

**Four Modern American Poets:
Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Eileen Myles, and Claudia Rankine**

**Hartwick College
ENGL 247-4 (3 Credits, WL3, DR)
Spring 2020**

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MWF 11:15 am – 12:10 pm, Clark Hall 329
Office Hours: Th 2:00 – 5:00 pm, F 2:00 – 4:00 pm
and by appointment

I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.

—Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.

—Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken”

Required Texts

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. 1984. Crossing, 2007.

Lorde, Audre. *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. 1997. W. W. Norton, 2000.

Myles, Eileen. *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems 1975–2014*. New York: Ecco, 2015.

Rankine, Claudia. *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric*. Graywolf, 2004.

Rankine, Claudia. *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Graywolf, 2014.

Rich, Adrienne. *Poetry and Prose*. Edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, Albert Gelpi, and Brett Miller, 2nd critical ed., W. W. Norton, 2018.

Additional texts to be covered can be found on the calendar below. These will be available on D2L under “Content Browser: Readings.” See endnotes for bibliographic citations.

Prerequisites

The successful completion of ENGL 190 Introduction to Literature and Criticism is highly recommended.

WL3

Students at Writing Level 3 must earn a C- or better in this course in order to progress to Writing Level 4.

Catalog Description

This class will focus on how to read, experience, and develop an understanding of four of the great American poets of the twentieth century. We will strive to develop an understanding of the art of poetry and how poets create a working style. The course will also focus on developing critical reading and writing skills and on presentation skills, since each student will be expected

on a regular basis to introduce specific poems for discussion. In recent years, the course has studied poets such as Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, E. E. Cummings, T. S. Eliot, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, and John Ashbery. (WL3; DR)

Course Description and Purpose

By focusing on the work of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Eileen Myles, and Claudia Rankine—four significant intersectional feminist writers from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—this section of ENGL 247 Four Modern American Poets will investigate the important role that poetry has played in US social justice movements over the past fifty years, particularly with regard to issues of gender, sexuality, and race. Restricting our view to this small group of poets will allow us to focus our attention: we will read each writer closely and carefully, think about the historical, political, and cultural contexts of each writer’s work, trace the influences these writers have upon each other, and investigate the world in which they lived and to which their poetry responds. Beginning with writing emerging from the civil rights and women’s movements of the 1960s—the political poetry and boundary-breaking essays of lesbian writers Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde—the course will then delve into the work of non-binary punk rock poet Eileen Myles, and will conclude with Claudia Rankine’s important meditations on contemporary racism and racial violence. Specific topics to be covered include but are not limited to: second- and third-wave feminism, LGBTQ+ writing and activism, African-American writing and activism, #BlackLivesMatter, economic inequality, and New York City. We will also be reading critical and theoretical essays by and about our four writers, and students will write critical essays of their own.

Learning Outcomes

In addition to the basic skills of literary and poetic analysis, students in this course will: 1) learn to interpret poems closely and carefully; 2) learn to make critical arguments supporting their interpretation of individual texts; 3) learn to situate poems within their cultural, political, social, and literary context; 4) recognize human diversity and analyze the sources and consequences of inequality, marginalization, and privilege; 5) explore the ways that poetry can access and illuminate diverse voices; 6) learn to draw upon the work of others to support their analyses.

Other Course Requirements and Assignments

Texts—Students will be required to have read and be prepared to discuss the assigned texts for each class meeting. This also entails that students bring the texts to class, whether the book or *printouts* of the .pdfs from D2L. Additional readings for the course (see below) can be found under the “Readings” section of D2L and then under a folder corresponding to the date by which given texts should be read. Do not let the content of this course or common preconceptions about poetry fool you (i.e., poetry is generally short): this course asks students to read *quite* a bit and *very* carefully. Our meetings and discussions will depend upon the rigorous, intelligent, and frequent involvement of every participant of the class, and this involvement is not possible if students do not come to class prepared. All students must obtain the edition of the texts specified above. Unless individual arrangements are made with the instructor, electronic versions of the texts will not be permitted. Students should expect to read between 75 and 150 pages per week.

