**American Poetry Survey Course**

**Spring 2014**

**Midterm I - Topics in American Modernist Poetry**

**KEY TO CORRECTIONS**

AP awkward phrasing

EXP expression (may range from inappropriate word, register, to simplification, school essay

WC word choice

GEN /JOURN generalisation, over sweeping statements; journalistic manner

REP repetition

RED redundancy / redundant expression and phrases,

IR inappropriate register / colloquialism /commonsensical statements, simple-minded statements and register, clichés

MS misreading / misperception

PAR paraphrase / ‘plot’ description

SYN syntax

GR grammar

**WRITING SAMPLES**

**INTRODUCTION**

Arising as a “retort” of sorts to the modernists’ employing the urban setting as a multifaceted symbol of decline, “Spring and All” does not shy away from the mundane aspects of the modern city, but instead focuses on sub/urban images in order to offer an alternative view to the disintegrating world perceived by other modernist poets.

T.S. Eliot’s ‘Preludes’ is a poem constituted by a succession or rather a collage of images drawn from urban life. These images denote a sense of a civilisation in delcine, decay, detha, dehumanisation, bbut there also emerge concepts of hope.

Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” and H.D.’s “Oread,” both constitute significant instances of Imagism, Pound’s movement that was subsequently influential in Anglo-American modernism. Questioning the stbable poetic traditions and influenced by French Symbolism, Pound aspired to bridge the poetic gap between America and Europe. The interest in European poetic culture and a critical stance towards American traditions was shared by his fellow imagist Hilda Doolittle (H.D.)

Williams’s “Spring and All” was published in 1923 and deals with American locality, a process of recovery and redemption, assertion of the ‘new’ and the idea that America will give brirth to this ‘new’ America. The poem contains meanings connected with promise and hope but also destrcution and death.

**PARAGRAPH/ ARGUMENT DEVELOPMENT**

A response to point (b) of Q1 ‘What is/are the main images in H.D.’s “Oread?’ Read the 3 paragraphs and be attentive to the economy of expression, the critical register, articulation and development of ideas in a critical argument, logical connections, relations, and transitions

**SAMPLE DEVELOPMENT 1**

In her poem “Oread,” H.D. is dialoguing with tradition through a classical myth, having Oread, a Numph, comanding the sea, in the form of a dramatic monologue. Looking at the poem, it would appear that the main theme is nature. However, “Oread,” like most of H.D.’s imagist poems is phenomenological in emphasis; it is a poem about consciousness, and not the world of objects external to consciousness. The poem is not actually concerned at all with either the ‘sea’ or the ‘fir trees,’ but rather with a complex set of identifications of the self with the activities and objects of the poem. H.D. complicates Pound’s principles; the focus shifts to the experience itself and the consciousness in experiencing movement.

The ‘sea’ here apperas as a metaphor for movement and transparency, while the “pointed pines,” an element of the land establish a polarity between transparency and opacity, set a contrast between movement and fixity. The word ‘rocks’ also evokes a solid substance, opaque and impenetrable, increasing the contrast. Moreover, the verb “whirl” creates a very strong impression of spiral movement, the sense of being submerged by the sea. There is progression, in H.D.’s poem, from verbs that invoke movement to verb that evoke transitive actions.

Finally, ‘Oread’ herself, the central consciousness of the poem, is missing from the poem that becomes a poem about the identity of H.D. herself. A poet, whose very name (a set of initials) is emptied of any firm demarcation of identity or gender. Oread commanding the sea could be seen as a persona herself.

**SAMPLE DEVELOPMENT 2**

In H.D.’s poem, there is similarly the construction of a single image of a furious sea that ‘splashes’ its waves aggressively agaisn the persona’s sould and encompasses it. Unlike Pound, H.D. uses verbs which move from transitive actions to intransitive states. The sense of contrast is strong as the poem moves from images of fixity and opacity, as that of the pines and rocks which represent the solidity of the land. H.D. additionally differentiates herself from Pound in the use of punctuation, respectively to Pound’s gaps, and the use of the pronouns “you” and “us” which implicate the poet’s subjectivity in the poem, while the presence of the imperative mode creates a pared down dramatic monologue.

**AWKWARD PHRASING / REDUNDANT EXPRESSION**

Lanston Hughes’s poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,’ expresses the black people’s need to establish an honorable past for themselves in order not only to be respected by the white, but also to create a sense of optimism and hope and forget the period of their life during which were slaves. But let me be more specific.

