

“I go where I love and where I am loved, / into the snow: // I go to the things I love,” “where I belong, inexorably.” H.D., “Flowering of the Rod” in *Trilogy*.

## Professor McCabe English 698

### ~~ Writing Within the Ruins

Psychic whiplash . . . . processes, fragments, copula, invocations, embraces, root-tracing, epigenetic, trauma, ecological bereavement-attunement, cosmic-inquiries, historical-ethical attunement—grief, love, joy . . . .

The above list of words represents a “ruin”---but also possibility, avenues to try out as we read poems and prose, as we pluck modes for writing in and among the ruins and possibilities of our contemporary landscape. What is there left to love? How do we love differently? How do we grieve; can we yet? What poetic or formal methods of modern and contemporary poets help refine your own question: what kind of poetry do I envision writing? Can I use autobiographic material in a fresh way? You may not be able to articulate it fully, but by the end of the class, you will write a “Letter to a Young (or Another) Poet” that imparts what you have gathered, or discarded. With embodied awareness, we will explore methods of resistance, or acceptance, or celebration, or grief, all when called for. We will read both prose work by poets and thinkers, as well as poems—through the lens of how culture meets poetry in each text. During these times of excavating history’s pathogens, what claims can poetry make—or not make? Moreover, what does it mean to be human, now, and how do you practice, now, with our diverse cultural inheritances and thefts? How does ecological worry and apocalyptic notions shape literary style and inquiry? We will read poems as essays and essays as poems to find dynamic new forms of writing about what we love.

I am aware this is a hefty reading list, but I hope to show the intersections between poetry, criticism, and memoir. If it gets too heavy, we can drop something. My notion is to link American 19<sup>th</sup> century Whitman and 20<sup>th</sup> century as one lens to read the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The texts selected (though by no means comprehensive) provide the historical thread(s) linking them, all selected as they pertain to craft and, moreover, a way to discover how and where social inequities and imbalances are addressed—as they inform aesthetic choices. Many of the texts are available online (which I note), and depending on your trajectory, I may recommend others.

#### Possible and likely Reading (some are short texts here)

19<sup>th</sup> c., and roots...

Benjamin, Walter. “Baudelaire” (on blackboard or photocopy)

Howe, Susan. “<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/53265/from-my-emily-dickinson>”

Rilke, Maria R. *Letters to a Young Poet*. (online blackboard)

Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste: The Origins of our Discontent*. Wilson, Ivy. 2020.

<https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.libproxy1.usc.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=393165d8-a796-4d59-bd60-3daebaf71362%40redis&vid=0&format=EK>

*Whitman Noir: Black America and the Good Gray Poet*. Iowa University, 2014

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/socal/reader.action?docID=1685916>

[chapters by June Jordan and Natasha Trethewey, and a couple others]

Whitman, *Song of Myself*. (online blackboard)

## 20<sup>th</sup> century

Eliot, T.S., “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” and *The Waste Land*. (on blackboard or photocopy)

Eliot, T.S., *Selected Essays*. Harcourt. 1975. Edited Frank Kermode

H.D. *Notes on Thought & Vision and The Wise Sappho*. City Lights Books, San Francisco. 1982.

H.D. *Hermione*. New Directions, 2022.

## Mid-20<sup>th</sup> century

Lorde, Audre. Edited R. Gay *Selected Works of Audre Lorde*, Norton, 2020.

Rich, Adrienne. “Twenty-One Love Poems,” “Power” (online blackboard)

Rukeyser, Muriel. *Life of Poetry*. (selections on blackboard)  
“ “ *Book of the Dead*. (poem on blackboard)

## 21<sup>st</sup> century

Diaz, Natalie *A Post-Colonial Love Poem*. Graywolf, 2020.

Gay, Ross. *Beholding*, Pittsburg 2020.

“ “ <https://onbeing.org/programs/ross-gay-tending-joy-and-practicing-delight/>

Gander, Forrest. *Your Nearness*. Arc Publications, 2022.

Gumbs, Alexis Pauline. *M Archive: After the End of the World* (2018)

<https://read-dukeupress-edu.libproxy1.usc.edu/books/book/2404/M-ArchiveAfter-the-End-of-the-World>

Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke University, 2016. <https://read-dukeupress-edu.libproxy1.usc.edu/books/book/27/Staying-with-the-TroubleMaking-Kin-in-the>

Hillman, Brenda. *In a Few Minutes Before Later*, Wesleyan 2022.

Perez, Craig Santos. “The Ocean in Us: Navigating the Blue Humanities and Diasporic Chamoru Poetry” [https://mdpi-res.com/humanities/humanities-09-00066/article\\_deploy/humanities-09-00066.pdf?version=1595240843](https://mdpi-res.com/humanities/humanities-09-00066/article_deploy/humanities-09-00066.pdf?version=1595240843)

We will have at least three workshops, and each person will select a week for a presentation. A letter (a la Rilke) is due at the end that sums up your “poetics” that would offer promise, direction, “trade secrets,” what helps you navigate our ruins to other future writers, or yourself as a future writer.