The main lines of the literary history of poetry since 1945 have yet to be fully discerned. There are a few overarching stories: the turn to a more personal, and more politically engaged style in the 1950s, a turn embraced in different ways by Adrienne Rich, Robert Lowell, and Robert Penn Warren. And there are famous poetic schools: Confessionalism, the Deep Image school, the Black Mountain school, the New Formalists, the Black Arts movement, the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, and others. And there is the increasing cultural diversity of the poetic world, both within and beyond the United States and Britain. But none of those schools are “movements” quite in the way that Modernism (or, as we say, “High Modernism”) was a movement, in the way that Romanticism or Neoclassicism was, with a core set of poets defining a practice and a dissenting penumbra reacting with or against that practice in various ways. For that reason, this course will study a large number of poets, and will not subdivide them into schools or groups, but simply sort them in their birth order. It might be just as easy to put the poets in alphabetical order by last name, but this method at least preserves some contact, however oblique, with the idea of literary history. Even this arrangement is a little bit irrational, since by birth date Amy Clampitt is grouped with poets who flourished in the 1940s and 1950s, but in fact her career did not really begin until the 1990s, just before her death. And it requires me to exclude Robert Penn Warren, a major poet of this period by any standard, one whose publishing career began before the publication of *The Waste Land*, but whose major period began in 1968. Although the course will include some thirty-eight poets, inevitably there are gaps, hence the “some” in the title. Including so many poets also requires the course to shortchange some of the heavyweights (Bishop, Merrill, Lowell, Rich), but further reading among the poets who matter to you will be one of the purposes of the final paper.

**Texts**

You are not bound to the anthology I have ordered, and are welcome to find these texts wherever you wish.

- *Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry, Volume 2: Contemporary Poetry*  
Class Sessions

Week 1
Session 1: Introductory (Handout of poems by Robert Penn Warren)
Session 2: ELIZABETH BISHOP (1911-1979)
Session 3: MAY SWENSON (1913-1989)

Week 2
Session 1: ROBERT HAYDEN (1913-1980)
“Middle Passage,” “Homage to the Empress of the Blues,” “Mourning Poem for the Queen of Sunday,” “Witch Doctor,” “Those Winter Sundays,” “Night, Death, Mississippi,” “Elegies for Paradise Valley,” “Bone-Flower Elegy,”
Session 2: RANDALL JARRELL (1914-1965)
“90 North,” “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner,” “Eighth Air Force,” “Next Day,” “Thinking of the Lost World”
Session 3: DYLAN THOMAS (1914-1953)

Week 3
Session 1: ROBERT LOWELL (1917-1977)
Session 2: GWENDOLYN BROOKS (1917-2000)
Session 3: AMY CLAMPITT (1920-1994)
“Beach Glass,” “Meridian,” “A Procession at Candlemas,” “Beethoven, Opus 111,” “Hispaniola,” “Syrinx”
Week 4

Session 1: RICHARD WILBUR (1921-2017)
“The Death of a Toad,” “Ceremony,” “Boy at the Window,” “Love Calls Us to the Things of This World,” “Playboy,” “The Writer,” “A Finished Man,” “A Barred Owl”

Session 2: PHILIP LARKIN (1922-1985)

Session 3: ANTHONY HECHT (1923-2004)

Week 5

Session 1: KENNETH KOCH (1925-2002)
“Mending Sump,” “Geography,” “Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams,” from “Days and Nights”: 2. The Stones of Time,” “One Train May Hide Another,” “To the Roman Forum”

Session 2: A. R. AMMONS (1926-2001)
“So I Said I Am Ezra,” “Corsons Inlet,” “Gravelly Run,” “Laser,” “Love Song,” “Small Song,” “The City Limits,” “Easter Morning,” “Motion’s Holdings,”
from Tombstones:
- 1 (“the chisel, chipping in”)
- 11 (“the grooves All with moss”
- 19 (“the things of earth are not objects”)
- 27 (“a flock of”)
- 29 (“the letters”)
from GARBAGE:
- 2 (“garbage has to be the poem of our time because”)

From Strip:
- 43 (“sometimes I get the feeling I’ve never”)

Session 3: JAMES MERRILL (1926-1995)

Week 6

Session 1: ALLEN GINSBERG (1926-1997)
“Howl,” “A Supermarket in California,” “Sunflower Sutra,” “America,” from Kaddish, “To Aunt Rose,” “Last Night in Calcutta,” “Mugging,” “Sphincter,” “Personals Ad”