**REPHRASED**

In “….” Langston Hughes recovers the African American past and creates an optimist and hopeful vision for his contemporary black consciousness.

Carl Sandburg was deeply involved in the social issues of his time, therefore the distinctive racism that characterised American society of the beginning of the 20th century could not be excluded from his poetry. The popular contemporary belief concerning people of color, and more specifically African Americans, was extremely negative and often led to constitutionalised acts of violence against innocent people based solely on the color of the skin.

**REPHRASED**

As a socially and politically-minded poet, Carl Sandburg was alive to issue of racism in early 20th century America.

When we talk about Ezra Pound and H.D. we immediately associate them with the movement of Imagism. It is essential to mention, that Imagism came out of the language crisis and the crisis of representation as a revolution against the standardised social, political and cultural meaning of words.

**REPHRASE**

…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………..

In this essay, I attempt to show the way in which Ezra Pound and H.D. employ the imagist principles in their poems In a Station of the Metro and Oread respectively, and the differences between the two poems.

**REPHRASE**

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**CLICHÉ-SCHOOL ESSAY / GENERALISATION /GRAMMAR / SYNTAX /VOCABULARY**

Like with working class, slaves were involved with labor work, but they were maltreated and treated in general like assets or animals.

Carl Sandburg wrote the poem Chicago in 1916 because he believed that the authentic America is the city of Chicago with so many industries and people. He presents us a city that we can easily recognize it.

Pound himself presents it as ‘the one image poem’ an idea set on top of antoher, which proves that thought in relation to creativity can give great results.

Sandburg presents the Chicago working class in a both idealistic and realist way. He prooves that however their goddish achievements they are still humans, that have done sins, that committed crimes, that aren’t flawless.

**REBARBATIVE SENTENCES-REPETITIVENESS**

Carl Sandburg’s Chicago is undoubtedly a poem of celebrating Chicago as a city and embraces everything that offers. Sandburg’s choice of manipulating modernist techniques led to the creation of a poem that presents the city of Chicago not only as a city, but as a person. Reconciling its beauty with its flaws, creates a realistic image of a city that anyone would love to live in.

In o rder to create a peom of Chicago’s pride celebration he chooses to create a nameless, genderless speaker. This way the speaker becomes the voice that represents the Chicagoans and all the people who love Chicago It’s obvious that the speaker adores the city, so she speaks about Chicago with pride and joy and thus he creates an anthem about Chicago’s history.

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Sandburg as a representative of modernism makes an extensive use of modernist elements. One of them is imagism.

**REPHRASED**

Sandburg assimilates modernist innovation, and experiments with Imagism in his poems.

**COLLOQUIAL /DESCRIPTIVE INAPPROPRIATE REGISTER/JOURNALISM/ LITERAL LEVEL/ PARAPHRASE**

Eliot decides to speak about the morning hours in the city. So, since it is morning, the reader expects something positive, as most of the itmes, morning is combined with light, thus something bright, positive and connected to congenial sentiments.

First of all is the theme of suffering in a neighborhod of a modern city because people live everyday the same routine which is full of boredom wihtouth enjoying anything.

Maybe, H.D. being a single mother wanted to have the control of her life and using verbs in the imperative form she shows she feels that when she asks something she is given it.

A main theme that Eliot uses in his poem is the Women and the Men, noting the difficulty in one women’s life, once the woman is passing an uneasy night in bed tormented by images which are probably her client.

**In an exam /essay you need to**

* Locate the key terms of the question
* Determine what the correlation among these terms is.
* Deal with each aspect of the question
* Organize your answer into an essay
* Have a thesis and a full body development
* Use examples from the texts
* Discuss and analyze don’t just state and mention, or ‘copypaste’ your notes, without appropriate critical assimilation and integration; avoid juxtaposing fragments from your class notes especially when you do not substantiate points / claims with critical analysis and close reading
* Attempt to organise your essay progressively through discussion of themes / ideas, and try to avoid describing the text in a linear manner

**Here are some suggestions on how to go about developping your topic:**

1. Once you have a sense of a topic or issue that you find intriguing, perform a close reading of the poem(s) in order to develop a better sense of how you can use it to develop your specific / narrower topic.
2. You may want to use more than one poem by more than one poet. If you do, you should remember that this should be on the basis of a meaningful relationship, that one poem should help illuminate the other, and that both/all of them should work to illustrate your thesis.