Papers—Students will be asked to write two essays of 4–6 pages and a final paper of 7–10 pages during the course of the semester, along with five short papers of around 2 pages each. These

papers are designed to build upon one another in preparation for your final paper. Their percentage of your grade will reflect this process. All papers should be proofread and polished. They should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins, and should accord to MLA guidelines for citation and format.¹ Students who do not follow directions or fail to meet the basic requirements of an assignment—e.g., not meeting the page requirement,² failing to format a paper correctly, or failing to upload a paper to D2L—will automatically cost that student a *minimum* of 5% of their grade (so B+ to B-, B to C+/B-, et cetera). I will primarily assess paper on the *strength of their argument, the quality of their idea, and the rigor of their analysis*. Due dates for these papers are below. The assignments with rubrics will follow. All papers must be handed in as hard copies in class *and* submitted on D2L. There will be a link under “Assignments” to electronically upload your papers.

Quizzes—Students will often be given unannounced short quizzes on the assigned material. Students who have done the reading will, for the most part, find these quizzes quite manageable. Students who fail a quiz will lose two points off their final grade. If you do the math, multiple failed quizzes could dramatically lower your grade. Unless otherwise informed, all quizzes are open book.

Participation—As we will be engaged with critically reading texts and exploring them together in class, an absolutely crucial part of this course is student participation. Though I will lecture from time to time, I conceive this class as a collective inquiry into the subject matter and class time will primarily be based around discussion that privileges students’ thinking, reading, and writing. I am quite excited to delve into the material, as I see it as both quite challenging and, in all honesty, quite fun. But this class will be a two-way street and will require the input of all its participants. I am completely aware that some students may be more vocal than others, but if I see a student consistently attempting to add to the discussion, I will take this into consideration. I have a habit of a rambling a bit, so please help me with this by asking questions of me if you are unclear. Asking questions can be an excellent way of participating. Since this class will rely heavily on student participation, your attendance is a necessity. *More than three absences will negatively affect your grade and can be grounds for failure, in which case you may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances.*

Grading

Participation: 15%

Short Papers: 10%

Essay 1: 15%

Essay 2: 20%

Final: 40%

¹ I recommend students purchase the *eighth* edition of the *MLA Handbook* (2016). For a good website on how to use MLA style, visit *The MLA Style Center* at <https://style.mla.org/mla-format/>. I urge students not to rely on EndNote, Microsoft Word, or other software to format their “Works Cited” pages, for citations will most often be incorrect. Students should also note that this syllabus correctly cites each course text in MLA format either above or below.

² 4–6 pages means that the paper must be *at least 4 full pages* (i.e., not 3 ½ or 3 ¾ pages). Students will not be penalized for going over the page requirement (within reason).

Classroom Etiquette

To ensure a positive learning environment for all participants, students should adhere to the following guidelines for classroom etiquette. Failure to do so may result in being marked absent or in penalties applied to a student's participation grade.

Texts—Students who do not have their text in class will be marked absent (whether I draw attention to it or not).

Lateness—As I often give crucial information and reminders about the course at the beginning of class, being late is not only disruptive but means that students may miss information that is important to their success in the course. Any student who is frequently more than five minutes late will be marked absent.

Notes—Students should take notes during class meetings and should have the materials to do so every day. Over a dozen years of teaching, I have found that students who take notes in class perform better than students who do not. A student who fails to have a pen or pencil and notebook out for each class meeting will result in an absence.

Laptops, Phones, Tablets—Anyone observed using their mobile phone or another digital device during class, whether I draw attention to it or not, will be marked absent for the day.³ In this course, phones, laptops, or tablets will not be permitted unless special arrangements are made with the instructor.