Session 2: FRANK O’HARA (1926-1966)
Poem (“The eager note on my door said ‘Call me’”) Poem (“At night Chinamen jump”) “Step Away from Them,” “The Day Lady Died,” “Rhapsody,” “A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island,” “Why I Am Not a Painter,” “Les Luths”

Tennis Court Oath,” “These Lacustrine Cities,” “Soonest Mended,” “Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape,” “As One Put Drunk into the Packet-Boat,” “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” “Wet Casements,” “Paradoxes and Oxymorons,” “At North Farm,” “Of the Light”

**Week 7**

**Session 1: W. S. MERWIN (1927–)**

**Session 2: ANNE SEXTON (1928-1974)**
“Her Kind,” “The Truth the Dead Know,” “All My Pretty Ones,” “The Starry Night,” from *The Death of the Fathers*

- 2. How We Danced

from *The Death Baby*:
- 1. Dreams

“The Room of My Life”

**Session 3: ADRIENNE RICH (1929-2012)**

**Week 8**

**Session 1: THOM GUNN (1929-2004)**

**Session 2: JOHN HOLLANDER (1929-2013)**
“Under Cancer,” “Adam’s Task,” “Back to Town,” “Variations on a Fragment by Trumbull Stickney,” “By Heart”

**Session 3: DEREK WALCOTT (1930-2017)**
from *OMEROS*:
- 1.1.1 (“This is how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes.’’’’)
- 1.3.3 (”’Mais qui ça qui rivait-’ous, Philoctete?’’’’)
- 1.9.3 (“The Cyclone, howling because one of the lances”)
- 1.13.2-3 (“’Walk me down to the wharf.’”’)
- 3.25.2-3 (“He remembered this sunburnt river with its spindly”)
- 6.49.1-2 (“She bathed him in the brew of the root. The basin”)
- 7.64.1 (“I sang of quiet Achille, Afolabe’s son”)

Proposal Due
Week 9

Session 1: TED HUGHES (1930-1998)
from Orts 17. Buzz in the Window

Session 2: GEOFFREY HILL (1932-2016)
“In Memory of Jane Fraser,” “Two Formal Elegies,” “Ovid in the Third Reich,” “September Song,”
from Funeral Music
- 6 (“My little son, when you could command marvels”)
- 8 (“Not as we are but as we must appear”)
from MERCIAN HYMNS
- I-II
- IV-VI
- X-XI
- XVI
- XXV
- XXIX-XXX
from THE MYSTERY OF THE CHARITY OF CHARLES PÉGUY
- I (“Crack of a starting-pistol. Jean Jaurès”)
“To the High Court of Parliament,”
from THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE
- CXXI (“So what is faith if it is not”)

Session 3: SYLVIA PLATH (1932-1963)

Week 10

Session 1: AUDRE LORDE (1934-1992)
“Coal,” “Now that I Am Forever with Child,” “Love Poem,” “From the House of Ye-manji,” “Hanging Fire,” “A Question of Climate”

Session 2: MICHAEL S. HARPER (1938-2016)

Session 3: SEAMUS HEANEY (1939-2013)
from *Station Island*

- VIII (“Black water. White waves. Furrows snowcapped.”)
- XII (“Like a convalescent, I took the hand”)

“Alphabets,” “Terminus,” “The Stone Verdict,” “Clearances,” “At Toomebridge,” “Electric Light”

Bibliography Due

**Week 11**

**Session 1: FRANK BIDART** (1939–)

“Ellen West,” “If I Could Mourn Like a Mourning Dove,” “A Coin for Joe, with the Image of a Horse; c. 350-325 BC”

**Session 2: LOUISE GLÜCK** (1943-)

“The School Children,” “The Drowned Children,” “Descending Figure,” “Mock Orange,” “A Fantasy,” “The Wild Iris,” “Penelope’s Song,” “Quiet Evening,” “Vita Nova,” “Earthly Love”

**Session 3: YUSEF KOMUNYAKAA** (1947-)

“Starlight Scope Myopia,” “To Do Street,” “Facing It,” “February in Sydney,” “My Father’s Love Letters”

**Week 12**

**Session 1: JORIE GRAHAM** (1950-)

“At Luca Signorelli’s Resurrection of the Body,” “Fission,” “The Surface,” “The Swarm”

**Session 2: ANNE CARSON** (1950-)

from *The Glass Essay*, *from TV Men*

- XI (“TV is presocial, like Man.”)