**Writing an academic /research paper**

**Drafting a ‘working title’ (this does not apply this year but it’s good to bear this in mind) an initial response to the chosen topic**; this involves focusing on thetheme/ concept/ poet, text and context, and identifying the critical issues you are going to explore. At this stage you need to read the primary texts and decide on the theme/ concept/ poet, text and context you want to work on. Identify the critical issues, and write them down so as to have a ‘working title’ for your paper. With your title/topic, you begin identifying the critical issues that you’ll be raising. Do your own close reading of the texts that you will engage with, and take notes critically addressing the issues and themes that you want to explore. This may take the form of a very rough draft or a series of bullet points; looking back on your initial response to your topic, rethink the ideas that you will be researching.

**Prepare an outline of your essay:**

This may take the form of a series of points *[and a couple of lines about each point]* which would essentially constitute your argument and analysis. While outlining your work and ideas think about developing **your own** reading and perspective on the chosen text(s); think about how your points would take your argument forward

An essay needs to have a clear sense of structure and development

Distinguish between general remarks / observations, overviews and specific analysis

In your concluding remarks where you reconfigure your critical issues and at best you open out to other contexts and/or works and poets.

**Writing Up**

Writing your paper is about developing your ideas and argument in an appropriate critical register. While working on your first draft, you need to have a clear sense of your development, and analysis, stay focused and avoid being descriptive as much as possible. Your secondary/ bibliographical sources should be incorporated into your text, either in support of your argument, as evidence of where you have drawn ideas and/or context from, or as an ‘other’ reading of / or critical perspective on the work you are writing about. A research-based academic paper should be balanced between argument and focused, critical close reading of the texts.

**Things to avoid in your essay**

1. **Do not** offer an overview on a period or a movement in general, in a way, that is unrelated to to your discussion and critical analysis.
2. **Do not** focusi n the biography of a poet or poets.
3. **Do not** refer to poems, or the general characteristics of a poet’s work that are **not the** main primary material and **focus of your essay**. You may introduce references to other poems (but in a focused manner).
4. DO NOT write in a journalistic and/or impressionistic manner. Don’t get carried away by the issues contained in poems in an impressionistic, didactic, moralising or generalising manner
5. **your critical argument aims to examine how an issue is handled, approached, represented, evoked in the poems**, **not to discuss in general the issue itself** (i.e. slavery, religion, or women’s rights).
6. **DO NOT** write /state the obvious. You avoid this by staying focused and have a clear sense of the structure of your essay and of the organisation of your ideas. (i.e. Don’t discuss the “modernism” of a particular poem, (it’s awkward at the level of both expression and analysis) discuss, *for instance*, the particular use of metaphor *or* image (etc) that is characteristic of modernist writing.

**SAMPLE ESSAY (including a reference to a bibliographical source)**

Walt(er) Whitman, a precursor of American Modernism, in his final phase of the work ‘’Leaves of Grass’’ introduces an inscription-a short poem- which constitutes a prelude to the various themes presented through the rest of his work (individuality within a society, kinship of the body and the soul and life). As Christopher Beach (1997) argued, Whitman in this poem ‘’introduces distinctions only to collapse them’’. It is arguable though to what extend this is the case.

The first juxtaposition is visible from the first couplet of the first stanza; ‘’the separate person’’ and the ‘’En-Masse’’. A functional society requires cohesion and unanimity; hence individuality would be out of the norms. However, as mentioned in the poem Whitman refers to a democratic society and the very essence of democracy represents freedom and individual expression. If a democratic society lacked different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs it would collapse since these are the elements that foreground disagreement and therefore development. These two notions are rather complementary and not merely apposite / juxtaposed. With regard to the second duality; Mind and body-spirit and matter, Whitman responds that what is important is ‘the complete form’ which contains and encompasses both terms. They are not different but interrelated since the body functions because of the mind and the mind exists in the body. Notably, for Whitman, who was influenced from Deism, God is experienced through nature-the physical world.

Another fundamental principle of democracy is the equality of the two sexes. Whitman looks beyond physical differences ‘’The female equally with the male I Sing.’’ The last distinction refers to law versus free will. In the ideal democratic republic of Whitman the state does not juxtapose freedom of will. .

Unquestionably, all the aforementioned distinctions do not constitute different notions but rather a unity with two different forms/ , Male-female, law-freedom, one-many, physical-metaphysical, which would not exist without each other. Therefore Whitman does introduce these distinctions to collapse them, or better unify them as is expressed in the closing line: ‘’of modern man I Sing’’.

**WORKS CITED**

Beach, Christopher. *The Politics of Distinction: Whitman and the Discourses of Nineteenth-Century America*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.