

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature

ENGLISH 202: Poetic Craft and Theory
Walt Whitman and the Bardic Tradition in Modern Poetry
Fall 2015

Instructor:	Persis Karim
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Office Hours:	Thurs. 3:30-5 pm or by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Thursday 7:00-9:45 PM
Classroom:	Faculty Office Building 104

Course Description

Walt Whitman and the Bardic Tradition in Modern Poetry

Bardic poetry is associated with the tradition of minstrel (musician)/poets who celebrated the exploits of heroes and chieftains or who composed verse that told what Ezra Pound called “the tale of the tribe.” Walt Whitman is considered the poet at the origin of the Modern bardic tradition, particularly as it manifests itself in modern and contemporary American poetry. In this seminar we will investigate the nature of the bardic tradition in as it can be seen in Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* and others of his works. We will read Whitman’s poetry with the guidance of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet C. K. Williams’ book *C. K. Williams on Walt Whitman*. We will investigate the bardic elements in the work of several 20th century poets, including Pablo Neruda (*Heights of Macchu Picchu* in English translation), Derek Walcott (*Omeros*), Claudia Rankine (*Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*) and Adrienne Rich (*The Fact of a Doorframe*). The course will require writing two seminar papers, with the option, for the second project, of completing an original poem or cycle of poems modeled on the bardic elements in the works assigned to be read for the course. The course will be of interest to MFA students in poetry as well as MA students who wish to increase their knowledge of Romantic and Modern poetic craft and theory.

MA/MFA English Program-Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric.
2. Students will demonstrate high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research.

3. Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts.
4. Students will demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion, b) formulate and defend original arguments, c) employ effectively the language of their discipline and d) write under time constraints.

Texts:

(Purchase these texts either at Spartan Bookstore or through [online vendors](#).)

Required:

Neruda, Pablo. *Heights of Machu Picchu: Bilingual Edition*. Farrar Straus. ISBN: 0374506485.

Rankine, Claudia. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*. Gray Wolf: ISBN. 155597407.

Rich, Adrienne. *The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems 1950 – 2001*. W. W. Norton. ISBN: 0393323951.

Walcott, Derek. *Omeros*. FSG: ISBN: 978-0-374-5230-3.

Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass 1855 Edition*. Penguin. ISBN: 0140421998.

Williams, C. K. *On Whitman*. Univ. of Princeton. ISBN: 0691144729.

Recommended:

([Available via online vendors](#)).

Des Pres, Terrence. *Praises & Dispraises: Poetry and Politics, the 20th Century*. Penguin Books. ISBN: 0140127607.

Gardner, Thomas. *Discovering Ourselves in Whitman: The Contemporary American Long Poem*. University of Illinois. ISBN: 0252016300.

Walker, Jeffery. *Bardic Ethos and the American Epic Poem*. Louisiana State. ISBN: 0807114782.

Williams, C. K. *Collected Poems*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. ISBN: 0374530998.

Seminar Presentations

Each student will lead class discussion by giving two presentations. One presentation of the two will be given in by a group of between two class members. Sign up for weekly presentations at the beginning of the semester (I will provide sign-up sheet).

Required Writing

1) Definition of Bardic Poetry (750 – 1,000 words):

Write a short paper (not more than three or four pages) defining bardic poetry and describing its most important elements or characteristics.

Due: September 17

2) **Response paper to Whitman** (either commenting on his craft, his ethos, or his commitment to the bardic tradition in *Leaves of Grass* and how he's shaped the modern American bardic tradition. **Rough Draft Due Oct. 8/Peer Commenting/Final Draft Due: October 15**

2) Paper on a poem(s) or poet whose work you are to argue is a site containing elements of the modern Bardic tradition (2,500 – 4,000 words):

The paper will contain an analysis and close reading of work(s) by poets whose work is assigned as part of the course curriculum as being within the bardic tradition. If you wish to write about work which has not been discussed in class, first obtain the instructor's permission. The paper

must be prefaced by an abstract which the instructor has reviewed and approved prior to you writing and turning in the paper. **Due: Nov. 5**

3) Short Paper describing your favorite poems or poets read in the seminar:

Explain why you've chosen these poems as your favorite. Include brief close reading and analysis, pointing out bardic elements and characteristics in the poems you've selected. Type the poems out and include with your paper. (1,000 – 1,500 words). **Due: Dec. 3**

4) Creative Option to Short Paper:

Write a group or cycle of poems which embody elements of the modern Bardic tradition. Attach to your poems a brief analysis reading how the poems you've written contain bardic elements and characteristics. (1,000 words). **Due: Dec. 3**

Responses to Assigned Readings:

Each student is required to participate in discussion of the weekly seminar readings. You should come to class having read the work/essays/poems, and be prepared to respond to specific aspects of the poet's work, do close-reading, note specific bardic elements of the poet's oeuvre, or offer significant comments/questions about the work. As this is poetry, I recommend you read the poems aloud, note specific images, elements, use of language, and be prepared to comment on it.

Assignments and Grading

- 20 % of the grade is based on the Bardic Poetry Definition paper.
- 30% of grade is based on the longer paper examining a poem or poet's work as embodying elements or characteristics of the Bardic ethos in modern poetry.
- 20% of grade is based on your shorter paper on a favorite poem(s) or poet; or alternatively only your creative work and analysis.
- 15% of grade based on your seminar presentations on the weekly seminar readings.
- 15% of grade based on class participation.