“Epitaph: Zion,” “Lazarus Standup: Shooting Script,” “Stanzas, Sexes, Seductions”

**Session 3: PAUL MULDOON** (1951-)

“Hedgehog,” “Lunch with Pancho Villa,” “Anseo,” “Why Brownlee Left,” “Quoof,” “Meeting the British,”

from *7, Middagh Street*

“Wystan”

“Salvador”


**Week 13**

**Session 1: RITA DOVE** (1952-)

“Geometry,” “The House Slave,” “Adolescence–II,” “Agosta the Winged Man and Rasha the Black Dove,” “Parsley,”

from *THOMAS AND BEULAH*

- “The Event,”
- “Dusting,”
• “Weathering Out,”
• “The Great Palaces of Versailles,”
• “Wingfoot Lake,”
“After Reading Mickey in the Night Kitchen for the Third Time before Bed,” “Claudette Colvin Goes to Work”

Session 2: THYLIAS MOSS (1954-)
“Lunchcounter Freedom,” “Interpretation of a Poem by Frost,” “The Rapture of Dry Ice Burning off Skin as the Moment of the Soul’s Apotheosis,” “Crystals”

Session 3: HENRI COLE (1956-)

Draft Due to Writing Groups

Requirements

1. Short papers There will be short (two pages or so) writing assignments due every Tuesday for 5 weeks. You will pick a short poem, or a passage from a long one, from the reading for that day or the next and type it out. Be sure to pick a passage which strikes you as rich and interesting and full of a significance that might not be already obvious to every reader of that text. In other words, I don’t want you to pick a passage that will enable you to repeat some point I have already made in the lecture, but rather some passage which will enable you to bring a new reflection into our conversation, some passage that casts some new light upon the conversation we have already been having, some light that we might not have seen were it not for you. You will write a two page (or so) commentary on that passage, giving what you take its point to be, noting its context, and developing in cogent detail the claim it leads you to make about the text. Imagine that you are writing for someone who has some knowledge of the text but who does not know what precisely is your point of view about it—someone rather like the other members of this class, for instance. I will not give particular papers letter grades, but I will comment upon them and give them either a check, a check plus, or a check minus.

2. Research Paper The principal assignment for this class will be a research paper, of 12 pages minimum, concerned with one of the texts this course will examine. To prepare this paper you will need to start with an overarching paradigm from literary study. Some overarching studies of southern literature might give you a starting point. Literary theory might provide you with paradigms to discuss issues of racial conflict, cultural conflict, colonialism, or gender and sexuality issues. You should also make yourself familiar with the critical literature on your chosen novel, which you can access using The MLA International Bibliography or JSTOR Language and Literature.

You will develop the papers in stages, which will include

• A one-page research proposal, giving your topic, developing your take, and outlining the stakes of your project, due on March 13
• An annotated bibliography, outlining what is to be learned from your key sources, due on
• A conference with me, which will take place during the week of
• A rough draft, which will be due to a writing group of your peers on
• A completed research paper, due on

Learning Goals

1. Develop the habit of independent critique, intellectual self-reliance, and self-confidence from the perspective of attentive reading and collaborative discussion

2. Become conversant with the major questions, concepts, theories, traditions, and techniques of humanistic inquiry about the 20th Century Poetry

3. Reflect on quality peer-to-peer interaction.

4. Develop and sharpen writing skills through rigorous assignments.

Policies

1. Disability If you are a student with a documented disability at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see the course instructor immediately.

2. Attendance and Participation Attendance in this course is required. A student with more than two unexcused absences should expect to fail the course. Participation in the class discussion is required, so come to class prepared to speak. There may well be classes at Brandeis in which you can coast for much of the term and recover yourself by heroic efforts at the end, but this isn’t one of them. It’s best to plan to work steadily.

3. Extensions You must contact me no later than the class before a paper is due to receive an extension. I will not grant extensions on the due date of the paper. Late papers will be docked in proportion to their lateness.

4. Academic Honesty You are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. The University policy on academic honesty is distributed annually as section 5 of the Rights and Responsibilities handbook. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. If you have any questions about my expectations, please ask.
5. **Electronics** You are not allowed to have an open laptop in this class. Please turn off your cell phones for the duration of the class.

6. **Four-Credit Course (with three hours of class-time per week)** Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

7. **Communications** The course will have a mailing list on LATTE. Information about snow days, changed deadlines, and so forth will be broadcast on that mailing list. We may make use of LATTE discussion forums as well.

**Assignment Weights**

I view calculations using these values with suspicion, and I will not accept arguments about your final grade based on calculations from this table, but I include this table to give you a rough idea of how much each assignment is worth.

- Short Papers 15 %
- Research Proposal 5 %
- Annotated Bibliography 10 %
- Research Paper First Draft 10 %
- Research Paper Final Draft 35 %
- Participation 25 %