

Course: LS 819

Course Schedule: Weds. 6:00 – 8:50 by Zoom

Office hours: flexible and by appointment –please send me an email

Instructor: Sasha Colby

Contact: scolby@sfu.ca

LS 819: Poetry, Prose, and the Professional Sphere

“Don’t tell me what the poets are doing. Don’t tell me that they’re talking tough. Don’t tell me that they’re anti-social. Somehow not anti-social enough, that’s right.” - “Poets,” *The Tragically Hip*

“Who among us has not dreamt, in his ambitious days, of the miracle of a poetic prose?” - Charles Baudelaire

In *Slouching Toward Bethlehem*, Joan Didion tells us she took the title for her essay collection from Yeats’ poem because there were lines that “reverberated in my inner ear as if they were surgically implanted there.” This line, vivid in itself, represents a starting point for this course: of what benefit is modern poetry to contemporary writing? Despite poetry’s reputation as an ineffective and pretentious art, how can its rhythms – and an understanding of its often radical existential and historical project – alter our assessment of the modern condition and the creation of our own written work?

In pursuing these questions, we will study the poetry and prose of modernist and post-modernist writers whose poetic tactics destabilize the conventional through a visceral approach to language and a wild re-ordering of chronological time to mine the energies of the personal and historical past. In tandem, each class member will perform a short oral reading from this body of work to develop the “inner ear” that brings about more concrete and original prose, whether academic, literary or popular. Throughout the course, we will also hear from visiting writers who will speak on the influence of the poetic imagination, read from their writing, and share their own experiences of the professional writing world. All of this will be undertaken not only as graduate-level study but also in applied form as each student writes a long-form prose piece that responds to the themes of the course. This work will then be respectfully workshopped by the class and the instructor with the ultimate goal of publishing in *The Ormsby Review’s GLS Journal* and beyond.

Reading:

Much of our reading will be poems, articles, and excerpts included on Canvas as outlined below. In addition, please purchase online or from a local seller:

Baldwin, James. *Giovanni's Room*. Vintage, 2013.
Lahiri, Jhumpa. *The Interpreter of Maladies*. Mariner Books, 1999.
Anne Carson, *The Beauty of the Husband*. Vintage, 2001.
Chariandy, David. *Brother*. McClelland & Stewart, 2017. (Guest March 30th)
Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine: Newly Revised Edition*. Harper, 2016.

Assignments:

15 % - short interpretive reading and presentation
15 % - workshop critiques
10% - Zoom participation
20% - draft submission
40% - final submission

Week 1: Wednesday, January 12th

Introduction

Week 2: January 19th

The Poetics of Influence

John Ashbery, "The Picture of Little JA in a Prospect of Flowers"
Andrew Marvell, "The Picture of Little TC in a Prospect of Flowers"
Mina Loy, "Parturition"

Week 3: January 26th

Modern Topographies

Sieburth, ed. *A Walking Tour in Southern France: Ezra Pound Among the Troubadours*, pp. 63-67 PDF in Canvas
Ezra Pound, "The Malatesta Cantos" - Canvas
H.D, *Tribute to Freud* – pp. 3-16 – PDF in Canvas
H.D, from "Trilogy" - Canvas
Dennis Lehane, intro to *Mystic River* pp. PDF in Canvas

Week 4: February 2nd

Digging down, digging deep

Olson, "The Kingfishers"
Olson, "La Préface"
Howe, from "My Emily Dickinson"
Guest: Steve Collis

Week 5: February 9th

Poetics of the archive

Stephen Scobie, *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* excerpt
Robert McAlmon, excerpt from *Being Geniuses Together*, Canvas

Week 6: February 16th

The centre will not hold

Yeats, "The Second Coming," "A Coat"

Paris Review Uses of Yeats

Didion, "Slouching Toward Bethlehem" (essay)

Week 7: February 23rd – Reading Break – no class

Poetics of interiorization- H.D. To Baldwin

Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, first half

Week 8: March 2nd

Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room*, second half

Week 9: March 9th

Poetics of the everyday

Alden Nowlan "He Raids the Refrigerator and Reflects on Parenthood"

Lahiri, stories from *The Interpreter of Maladies*

Guest: Catriona Strang

Week 10: March 16th

The poetics of the marriage

Carson, *The Beauty of the Husband*

Week 11: March 23rd

Family poetics

Chariandy, *Brother*, first half

Rita Dove: "Adolescence-II"

Week 12: March 30th

Social Poetics

Chariandy, *Brother*, second half

Guest: David Chariandy

Week 13: April 6th

Poetics of Reclamation

Excerpt: Abel, *Injun*

Erdrich, from *Love Medicine*