A NOTE ON GRADES: In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of the ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs (stanzas).

Grades given conform to the English Department and university grading policy. The Department of English is committed to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU *Catalog* ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

University policy requires Graduate Students to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA to remain in good standing in their degree program.

In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs, stanzas, or poetic form. Grades issued will represent a full range of

student performance and will adhere to the following SJSU academic standards of assessment. Academic Integrity:

"Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's Integrity Policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial Affairs." The policy on academic integrity can be found at: http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html

Academic integrity

Students should know that the University's [Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf). Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for [Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html).

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

Campus policy in Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act

"If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities register with the DRC to establish a record of their disability."

Dropping and Adding

Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. [Information on add/drops are available at http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html](http://info.sjsu.edu/web-dbgen/narr/soc-fall/rec-324.html) . [Information about late drop is available at http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/](http://www.sjsu.edu/sac/advising/latedrops/policy/) . Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

Course Calendar: English 202—Poetic Craft and Theory
Modern Bardic Poetry After Whitman

(The works assigned will be read and discussed in class on the date they are listed. It's important to read the work before the class meeting. You will get much more from the discussion that way. Individual presenters will add notes to our class Google Site using Wikis and other collaborative software. The assigned reading schedule may be adjusted to better accommodate class discussion or because of other scheduling changes. All poems listed on the calendar are required to be discussed in your notebook unless you are instructed otherwise.)

<p>Week 1: Aug. 20</p>	<p>Introduction: Discussion of course objectives, activities, presentations, and procedures. Discussion of the Bardic tradition and ethos in poetry. Discussion of Whitman's <i>Leaves of Grass</i> publication history. Using the Whitman online archive: http://www.whitmanarchive.org/. Whitman: "Bardic Symbols (1860 in the <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i>). Introduction to C. K. Williams, selected poems (course reader).</p>
<p>Week 2 Aug. 27</p>	<p>Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i>: Sections: Preface, "Song of Myself" Jeffery Walker, "Preface"; "The Rhetoric of 1855" (I will scan and email this to you). John Engell, "Walt and Sir Walter or the Bard and the Bart.: Balladeers." (download and read).</p>
<p>Week 3 Sept. 3</p>	<p>Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i>: Sections: "A Song for Occupations"; "To To Think of Time"; "The Sleepers"; "I Sing the Body Electric"; "Faces." Terrance de Pres, "Yeats and the Rat Rhymers" [W. B. Yeats: "Parnell's Funeral"; "The Tower"; "Sailing to Byzantium"; "Under Ben Bulben"; "Easter 1916"—for individual presentation—(recommended reading).]</p>
<p>Week 4 Sept. 10</p>	<p>Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i>: Sections: "A Boston Ballad"; "There Was a Child Went Forth"; "Who Learns My Lesson Complete;" "Great Are the Myths"; "Song of the Answerer"; "Europe the 72d and 73d Years of These States." Also "Sparkles from the Wheel" (1871); "By Blue Ontario's Shoes"; "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (1860); "As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life (1860)." C. K. Williams, <i>On Walt Whitman</i> pp. 1 – 91. [Adonis, "The Funeral of New York"]—for individual presentation—(recommended reading in course reader). Fernando Pessoa, "Salutation to Walt Whitman"—for individual presentation—(recommended reading).]</p>
<p>Week 5 Sept. 17</p>	<p>Walt Whitman, "Starting from Paumanok"; "Enfans d'Adam"; "Poem of Procreation"; "A Word Out of the Sea" (1860); "The Dresser" (1867); "The Veteran's Vision"; "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed."</p>

	<p>[“Calamus” section (1860) for individual presentation—recommended reading.] C. K. Williams, <i>On Walt Whitman</i>, pp. 91 – 187. Paper Due</p>
Week 6 Sept. 24	Film screening of “Walt Whitman” * documentary (American Experience)
Week 7 Oct. 1	Pablo Neruda, <i>Heights of Machu Picchu</i> Presentation:
Week 8 Oct. 8	Peer Reviews of First Paper (Meet with Peers in Class) Watch Interview with Derek Walcott: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z67iA4QCF14
Week 9 Oct. 15	Whitman Response-- Paper Due Derek Walcott, <i>Omeros</i> Presentation:
Week 10 Oct. 22	<i>Omeros</i> , Continued Presentation:
Week 11 Oct. 29	Adrienne Rich, <i>The Fact of a Doorframe</i> (focus will be on “At Atlas of a Difficult World”). Presentation:
Week 12 Nov. 5	Muriel Rukeyser, Selected Poems Paper Due Presentations:
Week 13 Nov. 12	Claudia Rankine <i>Don’t Let Me Be Lonely</i> Presentation:
Week 14 Nov. 19	Claudia Rankine, Selections from <i>Citizen</i> Presentation:
Week 15 Nov. 26	Thanksgiving Holiday- NO CLASS!
Week 16: FINAL MEETING Dec. 2 & 3	Dec. 2 nd , CLA Reading with Claudia Rankine! Class celebration: (Any last presentations.) Class members’ poetry reading. Paper Due.