 6

Continue reading and discussing Pound’s Cantos. Every student, by the end of this class, should have read one.

**Week 4**

Sept 9

Read Stein’s *Tender Buttons*

I expect that we’ll spend some of this Monday expressing our joy or repulsion to Stein’s writing. But after catharsis, we’ll explore how grammar (particularly *nouns*) operates in part one, “Objects.”

Sept 11

Let’s attempt out loud readings of “Food.” Come prepared to either offer a reading or to comment on another. Everyone should practice some readings, regardless of whether or not you plan to read. Pay attention to the sounds you hear. Attempt to construct some meaning.

Sept 13

Come prepared to offer an interpretation of “Rooms.” Look at a section that bears some lucidity. We don’t need to present a “total” reading. Just pick a section of some size and attempt to explain what you see happening. We’ll also discuss Phanopoeia assignment, and schedule conferences

**Week 5**

Sept 16

Read Louis Zukofsky *Selected Poems*

I’ll introduce “Objectivism” and how it relates to Zukofski. Plan to discuss how “objects” function in his poetry, especially how they compare/contrast to Stein. We’ll pose ways of rewriting each in the style of the other.

Sept 18

DUE: Rewrites of Stein and Zukofsky. Bring your examples and prepare to hand them in. You don’t need to read your rewrite out loud if you don’t want to, but I do expect everyone to share what the experience was like and how you went about your rewrite.

Sept 20

CONFERENCES



- Week 6** Read Charles Olson, Robert Creeley and “Projective Verse” from *New American Poetry Anthology*
- Sept 23 Introduction to Black Mountain Poets and concepts of “Projective Verse.”
- Sept 25 Read and discuss Charles Olson. We’ll pay special attention to the “space” of his poems, particularly in light of his idea of “field composition.” While reading these poems out loud (to yourself or to the class), find ways to *articulate* the visible space of his poems.
- Sept 27 We’ll focus on Robert Creeley. I’ll especially want to read him as a different embodiment of “projective verse.” We’ll attempt another poetic rewrite, this time translating between Olson and Creeley. We’ll present/discuss them on Monday. **DUE: Phanopoeia Assignment**
- Week 7** Read Denise Levertov poems from *New American Poetry*
- Sept 30 We’ll offer general responses to Levertov’s work. As usual, class readings will be helpful, as will any interpretive insight.
- Oct 2 We’ll attempt to pin down “The Black Mountain School” by taking inventory of Olson, Creeley, and Levertov’s poetic styles. I’ll ask, generally: How do these poets embody “Projective Verse”? Is the “manifesto” helpful or hurtful to understanding a particular group of poets?
- Oct 4 Discuss ways of approaching the Melopoeia assignment. We’ll brainstorm ways of meaningfully describing the sound or musicality of a particular poem. Bring ideas so we can develop them together.
- Week 8** Read Notley’s *Descent of Alette*
- Oct 7 CONFERENCES
- Oct 9 Let’s look at the “epic narrative” of *Alette*. I expect that we’ll spend time unpacking and debating the intense symbolism of the piece. And I’ll probably ask if “symbolism” is important to reading this long poem at all.
- Oct 11 I want to begin addressing the idea and/or possibility for *gendered voices* in poetic writing. We’ll return to this frequently (if we haven’t already brought it up), but *Alette* seems like a pivotal place to start.
- Week 9** Read “Personalism: A Manifesto” by Frank O’Hara (in *New American Poetry*) and *Coeur De Lion* by Ariana Reines
- Oct 14 I have a feeling we’ll spend time debriefing on the Melopoeia assignment and sharing responses to *Coeur De Lion*, since it’s such a provocative poem. **DUE: Melopoeia Assignment**
- Oct 16 We’ll try understanding “Personalism” and see if any of its ideas play out in *Coeur De Lion*.
- Oct 18 Let’s compare “Personalism” to “Projective Verse” and *ABC of Reading*. Come prepared to share you’re thoughts on relevance or lack of relevance of poetic manifestos. I’ll especially want to hear how you distill the basic points of each essay.

- Week 10** Read *Nest* by Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge
- Oct 21 We'll share readings and general responses to *Nest*. I'll be curious as to what you think of her prose style (her use of sentences as opposed to line breaks). This will be a good opportunity to return to the basic (but in no way simple) question of poetic grammar.
- Oct 23 Poetic Rewrite: Take a scene or moment from *Coeur De Lion* and try to capture it through Berssenbrugge's stylistic lens.
- Oct 25 Let's brainstorm ideas for the Logopoeia assignment. By this point, you'll have several theories and ideas to draw from. Our task, now, is sorting them out.
- Week 11** Read select passages from *The Language Book*
- Oct 28 CONFERENCES
- Oct 30 We'll attempt to pin down, historically, where the Language poets fit in American avant-garde poetry. Let's share our interpretations of the movement's significance. I'll especially want to discuss the overtly political nature of some of these essays.
- Nov 1 I want to ignore, now, the "historical" aspect of the Language poets and try to read, closely, what the essays are actually advocating. What are they doing, if anything, that's different? What are the implications of these particular essays?
- Week 12** Read *Where Shadows Will* by Norma Cole
- Nov 4 Offer readings and interpretations of *Where Shadows Will*
- Nov 6 Answer for this class: Do you count Norma Cole as a Language Poet? Explain why. **DUE: Logopoeia Assignment**
- Nov 8 Holiday
- Week 13**
- Nov 11 Holiday
- Nov 13 We'll go into detail about my expectations from the final, "Conceptualism" paper.
- Nov 15 I'll want to class-workshop your ideas for and concerns with for the final paper.
- Week 14** Read *Uncreative Writing* by Kenneth Goldsmith
- Nov 18 Let's unpack Goldsmith and
- Nov 20 Let's look at "Flarf" and other examples of "Uncreative Writing." I'll ask you, for Friday, to come up with and present an idea/example of your own.
- Nov 22 Bring an example of or idea for "Uncreative Writing." There's always a sense in which the *idea*, here, is as good as—if not better than—the actual product. Aside from your specific idea, I'll be curious to hear your general thoughts on conceptualizing poetry in this way.

**Week 15**

Nov 25 Conferences  
Nov 26 Holiday  
Nov 28 Holiday

**Week 16**

Dec 2 I'll want to debrief on the class, discuss what worked and what didn't work, etc. I'll also take more time answering any questions about the final paper.

Dec 4 Present your "Conceptualism"