

## ENGL 199

### *Visionary Poetry: East and West* (First Year Seminar)

CRN 36850

Spring, 2016

101 VOL (Volcanology Building)

Tuesday and Thursday 12:00-1:20

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Office hours: Monday 2-3. McKenzie 453

#### **Overview**

In each class meeting of this First Year Seminar, we will read poems and look at art together.

Most of the poems in the syllabus relate to visionary experiences. They come from a range of times and cultures, starting from contemporary America and working gradually backward, ending with ancient India. Each historical or cultural setting will also be introduced by exploring one or more works of visual art from that setting.

As we travel through poetry and art, we will consider the nature of the visionary or mystical experiences conveyed by our poets and artists. In order to help with this inquiry, we will also read some secondary sources about mystical or spiritual experience in order to develop a shared understanding of it.

#### **Primary readings**

Students will read several poems (or excerpts of poems) in preparation for each class. The main activity during class time will be a facilitated group discussion of one or more of these poems, and of one or more works of art.

Students will often be asked to prepare written notes on the poetry reading assignments. We will talk about how to do this in class. For a list of the primary poets we will read, see **Course Schedule** below.

#### **Secondary readings**

Secondary readings will include essays or book excerpts on (1) the technique of close reading of poetry and (2) attempts to understand mystical experiences. Readings of the first will guide us in setting up a framework for reading poems...

- Camille Paglia, *Break, Blow, Burn*, (Introduction). Paglia's introduction to the volume gives clear and succinct explanation of 'close reading.' We will also use as an example one of her close readings, on a poem of John Donne.
- T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (selections).

...and the second sort will help us in thinking about how mystical experience relates to its religious context:

- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (selections)
- Steven Katz, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism" (selections) In Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*

Brief passages from other secondary readings will also be assigned at mileposts during the course to help contextualize each new group of poets.

### **Class discussions**

All students will learn how to facilitate such discussions, and in fact most discussions will be student-led.

We will initially learn facilitation techniques using visual art. It is easiest to learn the technique in this way, and the main qualities that we aim for in both types of discussion are the same: *specificity* of observation, *evidentiary reasoning* ("What do you see that makes you say that?") and articulating *connections* amongst different types of observations or conjectures.

We will view works of visual art throughout the term as the instructor introduces the cultural context of each poet or group of poets. For example, when reading medieval Christian mystics, we will look at medieval European religious art.

Through our discussions, we will work together to develop a list of poetic terminology and 'strategies' (including techniques, formal qualities, poetic subjects) for conveying mystical or visionary experience in verse.

### **Writing assignments:**

There will be two short writing assignments and two longer essays. The **short assignments** will be close readings of single poems (or excerpts from poems). The **longer essays** will compare two or more poems on their formal qualities while defending a thesis about mysticism and poetry. In addition to these, brief written **reading summaries** may sometimes be required.

**Short essays 1 and 2** (due **Tuesday of Week 2** and **Tuesday of Week 4**, respectively.)

Each of these papers will be a 2-3 page close reading of a poem (or excerpt from a poem.) The poem must be one that we have studied for class, or students should receive approval from the instructor (via email) to use a different poem.

Just as we will have practiced in our in-person discussions, a written close reading must be carried out in terms of features and qualities that can actually be seen in the poem. That is, your ideas about the poem must be supported by things in the poem that can be pointed out to any reader; your interpretation can't just be based on your personal experience, or on other information about the poet or his/her culture.

The close reading must also support a thesis statement about the meaning in or the formal qualities of the poem. Prior to the first short paper, we will read and review a sample student close reading essay together. We will also review a range of appropriate thesis statements that could be tackled for poems we have already talked about.

Students will receive grades and written feedback from the instructor on their two short essays by **Tuesday of Week 3** and **Tuesday of Week 5**, respectively.

Students are welcome to revise their papers based on written feedback and resubmit them, if they wish to improve the paper's grade.

**Long essays 1 and 2** (due **Tuesday of Week 7** and **the last day of class**, respectively.)

The long essays will have all the requirements of the shorter ones, with the additional challenge that the essay must compare two poems (or poetic excerpts) and support a thesis about the nature of mystical experience as seen in the poems you are writing about. These essays should be 6-8 pages long.

The long essays can be based upon a student's earlier work in one of the shorter essays, or they can tackle new poems.

