

**Contemporary Feminist Poetry:  
Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Bernadette Mayer, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis**

**Hartwick College  
ENGL 384-1  
(3 Credits; WGS; DR; GEO 4)**

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MTuThF 9:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m., Clark Hall 329

Office Hours: by appointment

*I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.*

—Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”

*Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.*

—Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken”

**Required Texts**

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice*. 1990. 2nd ed., U of Alabama P, 2006.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. 1984. Crossing, 2007.

Mayer, Bernadette. *Midwinter Day*. 1982. New Directions, 1999.

Rich, Adrienne. *Poetry and Prose*. Edited by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, Albert Gelpi, and Brett Miller, Norton Critical Edition, 2nd. ed., W. W. Norton, 2018.

Additional texts to be covered can be found on the calendar below. These will be available on D2L under “Content Browser: Readings.” See footnotes for bibliographic citations.

**Prerequisites**

The successful completion of ENGL 110 College Writing and ENGL 190 Introduction to Literature and Criticism is highly recommended.

**Catalog Description**

This class will focus on how to read, experience, and develop an understanding of four of the great American poets of the twentieth century. We will strive to develop an understanding of the art of poetry and how poets create a working style. The course will also focus on developing critical reading and writing skills and on presentation skills, since each student will be expected on a regular basis to introduce specific poems for discussion. In recent years, the course has studied poets such as Robert Frost, Emily Dickinson, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, E. E. Cummings, T. S. Eliot, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, and John Ashbery. (WGS, DR, GEO 4)

## Course Description and Purpose

By focusing on the work of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Bernadette Mayer—four significant intersectional feminist writers from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—this section of ENGL 247 Four Modern American Poets will investigate the important role that poetry has played in US social justice movements over the past fifty years, particularly with regard to issues of gender, sexuality, and race. Restricting our view to this small group of women poets will allow us to focus our attention: we will read each writer closely and carefully, think about the historical, political, and cultural contexts of each writer's work, trace the influences these writers have upon each other, and investigate the world in which they lived and to which their poetry responds. We will also focus on poetry *and* poetics, that is, critical writing *about* poetry, and treat such writing as worthy of the same kind of critical attention as poetry itself. Beginning with writing emerging from the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s—Adrienne Rich's political poetry and boundary-breaking essays and Audre Lorde's foundational essay collection, *Sister Outsider* (1984)—the course will then delve into Bernadette Mayer's long poem, *Midwinter Day* (1982), and Rachel Blau DuPlessis's important essays of feminist poetics collected in *The Pink Guitar* (1990). Specific topics to be covered include but are not limited to: second- and third-wave feminism, LGBTQ+ writing and activism, African American writing and activism, economic inequality, and the poetics of the everyday. Students will write essays and short papers—one per week—on that week's or unit's reading.

## Learning Outcomes

In addition to the basic skills of literary and poetic analysis, students in this course will: 1) interpret poems closely and carefully; 2) produce critical arguments supporting interpretations of literary texts; 3) situate texts within their cultural, political, social, historical, and literary context; 4) recognize human diversity and analyze the sources and consequences of inequality, marginalization, and privilege (GEO 4); 5) explore how poetry can access and illuminate diverse voices (GEO 4); 6) draw upon the work of others to support their analyses.

## Other Course Requirements and Assignments

*Texts*—Students will be required to have read and be prepared to discuss the assigned texts for each class meeting. This also entails that students bring the texts to class, whether the book or *printouts* of the .pdfs from D2L. Additional readings for the course (see below) can be found under the “Readings” section of D2L and then under a folder corresponding to the date by which given texts should be read. Do not let the content of this course or common preconceptions about poetry fool you (i.e., that poetry is generally short): this course asks students to read *quite* a bit and *very* carefully. Our meetings and discussions will depend upon the rigorous, intelligent, and frequent involvement of every participant of the class, and this involvement is not possible if students do not come to class prepared. All students must obtain the edition of the texts specified above. Unless individual arrangements are made with the instructor, electronic versions of the texts will not be permitted. Students should expect to read around 200 pages per week.

