



JINDAL SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES & LITERATURE

India's Global School of Language & Literature Studies



Jindal School of Languages and Literature – Fall Semester 2026

Twentieth Century European Poetry: An Introduction

Instructor: Prof. Akshay Kale (akale@jgu.edu.in)

Meeting time: TBD

This cross-elective course is currently taught through JSLL and carries weight of 4 credits

Course description:

*The Poet is a kinsman in the clouds
Who scoffs at archers, loves a stormy day
But on the ground, among the hooting crowds
He cannot walk, his wings are in the way.
-Baudelaire*

One of the foremost champions of world literature, German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe argued as far back as 1827 that “poetry is the universal possession of mankind, revealing itself everywhere and at all times in hundreds and hundreds of men”. His claim seems to have been borne out by the fact that even in a 21st century convulsed by the information revolution, poetry seems to be ubiquitous, especially the practice of it. However, at the same time, critics such as Terry Eagleton have bemoaned the dying art of literary criticism which in turn leads to impoverished readings and watered-down definitions of poetry. This course precisely aims at fostering a close reading of the poetic text through a broad overview of European poetry written during the preceding twentieth century, anointed by British historian Eric Hobsbawm as the “age of extremes”. The course engages with the poetic work and credo of a wide array of European poets and examines the singularity of their poetic voice. Thus, students will read poetry in translation by German language poets such as **Rilke, Georg Trakl, Paul Celan** et. al.; French language poets such as **Apollinaire, Paul Éluard, Aimé Cesaire** et al., Spanish language poets such as **Luis Cernuda, Federico García Lorca, José Ángel Valente** et. al and Polish poets such as **Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska** et al. Given the course’s focus on translated poetry, we will consider the ways in which translation impacts our reading of poetry and qualify Octavio Paz’s claim that “poetry is what gets translated”. Finally, the course encourages students to explore and go beyond the dichotomy of imitation and imagination by tapping into their creative vein as students will try to compose their own poems guided by their close reading of European poetry and subsequently undertake a collective analytical exercise.

As this is an introductory course designed for students from a range of backgrounds, the only requirements will be a good measure of intellectual curiosity, a willingness to engage actively with the material, and to be open to the views of others. It is anticipated that students unaccustomed to analysing poems will quickly acquire skills and gain in confidence. Course material, including all the poems both in translation as well as in English and core essays on the poets and their work will be made readily available online.



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Course objectives:

- ❖ To carry out a close and critical reading of European poetry and enjoy reading poetry.
- ❖ To scrutinize the ways in which translation influences and mediates our reading of poetry and apprehend the centrality of language to the production and reception of the poetic text.
- ❖ To identify and discuss a variety of styles and themes that characterize poetic works from different parts of Europe.
- ❖ To develop an understanding of the political, historical and cultural contexts from which the poems discussed in class have emerged.
- ❖ To recognize multiple structural elements used in poetry, and develop a nuanced understanding of the relationship between form and meaning.
- ❖ To respond to works of European poetry through writing, demonstrating learning of concepts and approaches to poetry appreciation covered in the course.
- ❖ To confidently, respectfully, and creatively participate in an intellectual community

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course students will be expected to:

- ❖ Convey through their oral and written work knowledge and understanding of a range of poems, demonstrating their ability to analyse their meanings, methods and formal qualities, and evaluate their strengths and possible shortcomings.
- ❖ Reflect on the place and relevance of European poetry in today's world
- ❖ Problematize the mystic shrouding poetry and understand the value of literary criticism for gaining a fuller and more rounded appreciation of poetry.
- ❖ Critically examine the fraught and layered relationship between poetry and ideology, particularly in the context of twentieth century Europe.
- ❖ Develop the ability to make informed judgments about literary works.

Assessment pattern:

- Analytical response pieces- 40 % of the total course grade
- Poetry podcast assignment- 25 % of the total course grade
- Final term-paper: 35% of the total course grade

Additional requirements:

The core focus of this course is the close examination of the poems assigned to the students. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the assigned readings, it is of vital importance that students come to class prepared and ready to discuss the material. **This is primarily a discussion class.** Collective critical analysis of poetry is a vital component of the course as students are able to gain a deeper understanding of each text by finding out how each member of



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the class views and interprets it. Students are expected to come to class prepared to participate in the discussion and other activities.

Indicative list of representative study materials

Note: Students will only read relevant excerpts and sections from the following course materials. Selections will be made later.

- Taylor, John. *Into the heart of European poetry*. Transaction Publishers, 2008.
- Taylor, John. *A Little Tour Through European Poetry*. Routledge, 2017.
- Ramazani, Jahan, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair, eds. *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry: Modern Poetry*. Vol. 1. WW Norton & Company Incorporated, 2003.
- Washburn, Katharine, John S. Major, and Clifton Fadiman. *World poetry: An anthology of verse from antiquity to our time*. WW Norton, 1998.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a young poet*. Penguin UK, 2011.
- Mathieu, Gustave, and Guy Stern. *Introduction to German poetry*. Courier Corporation, 1991.
- Appelbaum, Stanley. *Introduction to French poetry*. Courier Corporation, 1991.
- Florit, Eugenio. *Introduction to Spanish Poetry*. Courier Corporation, 1991.
- Rees, William. *The Penguin Book of French Poetry: 1820-1950*. Penguin UK, 2005.
- Cohen, John Michael, ed. *The Penguin book of Spanish verse*. Penguin UK, 1988.
- Miłosz, Czesław. *Selected and last poems 1931-2004*. Penguin UK, 2017.
- Eskin, Michael, Karen Leeder, and Marko Pajević, eds. *Paul Celan Today: A Companion*. Vol. 10. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2021.
- Lorca, Federico García. *The Selected Poems of Federico García Lorca*. Vol. 1010. New Directions Publishing, 2005.
- Szymborska, Wisława. *Poems, new and collected, 1957-1997*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000.
- Duffy, Carol Ann. *Collected poems*. Picador, 2015.
- Heaney, Seamus. *Opened ground: Selected poems, 1966-1996*. Macmillan, 1999.
- Hughes, Ted. *Collected Poems of Ted Hughes*. Faber & Faber, 2012.
- Trakl, Georg. *Poems and prose: A bilingual edition*. Northwestern University Press, 2005.