Leaving Class—Ideally, students will not have to leave class, but as a variety of things may necessitate leaving class, students should feel free to get up without my permission as long as they do so quietly and unobtrusively. If individual students make a habit of leaving and returning during class time, however, I will have a conversation with that student about disrupting class. If a student continues frequently leaving after this conversation, they will be marked absent each time they leave regardless of circumstance. If a student has any issue that would cause them to need to get up frequently, please talk with me in the first weeks of class or at any time during the semester.

Preparation—A key part of being prepared for this class is reading the assigned text in advance of class meetings. If it is clear that a student has not done the assigned reading, they will be marked absent.

³ On how students more fully retain information if they take notes by hand rather than on a computer, see Meyer, Robinson. "To Remember a Lecture Better, Take Notes by Hand." *Atlantic*, 1 May 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/>.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism is a serious and intellectually inexcusable offense and it will not be tolerated. Plagiarism will result in an immediate zero for the assignment and I will file a formal charge with the Office of Academic Affairs; plagiarism could also result in more serious action, including a student failing the class completely and being suspended from the College. *Plagiarism includes: lack of proper citations when quoting from someone else's work, representing someone else's work as your own, and knowingly allowing one's work to be submitted by someone else.* This should ultimately be a fun and stimulating class, and there is absolutely no reason for you not to take advantage of being able to do your own work and discuss it in an academic environment. Violations of Hartwick's Academic Honesty policy are not limited to plagiarism—for example, cheating and submitting a paper to more than one class would constitute violations—so students should familiarize themselves with Hartwick College's policy on academic honesty at: <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/>.

Academic Adjustments and/or Modifications

Students must present me with an updated Academic Plan Letter for the Spring 2020 semester in order to be eligible for academic adjustments. Hartwick College is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic adjustments, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of AccessAbility Services, at sanfordl@hartwick.edu or AccessAbilityServices@hartwic.edu. AccessAbility Services is located on the fifth floor of Yager Library in the Center for Student Success. Any information regarding a student's disability will remain confidential. Requests for academic adjustments should be made as early as possible.

The Writing Center

Located in Clark Hall 230, the Writing Center offers events, courses, and one-on-one tutorials for students. Tutors can help you with your writing for classes or any writing project, and can teach you strategies for organizing, editing, and revising your writing. You can meet with a tutor once or regularly over the course of the semester; the Writing Center will also respond to queries via email. In some cases, I may send you to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can seek assistance on your own. Their services are free. You can browse the services at <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/writing-center/>, or make an appointment by emailing wcenter@hartwick.edu or calling (607) 431-4910.

E-mail Communication Policy

Each student is issued a College e-mail address (username@hartwick.edu) upon admittance. This e-mail address may be used by the College for official communication with students. I will also communicate with students via their hartwick.edu address. Students are expected to regularly read e-mail sent to this account. Failure to read and react to communications from either the College or from me in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. If e-mail is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to communications sent to their Hartwick e-mail address.

Special Assistance

Hartwick offers free counseling for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties. The Counseling Center is located in the Perrella Health Center and offers psychological services and sexual assault services. Appointments can be made Monday to Friday, 9 am – 5 pm, by calling 607-431-4420 or emailing counselingcenter@hartwick.edu.

Mandatory Reporting

Faculty at Hartwick College are considered *responsible employees* and are legally required to report to Hartwick's Title IX Coordinator, Traci Perrin—(607) 431-4293; perrint@hartwick.edu—incidents of sexual harassment or violence that they witness or are advised have occurred. Exceptions to this requirement include when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a university-approved research project. For more information, visit: <https://www.hartwick.edu/about-us/employment/human-resources/title-ix/>.

