English 5800: 20th Century Poetry: British and American
Professor Bruce Bond
Office: Auditorium Building 213 A.
Office Hours: M/ T: 3:30-5:
To be held at Aura Coffee or, at your request, in my office. Feel free as well to arrange a
time to meet, if you would prefer an appointment outside my scheduled office hours.
Email: bond@unt.edu

Texts:

Required:
Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry, Volumes 1 and 2, eds.
Ramazani, Ellmann, O’Clair.

Recommended:
Claims for Poetry, ed. Donald Hall.
History of Modern Poetry, Volumes 1 and 2, David Perkins.

Class objective: to explore 20th Century American and British poetry and so to enlarge our
possibilities of pleasure both by way of close reading of poems themselves and by
discussing their implied aesthetic affinities and historical contexts. Thus the reading list has
been designed with two purposes in mind: first, to offer representatives of broader poetic
movements to garner a better understanding of poetry’s diversity in recent culture, its
responsiveness to social history and various literary traditions; and second, to focus our
discussion on specific examples in search of what arguably makes a case for that poet’s
unique contribution to the genre. In this spirit the class will ideally open itself to matters of
interest both to literary scholars and to working poets, the premise being that both thrive
not only on patterns of meaning, on ways in which language tests, reinvents, and sheds light
on language, but also, more elusively, on an aesthetic experience. Hopefully this class will
be devoted to deepening the nature and transformative power of that experience.

To become a serious reader of poetry, to plumb the art of it, demands of us qualities
similar to those possessed by the serious poet—that is, cognitive skills, a physical
engagement of words, an ability to dwell with uncertainty, a taste for meaningful
multiplicity, and an emotional intelligence, particularly in terms of the emotional life of
language. It is not such a bad thing to read selfishly, that is, to look for the respective
strengths in various writers with an eye to what it is we might emulate, perhaps
unrecognizably, as writers ourselves, as critics as well as poets. In light of this, we might
well learn more from poets who are different from us than from those who already
resemble us closely. Reading, like writing, is at its best, its most potent, when it promises to
change us, when we feel like Dickinson when she wrote: “If I read a book [and] it makes
my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel as if the
top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry.”
Schedule

Please read all of the selections available for each poet in both the anthologies. Readings will be supplemented by handouts in class.

Week 1 (August 28): Whitman, Dickinson
Week 2 (September 4): Labor Day: no class
Week 3 (September 11): Yeats, Eliot; Pound’s essay “Retrospective”
Week 4: (September 18): Frost, Stevens
Week 5: (September 25): H.D., Langston Hughes
Week 6 (October 2): Owen, Auden
Week 7 (October 9): Lowell, Bishop
Week 8 (October 16): Levertov, Ginsberg; Olson’s essay “Projective Verse”
Week 9 (October 23): Plath, Sexton
Week 10 (October 30): Merwin, James Wright
Week 11 (November 6): Rich, Brooks
Week 12 (November 13): Ashbery, O’Hara; O’Hara’s essay “Personism.”
Week 13 (November 20): Larkin, Heaney
Week 14 (November 27): Strand, Glück
Week 15 (December 4): Graham, Hass

Course Requirements:

Either one paper (12-15 pages) or two (6-8 pages each).
Due date: either the final day of class or any day previous to that. Plan ahead.

Oral Presentation: (10 minutes or so) on poet of your choice (poet need not be on the syllabus).

Final Exam: Take home exam. Due via email on Monday, December 11.

Grading:
40%: final exam.
40%: paper.
10%: oral report.
10%: attendance/ participation.