*Papers*—Students will be asked to write two short papers of 2–3 pages and two essays of 4–6 pages over the next month. All papers should be proofread and polished. They should be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, with one-inch margins, and should accord to

MLA guidelines for citation and format.<sup>1</sup> Papers will not be accepted late unless a student asks for an extension *prior* to a paper's due date. Students who do not follow directions or fail to meet the basic requirements of an assignment—e.g., not meeting the page requirement,<sup>2</sup> failing to format a paper correctly, or failing to upload a paper to D2L—will automatically cost that student a *minimum* of 5% of their assignment grade (so B+ to B-, B to C+/B-, etc.). I will primarily assess papers on *the quality of their idea* and *the strength of their argument*. Due dates for these papers are below; assignments will follow. All papers must be handed in as hard copies in class *and* submitted on D2L. There will be a link under “Assignments” to electronically upload your papers.

*Participation*—As this is a month-long seminar that privileges in-class conversations about the assigned texts as one of our principal activities, student participation is absolutely crucial to our work and it thus also constitutes a larger portion of your final grade than in most classes. Though I will occasionally lecture, this class is a collective inquiry into the subject matter and class time will primarily consist of discussions that privilege students' thinking, reading, and writing. As such, the course requires the input of all its participants and your attendance is a necessity. *More than one absence will negatively affect your grade, in which case you may want to consider withdrawing from the course and taking it again under better circumstances. Students who are marked absent for more than three total classes will automatically fail the course.*

That said, I understand that it is possible that a student may miss significant class time due to illness, a positive COVID-19 test, or other unforeseen circumstances. In such cases, as with cases of serious illness or other unforeseen events prior to the appearance of COVID-19, it is each individual student's responsibility to communicate with me regarding any issues they might have attending or doing the work of the course. If a student communicates with me about legitimate issues that may cause them to miss class time, I will do my best to work with them to make sure that they are given the opportunity to succeed.

### **Flexibility and Course Modality**

As there is again a large amount of uncertainty heading into this term, and I can foresee any number of challenging circumstances that you or I might face, I reserve the right to be flexible in my policies concerning late work, attendance (as immediately above), and other policies (though students should not expect such flexibility without communicating with me). The default mode for this course is in-person, face-to-face instruction, and there will be no option to attend class remotely—except in *extraordinary* or COVID-19-related circumstances. As this is only a month-long course, I can foresee such a situation arising, in which case students are expected to get in touch with me as soon as possible so that we can arrange something individually. If the College's policies change or circumstances necessitate a shift in the modality of the course (to online, hybrid, etc.), changes in the course and its policies may be necessary. Let me assure you of two things. First, I will be sure to notify you of any changes to the class or the syllabus in a timely fashion. Second, I am willing to work with you and to be understanding regarding whatever may

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<sup>1</sup> I recommend students purchase the *ninth* edition of the *MLA Handbook*, Modern Language Association, 2021. For a good website on how to use MLA style, visit *The MLA Style Center* at <https://style.mla.org/mla-format/>. I urge students not to rely on EndNote, Microsoft Word, or other software to format their “Works Cited” pages, for citations will most often be incorrect. Students should also note that this syllabus correctly cites each course text in MLA format either above or in the footnotes below.

<sup>2</sup> 4–6 pages means that the paper must be *at least 4 full pages* (i.e., not 3 ½ or 3 ¾ pages). Students will not be penalized for going over the page requirement (within reason).

come up in your life as long as you are in communication with me regarding your attendance and your work in the course.

### **Grading**

Participation: 30%

Short Paper 1: 10%

Essay 1: 20%

Short Paper 2: 10%

Essay 2: 30%

### **Classroom Etiquette**

There continue to be many complex issues facing our community this term. To make life a little easier for everyone and to create a solid logistical foundation that will ensure a positive learning environment for each participant, students should adhere to the following guidelines for classroom etiquette. Failure to do so may result in being marked absent or in penalties applied to a student's participation grade.

