ENGL 3394

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Robert Lowell and the Legacy of Confessionalism

Texts

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, Marxist 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:

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

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


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).

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


Oct. 5: Culler, Literary Theory, 42-68. Chs. 3-4
7: Culler, Literary Theory, 69-81, 121-32. Ch. 5 + Appendix.


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

This schedule is subject to change.
Assignments, October 26 - December 9:

26: **Paper #2 due on poem not by Lowell.** (3-4 pp., typed, double-spaced)
28: Culler, *Literary Theory*, 94-120. Chs. 7-8

   **Annotated bibliography due (6-10 sources; 1-2 pp., typed in MLA form of documentation)**


23: **Term Paper due (11-12 pp., typed, double-spaced + Works Cited)**


9: (Wednesday), 3:00-5:00 pm: Final Seminar (Forum on Confessionalism)

This schedule is subject to change.