Students can refer to the course website for our collaboratively compiled list of 'strategies' by which mysticism and poetry interrelate. After discussing the long essay assignment in class on **Thursday of week 4**, students will receive

instructions for writing an essay proposal, and will have the weekend to prepare a written proposal, due **Tuesday of week 5**. Students will receive written feedback from the instructor on their proposals the next class session. The first long essay is due **Tuesday of week 7**.

The process for long essay 2 is similar, occurring between weeks 8 and 10. (See the schedule below).

### **Turning in work:**

All work should be submitted electronically via the site's Canvas page. This way you and I can both easily look back over previous work and compare to see how things are coming along.

### **Field trips:**

We will take two field trips during the term, one to the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, to practice group discussion of religious art, and one to Knight Library Special collections, where we will view and handle artifacts related to poetry.

### **Grading Structure**

- **10%** Discussion participation.
- **10%** Discussion facilitation
- **20%** Short assignments such as reading summaries
- **40%** The two longer essays
- **20%** The two shorter essays

### **Course Schedule**

1A

- William Stafford, "When I Met My Muse," "The Way It Is"
- Louise Gluck, "The Evening Star"
- Louise Gluck, "The Undertaking"
- Art discussion: David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Face in Dirt)*, 1993

1B

- Camille Paglia, "Introduction" (selections), in *Break, Blow, Burn*, pp. vii-xvii.
- Camille Paglia, analysis of John Donne *Holy Sonnet XIV* in *Break, Blow, Burn*, pp. 30-33.
- William Carlos Williams 1883-1963 "The Red Wheelbarrow"
- Wallace Stevens 1879-1955 "The Idea of Order at Key West" "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself"
- ee cummings 1894-1962 "Seven Poems"

- Marianne Moore 1887-1972 “What Are Years?”
- Art discussion: Henri Rousseau, *Sleeping Gypsy*, 1897.

## 2A

- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures XVI and XVII, ‘Mysticism.’ pp. 379-406
- Walt Whitman 1819-1892 “Song of Myself” (“Walt Whitman”) 1-33
- Emily Dickinson 1830-1886 “Behind Me – dips Eternity”, “’Tis So Much Joy” “I taste a liquor never brewed” “I know that He exists” “The Secret (Some things that fly there be – )”
- Art discussion: Mary Cassatt, *The Child’s Bath*, 1893, Art Institute of Chicago.
- **Short paper 1 due**

## 2B

- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures XVI and XVII, ‘Mysticism.’ pp. 407-429
- Ralph Waldo Emerson 1803-1882 , “Brahma,” “Give All to Love”, Chapter 1, “Nature” from the essay, “Nature.” (“I become a transparent eyeball...”)
- Gerard Manley Hopkins 1844-1889 “God’s Grandeur,” “Pied Beauty,” “The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe,” “Peace”
- Art discussion: Vincent van Gogh. *Plain of Auvers*. 1890. Neue Pinakothek (Munich, Germany).

## 3A

- John Clare 1793-1864 “I Am” “Song (I Hid My Love)” “Remembrances”
- William Blake 1757-1827 “The Tyger” “Auguries of Innocence” selections from “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”
- William Wordsworth 1770-1850 “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” “Ode on Intimations of Immortality”
- Art discussion: William Blake, *Songs of Experience*, 1794.
- Art discussion: J.M.W Turner. *The Harbor of Dieppe*. 1826(?). The Frick Collection.
- **Students receive written feedback on Short paper 1.**

## 3B

- Knight Library Field Trip

## 4A

- Andrew Marvell 1621-1678 “On a Drop of Dew” “The Garden”
- Thomas Traherne 1636-1674 “Innocence” “Wonder” “The Preparative” “My Spirit” “Sight” “Love” “An Hymne upon St Bartholomews Day”
- Art discussion: Rembrandt van Rijn. *Sacrifice of Isaac*. Alte Pinakothek (Munich, Germany.)