*Texts*—Students who do not have their text in class will be marked absent (whether I draw attention to it or not).

*Lateness*—I give crucial information and reminders about the course at the beginning of class, so being late is not only disruptive but means that students may miss information that is important to their success. Students who are frequently more than five minutes late will be marked absent.

*Notes*—Students should take notes during class meetings and should have the materials to do so. During my sixteen years of teaching in higher education, I have found that, unsurprisingly, students who take notes in class perform better than students who do not.

*Laptops, Phones, Tablets*—Anyone observed using their mobile phone or another digital device during class, whether I draw attention to it or not, will be marked absent for the day. Phones will not be tolerated in this class, and the use of laptops or tablets in this course will not be permitted unless individual arrangements are made with the instructor.

*Leaving Class*—Ideally, students will not have to leave class and we will have at least one break every day. But students should feel free to get up without my permission. If an individual student makes a habit of leaving, however, I will have a conversation with them about disrupting class. If they continue to leave class after this conversation, they will be marked absent each time they leave regardless of circumstance. If a student has any issue that would cause them to need to get up frequently, please talk with me in the first weeks of class or at any time during the semester.

*Preparation*—The most fundamental way to succeed in this class is simple: *read the assigned text*. If it is clear that a student has not done the assigned reading nor prepared for class, they will be marked absent.

*Participation*—Students should be prepared to participate throughout the class. I frequently call on students even if they have not raised their hand.

### **FlightPath**

The Hartwick Flightpath is a student-centered program that is flexible and adaptable to support your pathway to graduation and to prepare you for what lies ahead. By the time you graduate from Hartwick, you will have a suite of skills and experiences that tie together the breadth of your Hartwick education and highlights your accomplishments. This course supports the development of student educational outcomes in the following way(s): it fulfills FlightPath General Education Outcome 2, fulfills the LAiP diversity requirement, counts as a Women and Gender Studies elective, and is a possible elective in the English Major.

### **College COVID-19 Policy**

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, circumstances may necessitate adjustments to instruction, such as shifts in mode of instruction (to remote or hybrid), classroom capacity limits, or indoor mask requirements. Updates will be provided on the College website (<https://www.hartwick.edu/about-us/covid-19-updates/>). Instructors will communicate with students about any specific adjustments that are being made to their courses, such as modality of instruction, expectations for participation, and any changes to assigned work; students should check their Hartwick email accounts frequently for information from their instructors.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated. It will result in a zero for the assignment and a formal charge will be filed with the Office of Academic Affairs. Plagiarism could also result in more serious action, including a student failing the class and being suspended from the College. *Plagiarism includes: lack of proper citations when quoting from someone else's work, representing someone else's work as your own, and knowingly allowing one's work to be submitted by someone else.* Violations of Hartwick's Academic Honesty policy are not limited to plagiarism, so students should familiarize themselves with it at: <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/>.

### **Academic Adjustments and/or Modifications**

Students must present me with an updated Academic Plan Letter for the January 2022 term in order to be eligible for academic adjustments. Hartwick College is committed to upholding and maintaining all aspects of the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic adjustments, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of AccessAbility Services, or [AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu](mailto:AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu). AccessAbility Services is located on the fifth floor of Yager Library in the Center for Student Success. Any information regarding a student's disability will remain confidential. Requests for academic adjustments should be made as early as possible. Please reach out to the instructor with any other concerns you might have about the course, including accessing course texts.

### **The Writing Center**

Located in Clark Hall 230, the Writing Center offers events, courses, and one-on-one tutorials for students. Tutors can help you with your writing for classes or any writing project, and can teach you strategies for organizing, editing, and revising your writing. You can meet with a tutor once or regularly over the course of the semester; the Writing Center will also respond to queries via email. In some cases, I may send you to the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can seek assistance on your own. Their services are free. You can browse the services at <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/writing-center/>.

