Poets of Democracy

This seminar will focus on the poetry and prose of Walt Whitman, and will consider the ways in which it can be considered to be political theory. Perhaps America’s greatest poet, Whitman is also referred to as a theorist of democracy, but this raises the question what political theory is and whether poetry counts as political theory. Our seminar is therefore interested in the different forms political theory can take, in Whitman’s unique insights into democracy, especially America, and whether Whitman’s work, particularly his poetry, should be considered political theory or just of relevance to political theorists. In addition to Whitman, time will be devoted in lecture to other poets who have written about democratic life, such as Pablo Neruda.

Course Requirements

Students are required to write a term paper on Whitman. While students are permitted to choose their own topics with the consent of the instructor, they are encouraged to write on problems raised in lectures and class discussions. This approach will offer students weekly opportunities to think and talk about the topics on which they are writing and also help to enrich the seminar overall. Students are encouraged to build their regular oral contributions to our seminar around their research papers. Dates for submission of a research paper prospectus and submission of the final draft are indicated below. Students are also encouraged to visit the instructor during office hours to discuss possible topics and the topic after it is chosen.

The term paper is valued at 60% of the final grade. No late papers will be accepted. Students are to submit a hard copy in class and an online copy by email. Papers are to be 25-30 pages in length, double-spaced, and are to include a bibliography of all works used, regardless of whether they are cited. Topics are to be approved by the instructor in advance by a prospectus of 250 words that (1) will identify the topic on which the student intends to write; (2) describe the approach to be taken in the paper; (3) list primary and secondary sources to be used. The prospectus is to be submitted in class, but will not be accepted by email.
Students are also required to make in-class presentations on the reading material, the number of presentations to be made by each student depending on the number of students in the class. Presentations are to:
1) summarize the argument of the reading for the day;
2) pose critical questions about the reading in relation to the course theme;
3) relate the reading and questions posed to earlier discussions in the semester, in that way contributing to a cumulative understanding of texts, issues, and theoretical problems and insights.

Class presentations are valued at 20% of the final grade. Regular week-to-week class participation is valued at 20% of the final grade. No student can receive an A or B as a final grade without having established a record of class participation.

**Rules of Engagement**

Students may bring beverages to class, but are not permitted to eat food of any sort during class time. Classes begin and end promptly at the designated hour. Students are not to be late to class, as it is disruptive of class proceedings. Students may not miss class more than twice during the semester without a note from the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Affairs. Attendance will be taken during the first five minutes of each class. No grades of "Incomplete" will be given without appropriate medical and administrative excuses.

Reading assignments are due on the dates below for which assigned pages are given. Unannounced quizzes on reading assignments may be given.

Plagiarism is cause for immediate failure of this course and judicial action by the university administration.

**Required Texts**

*Whitman: Poetry and Prose* (available at Mary Jane Books)
David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America* (available at Mary Jane Books)
Morton Schoolman, *Reason and Horror: Critical Theory, Democracy, and Aesthetic Individuality* (available from Amazon Books)
**Reading Assignments**

**January 24. Thursday: Course Introduction**

**January 29, Tuesday:**
Whitman, *Poetry and Prose* (Table of Contents for poetry is on p. 149)

- One’s-Self I Sing (presenter: ____________)
- As I Pondered in Silence
- In Cabin’d Ships at Sea
- To Foreign Lands
- To a Historian
- To Thee Old Cause
- Eidolons
- For Him I Sing
- When I Read the Book
- Beginning My Studies
- Beginners
- To the States
- On Journeys through the States
- To a Certain Cantarice
- Me Imperturbe
- Savantism
- The Ship Starting
- I Hear America Singing
- What Place is Besieged?
- Still though the One I Sing
- Shut Not Your Doors
- Poets to Come
- To You
- Thou Reader
- Starting From Paumanok (presenter: ____________)