- **Short paper 2 due**

4B

- Art Museum Field Trip
- **Introduction to long essay requirements**

5A

- Camille Paglia, analysis of George Herbert, "Love" in *\_Break, Blow, Burn\_*, pp. 43-46.
- George Herbert 1593-1633 "Love" "The Call" "Easter Wings"
- John Donne 1572-1631 "Holy Sonnet XIV (Batter my heart, three-personed God...)" "Aire and Angels" "A Hymn to Christ at the Author's Last Going Into Germany"
- Art discussion: Breughel, *Conversion of St. Paul*, 1567. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien.
- **Proposals for long essay 1 due**

5B

- Saint John of the Cross 1542-1591 "Stanzas of the Soul" ("Dark Night of the Soul") "The Living Flame of Love" (three stanzas); "Concerning an Ecstasy Experienced in High Contemplation"
- Saint Teresa of Avila 1515-1582, Introduction and selected poems from Ladinsky, Daniel, *Love Poems From God...*"
- Art discussion: Hieronymus Bosch, *Triptych of the Epiphany*. After 1500. Museo del Prado.
- Art discussion: *The Crucifixion with Donors and Saints Peter and Margaret*, Cornelis Engebrechtsz, 1519. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

6A

- Rumi [c. 1200] (Nicholson, trans.) "The Children of Light" (p. 42) "The Saint's Vision of Eternity" "Amor Agitat Molem" "Cosmic Consciousness". Introduction and selected poems from Ladinsky, trans. *Love Poems From God*
- Art discussion: *Seduction of Yusuf by Suleika* (from *Bustan* by Sa'di, a book of tales) 1488, Dār al-Kutub al-Qawmīyah, Cairo, Egypt.

6B

- Hafiz (Ladinsky, trans.) "For a Single Tear" "That Lamp that Needs No Oil" "The Fish and I Will Chat" "Faithful Lover" "Imagination Does Not Exist"
- Art discussion: Folio from the "Blue Qur'an"; Qur'an Manuscript, Fatimid period (909-1171). Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

7A

- Dogen Kigen [c. 1300] *Shobogenzo*: Genjokoan, Sansuikyo, Uji.
- Art discussion: Fugai Ekun, *Bodhidharma Crossing the Yangtze River on a Reed*, late Momoyama or early Edo Period, Sanso Collection, Asian Art Photographic Distribution (AAPD) (University of Michigan)

- **Long essay 1 due**

7B

- Foreword and Introduction to *A Zen Forest, Sayings of the Masters* [c. 1300] , with a selection of poems; Poems and commentaries on pages 4-17 of *Haiku*, by R.H. Blyth, volume III, Summer-Autumn
- Art discussion: *The Daoist Immortal Resshi*, Attributed to, Kano Kotonobu, active early 17th century, Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

8A

- Li Po [c. 700] “The Yo-Mei Mountain Moon” “I am a Peach Tree” “Chuang Chou and the Butterfly” “The Cataract of Luh Shan – I” “On Going to Visit a Taoist Recluse on Mount Tai-Tien, but Failing to Meet Him” “At the Cell of an Absent Mountain Priest” “A Midnight Farewell”
- Tu Fu: “Autumn Pastoral” “Night”
- Art discussion: *Night-Shining White*, Han Gan (Chinese, active ca. 742–756) Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- **Proposals for long essay 2 due**

8B

- *Book of Revelation* [c. 95] King James translation
- Art discussion: *Saint John Devouring the Book*, from *The Apocalypse*, Albrecht Dürer (German, Nuremberg 1471–1528 Nuremberg) Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Art discussion: *Leaf from a Beatus Manuscript: the Lamb at the Foot of the Cross, Flanked by Two Angels; The Calling of Saint John with the Enthroned Christ flanked by Angels and a Man Holding a Book*, ca. 1180, Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

9A

- *Tao Te Ching* [c. 600 BCE] 1-17, S. Mitchell translation
- Art discussion: *The Grand Tetons and the Snake River*, Ansel Easton Adams, 1942 (printed later) The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art .

9B

- *Mahabharata* [c. 400 BCE] Book 10 “The Massacre at Night”, Chapter 7, (Ashvatthaman’s self-sacrifice and transformation). Theophany in the Bhagavad Gita (*Mahabharata* book 6, section 35)
- Art discussion: *Shiva as Mrityunjaya, the Conquerer of Death*, 12th century, Bangladesh or India (Bengal), Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

10A

- *Rg Veda* [1700 BCE] “Creation Hymn” “Soma and Indra and the Eagle” “The Soma-Drinker Praises Himself” “The Ecstasy of Soma” “We Have Drunk the Soma” “The Long-haired Ascetic”

10B

- Discussion passages: students’ choice
- **Long essay 2 due.**