

Fall 2015

## **ENGL 3394**

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*University of New Orleans*

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### **Recommended Citation**

Gery, John, "ENGL 3394" (2015). *University of New Orleans Syllabi*. Paper 461.  
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English 3394/Seminar in English  
Fall 2015

John Gery BA 365 280-6361  
Off. Hrs: M 1:30-3:30  
T 5-6, 9-10  
W 5-6, 9-10

### **Robert Lowell and the Legacy of Confessionalism**

#### Texts

Ai, *Dread*. New York: Norton, 2003  
Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997, 2011.  
Dove, Rita. *Mother Love*. New York: Norton, 1995.  
Lowell, Robert. *Selected Poems*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2007.  
McClatchy, J.D., ed. *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*. New York: Vintage, 2003.  
Olds, Sharon. *The Dead and the Living*. New York: Knopf, 1984.  
Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel: The Restored Edition*. New York: HarperPerennial, 2004.

#### The Course

This course will be devoted to the poetry of Robert Lowell (1917-77) and his impact on Confessionalism and American poetry. In the first part of the course, while reading Lowell's early poems, his significant "Confessional" poetry from the 1950s and 1960s, selections from his "epic" poem *History*, and his late poems, we will examine a range of critical approaches to his work – including texts in New Criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, historicism and new historicism, Marxian or social criticism, structuralism/poststructuralism, deconstructionism, formalism, feminism, and postcolonial criticism. Intermittently, we will also look at poems from Lowell's contemporaries, especially Elizabeth Bishop, Randall Jarrell, John Berryman, and W.D. Snodgrass. In the latter part of the course, while reading Lowell's later work, we will read works of those influenced by (or responding to) Lowell, with a focus on Confessional and post-Confessional poets -- ranging from Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, and Mark Strand to Louise Gluck, Robert Hass, Sharon Olds, Marilyn Hacker, Rita Dove, and Ai. Our goal will be to discern how, if at all, Lowell's legacy has survived into the twenty-first century. In addition to reading, presenting, writing about and discussing poems in class, students will propose, research, and write a detailed study on the poet or poets of their choice, applying the theoretical, critical and scholarly methodologies we will discuss.

#### Requirements

Reading assignments (unannounced quizzes, as needed)

One short explication (3-4 pp.) on an assigned poem by Lowell not discussed in class, unless presented by student

One short explication (3-4 pp.) on a poem *not* by Lowell, with an emphasis on its comparative or confessional features

Class recitation and presentation (5-7 min.) of one assigned poem (can be applied to one paper, if desired)

Class presentation (5-7 min.) on one critical source, critic, or theoretical reading (can be applied to research paper).

Research Paper (11-12 pp. + Works Cited page), including a proposal and annotated bibliography on sources, due in advance

#### Grades

The term paper will be worth 45% of the final course grade, each explication 15%, class presentations 10%, and class participation 15%. Late work will be graded down one letter grade *per day*, and poor attendance will mean these percentages no longer apply.

NOTE on Compliance: This course description also abides by any/all relevant guidelines, agreements, and policies of the University of New Orleans; see, specifically, "UNO Policies on Academic Dishonesty, Attendance, and Students with Disabilities" (handout) and/or <http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu> and/or <http://www.ods.uno.edu>. Also, as mandated by the UNO administration under the category of "Student Learning Outcomes," by the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. effectively analyze poetry, especially twentieth- and twenty-first century American poetry associated with Confessionalism, as well as demonstrate an understanding of Confessionalism and how it has developed over time.
2. demonstrate a basic understanding of a range of perspectives in literary theory (based on summaries as well as original writing) as approaches to interpreting contemporary American poetry and to apply those approaches to literary analysis in general.
3. develop strategies for research in literature, especially poetry, and apply those strategies as writers/scholars/critics.

**Assignments, August 19 - October 28:**

Aug. 19: Introduction.

Robert Lowell (1917-77), "Public Letters to Two Presidents"; "Christmas Eve under Hooker's Statue" (handout)

24: Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 1-14. From *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946)

*Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: Randall Jarrell (1914-65), 56-58; Howard Nemerov (1920-91), 123.

26: Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 15-27, 33, 42-48. From *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946) and *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (1951)

31: Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 51-58, 93-101. From *Life Studies* (1959), Parts One and Three

*Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: W.D. Snodgrass (1926-2009), 237-43.

Sep. 2: Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 103-24. From *Life Studies* (1959), Part Four: Life Studies

7: Labor Day (no class)

9: Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 125-34. From *Life Studies* (1959), Part Four: Life Studies

14: Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 135-57. From *For the Union Dead* (1964).

16: Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 164-80. From *For the Union Dead* (1964).

21: *Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: Elizabeth Bishop (1911-79), 22-25, 32-39.

23: **Paper # 1 due on poem by Lowell.** (3-4 pp., typed, double-spaced)

28: *Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: John Berryman (1914-72), 47-55; Jarrell, 58-62.

30: Jonathan Culler (1944- ), *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (1999), 1-41. Chs. 1-2.

Oct. 5: Culler, *Literary Theory*, 42-68. Chs. 3-4.

7: Culler, *Literary Theory*, 69-81, 121-32. Ch. 5 + Appendix.

12: Sylvia Plath (1932-63), *Ariel: The Restored Edition* (1965, 2004), 1-28, 33-44. Handout: Foreword by Lowell.

14: Plath, *Ariel: The Restored Edition*, 47-48, 56-65, 71-80. Rec: 81-90. Handout: Last four poems from 1966 *Ariel*.

19: *Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: Anne Sexton (1928-74), 304-10; Adrienne Rich (1929-2012), 345-51; Audre Lorde (1934-92), 402-8.

21: **Prospectus for Term Paper due (1 page)**

*Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: W.S. Merwin (1927- ), 256-61; Philip Levine (1928-2015), 314-19; Mark Strand (1934-14), 381-91,

26: **Paper # 2 due on poem not by Lowell.** (3-4 pp., typed, double-spaced)

Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 197-205, 219-31. From *History* (1973)

28: Culler, *Literary Theory*, 94-120. Chs. 7-8

This schedule is subject to change.

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**Assignments, October 26 - December 9:**

- 26: **Paper # 2 due on poem not by Lowell.** (3-4 pp., typed, double-spaced)  
Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 197-205, 219-31. From *History* (1973)
- 28: Culler, *Literary Theory*, 94-120. Chs. 7-8
- Nov. 2: Lowell, *Selected Poems*, 302-5; 308-25; 337-41. From *Day by Day* (1977)
- 4: *Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: Robert Hass (1941- ), 461-66; Marilyn Hacker (1942- ), 481-83; Louise Gluck (1943- ), 507-09
- 9: Sharon Olds (1942- ), *The Dead and the Living* (1984), 10-48.  
**Annotated bibliography due (6-10 sources; 1-2 pp., typed in MLA form of documentation)**
- 11: Olds, *The Dead and the Living*, 49-80.
- 16: *Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: Rita Dove (1952- ), 557-60.  
Rita Dove (1952- ), *Mother Love*, 1-33.
- 28: Dove, *Mother Love*, 45-77.
- 23: **Term Paper due (11-12 pp., typed, double-spaced + Works Cited)**  
*Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*: Jorie Graham (1951- ), 549-53; Gertrude Schnackenberg (1953- ), 571-74.
- 25: Ai (1947- ), *Dread* (2003), 13-33.
- 30: Ai, *Dread* (2003), 34-60..
- Dec. 2: Ai, *Dread*, 61-82, 90-100.
- 9: (Wednesday), 3:00-5:00 pm: Final Seminar (Forum on Confessionalism)

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