### **E-mail Communication Policy**

Each student is issued a college email address (username@hartwick.edu) upon admittance. This email address may be used by the college for official communication with students. I will also communicate with students via their hartwick.edu address. Students are expected to regularly read email sent to this account. Failure to read and react to communications from either the College or from me in a timely manner does not absolve the student from knowing and complying with the content of the communications. If email is lost as a result of forwarding, it does not absolve the student from responding to communications sent to their Hartwick email address.

### **Health and Success**

Success in this course depends heavily on your personal health and wellbeing. Recognize that stress is an expected part of the college experience, and it often can be compounded by unexpected setbacks or life changes outside the classroom. Your other instructors and I strongly encourage you to reframe challenges as an unavoidable pathway to

success. Reflect on your role in taking care of yourself throughout the term, before the demands of exams and projects reach their peak. Please feel free to reach out to me about any difficulty you may be having that may impact your performance in this course as soon as it occurs and before it becomes unmanageable. In addition to your academic advisor, I strongly encourage you to contact the many other support services on campus that stand ready to assist you. Hartwick offers free counseling for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties. The Counseling Center is located in the Perrella Health Center and offers psychological services and sexual assault services. Appointments can be made Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., by calling (607) 431-4420 or emailing [counselingcenter@hartwick.edu](mailto:counselingcenter@hartwick.edu).

### **Sexual Misconduct and Title IX Reporting**

Hartwick College is committed to equal opportunity and providing a safe community free from all forms of sexual misconduct including sexual-/gender-based harassment, discrimination, dating or domestic violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, and sexual assault. If you wish to make an official report to the College or have questions about the College policy and procedures regarding sexual misconduct, please contact the Title IX Coordinator, Michael Arno. Online reporting and policy information is available at <http://www.hartwick.edu/titleix>. If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, please contact one of the following resources: Perrella Wellness Center, Health or Counseling; or Opportunities for Otsego's Violence Intervention Program. All other employees of the College are required to report incidents of sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator so that support and resources can be provided for all parties.

### **Statement on Classroom Recording**

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion, or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

## Calendar<sup>3</sup>

### Week 1

Class Canceled for Student Testing and Return to Campus

Introduction

Syllabus

Adrienne Rich, *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 51 and 34–37)

Adrienne Rich, *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 32–61, 181–93)

Adrienne Rich, *Poetry and Prose* (pp. 9–16, 62–83, and 212–234)

### Week 2

#### **Short Paper 1 Due**

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (pp. 6–44)

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (pp. 45–113)

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (pp. 114–190)

#### **Essay 1 Due**

Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich continued (bring both books to class)

### Week 3

Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day* (pp. 1–37)

Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day* (pp. 41–79)

Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day* (pp. 83–119)

#### **Short Paper 2 Due**

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar* [pp. vii–19]

### Week 4

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar* [pp. 20–67]

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar* [pp. 83–122]

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar* [pp. 123–174]

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, “Reader, I married me: Becoming a Feminist Critic”<sup>4</sup>

Bradley J. Fest, “Something Worth Leaving in Shards: An Interview with Rachel Blau DuPlessis”<sup>5</sup>

#### **Essay 2 Due**

#### **Mini-Conference and/or Class Wrap-Up (TBD)**

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that additional readings or handouts may be assigned when appropriate and that the schedule is subject to change. For ease with citation, bibliographic footnotes to the readings available on D2L have been provided below in MLA style.

<sup>4</sup> DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. “Reader, I married me: Becoming a Feminist Critic.” 1993. *Blue Studios: Poetry and Its Cultural Work*, U of Alabama P, 2006, pp. 15–33.

<sup>5</sup> Fest, Bradley J. “Something Worth Leaving in Shards: An Interview with Rachel Blau DuPlessis.” *boundary 2*, forthcoming.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Jake Wolff for language used in the “Learning Outcomes” section of this syllabus and the Rochester Institute of Technology for their statement on health and success

(<https://www.rit.edu/academicaaffairs/tls/course-design/syllabus-design/rit-policies>).