Statement on Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion, or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Calendar⁴

- 2.3 Introduction
Syllabus
- 2.5 Brett C. Miller, introduction to Adrienne Rich, *Poetry and Prose* (pp. ix–xiii)
Adrienne Rich, “The Fact of a Doorframe” and from *The Will to Change*, in *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 51, 32–39)
- 2.7 Adrienne Rich, “Poetry and Experience” and “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” in *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 181–93)
- 2.10 **Short Paper 1 Due**
Adrienne Rich, from *Diving into the Wreck*, in *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 40–50)
- 2.12 Adrienne Rich, “From an Old House in America” and from *The Dream of a Common Language*, in *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 52–76)
- 2.14 Workshop Short Paper 1
- 2.17 **Short Paper 2 Due**
Adrienne Rich, from *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* and from *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, in *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 9–16 and 77–83)
- 2.19 Adrienne Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” in *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 212–34)
- 2.21 Workshop Short Paper 2
- 2.24 Audre Lorde, *From a Land Where Other People Live*, in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (pp. 57–98)
- 2.26 Audre Lorde, “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” and “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” in *Sister Outsider* (pp. 36–39 and 40–44)
- 2.28 **Short Paper 3 Due**
Audre Lorde, *New York Head Shop and Museum*, in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (pp. 101–29)
- 3.2 Audre Lorde, *New York Head Shop and Museum*, in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (pp. 130–57)
- 3.4 Audre Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us*, in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (pp. 357–83)
- 3.6 **Short Paper 4 Due**
Audre Lorde, *Our Dead Behind Us*, in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (pp. 384–419)
- 3.9 Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger” in *Sister Outsider* (pp. 124–33)
Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, “An Interview,” in *Sister Outsider* (pp. 81–109)
- 3.11 Workshop Short Paper 4
- 3.13 **Essay 1 Due**
Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” in *Sister Outsider* (pp. 134–44)

⁴ Please note that additional readings or handouts may be assigned when appropriate and that the schedule is subject to change. For ease with citation, bibliographic endnotes to the readings available on D2L (anything with an endnote rather than page numbers) have been provided below in MLA style.

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "Reader, I married me"¹

3.16–3.20 Spring Break, No Class

3.23 Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice* (pp. 3–31)

3.25 Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice* (pp. 33–71)

3.27 Workshop Essay 1

3.30 Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice* (pp. 73–138)

4.1 Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice* (pp. 139–84)

4.3 Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice* (pp. 185–222)

4.6 Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice* (pp. 223–76)

4.8 Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice* (pp. 277–303)

4.10 Eileen Myles, *I Must Be Living Twice* (pp. 305–53)

4.13 **Essay 2 Due**

Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* (pp. 1–43)

4.15 Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* (pp. 45–85)

4.17 Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* (pp. 89–131)

4.20 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (pp. 1–36)

4.22 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (pp. 37–79)

4.24 Workshop Essay 2

4.27 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (pp. 81–135)

4.29 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (pp. 137–59)

5.1 Student Showcase, No Class

5.4 **Short Paper 5 Due**

Group Workshop of Short Paper 5

5.6 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (continued)

Angel Hume, "Toward an Antiracist Eco-poetics"²

5.8 Erica Hunt, "Notes Toward an Oppositional Poetics"³

Dawn Lundy Martin, "A Black Poetics"⁴

5.13 **9:00 – 11:00 am**

Final Papers Due

Mini-Conference and/or Class Wrap-Up (TBD)

Endnotes

¹ DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. "Reader, I married me: Becoming a Feminist Critic." 1993. *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work*, U of Alabama P, 2006, pp. 15–33.

² Hume, Angela. "Toward an Antiracist Eco-poetics: Waste and Wasting in the Poetry of Claudia Rankine." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2016, pp. 79–110.

³ Hunt, Erica. "Notes for an Oppositional Poetics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, Roof, 1990, pp. 197–212.

⁴ Martin, Dawn Lundy. "A Black Poetics: Against Mastery." *boundary 2*, vol. 44, no. 3, August 2017, pp. 159–63.