**January 31, Thursday**
Reynolds, Prologue, Chapters 1 & 2. (presenter: ____________)

**February 5, Tuesday**
Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*

- Song of Myself, verses 1-16. (presenter: ____________)

**February 7, Thursday**
Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*

- Song of Myself, verses 16-33. (presenter: ____________)

**February 12, Tuesday**
Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*

- Song of Myself, verses 34-52. (presenter: ____________)

**February 14, Thursday**
Schoolman, Chapter 6. (presenter: ____________)  

**February 19, Tuesday**  No class, Winter break.

**February 21, Thursday**
Whitman, *Prose and Poetry* (pp. 5-27)  
Preface - 1855  Leaves of Grass, First Edition (presenter: ____________)  

**February 26, Tuesday**
Whitman, *Prose and Poetry* (pp. 953-1018)  
Democratic Vistas (presenter: ____________)  

**February 28, Thursday**
Democratic Vistas, discussion continued  

**March 4, Tuesday**
Reynolds, chapter 5, “The United States Needs Poets” (presenter: ____________)  

**March 6, Thursday: Term paper prospectus due**
Reynolds, chapter 10, “I Contain Multitudes,” The First edition of Leaves of Grass (presenter: ____________)  

**March 11, Tuesday**
Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*  
A Song of the Rolling Earth (presenter: ____________)  
Our Old Feuillage (presenter: ____________)  
Salut au Monde (presenter: ____________)  
Crossing Brooklyn Ferry (presenter: ____________)  

**March 13, Thursday**
Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*  
Song of the Open Road (presenter: ____________)  
Among the Multitude (presenter: ____________)  
Sleepers  

**March 18, Tuesday**
Whitman, *Poetry and Prose*  
A Song for Occupations (presenter: ____________)  
Passage to India (presenter: ____________)  
Darest Thou Now O Soul (presenter: ____________)  
To Think of Time
March 20, Thursday
Whitman, Poetry and Prose
Earth, My Likeness (presenter: ____________)
I Dream’d in a Dream
In Paths Untrodden
Scented Herbage of My Breast
One Hour to Madness and Joy (presenter: ____________)
Are You the New Person Drawn Toward Me
Whoever You Are Holding Me Now in Hand
Of the Terrible Doubt of Appearances
For You O Democracy (presenter: ____________)
City of Orgies
I hear It Was Charged Against Me
To a Stranger
I Sing the Body Electric
A Woman Waits for Me
As Adam Early in the Morning

March 25, Tuesday: No class, Spring Break

March 27, Thursday: No class, Spring Break

April 1, Tuesday
Reynolds, “Sex is the Root of All”: Eroticism and Gender (presenter: ____________)

April 3, Thursday
Reynolds, chapter 9, “Toward a Popular Aesthetic” (presenter: ____________)

April 8, Tuesday
Schoolman, chapter 7. (presenter: ____________)

April 10, Thursday
Schoolman, chapter 7. (presenter: ____________)

April 15, Tuesday
Whitman, Poetry and Prose
O Living Always, Always Dying (presenter: ____________)
Song of the Answerer (presenter: ____________)
A Noiseless Patient Spider (presenter: ____________)
That Shadow, My Likeness (presenter: ____________)
Unseen buds (presenter: ____________)
Grand is the Seen (presenter: ____________)
Behold this Swarthy Face (presenter: ____________)


April 17, Thursday
Whitman, Poetry and Prose
   Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood (presenter: _____________)

April 22, Tuesday
Schoolman, chapter 8. (presenter: _____________)

April 24, Thursday
Schoolman, chapter 8. (presenter: _____________)

April 29, Tuesday
Whitman, Poetry and Prose
   Song of the Broad Axe (presenter: _____________)
   Song of the Redwood Tree (presenter: _____________)

May 1, Thursday
Whitman, Poetry and Prose
   Song of Joys (presenter: _____________)

May 6, Tuesday (last class): Term papers due (hard copy in class and by email)
Schoolman, Chapter 9. (presenter: _____________) Summary Discussion