

Jazz and the Literary Imagination
CLEN W4900
T-Th 10:35-11:50
516 Hamilton Hall

Professor Brent Edwards
609 Philosophy
bhe2@columbia.edu
office hours: T 1-3, W 4-5

- Jan. 20: Introduction
- Jan. 22: James Weldon Johnson, Preface to *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925) (*)
Zora Neale Hurston, "Characteristics of Negro Expression"; "Conversions and Visions"; "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," *Negro Anthology* (1934) (*)
Theodor Adorno, "Music and Language: A Fragment" (1956) (*)
Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice" (1972) (*)
Nathaniel Mackey, "Other: from Noun to Verb" (1992) (*)
- Jan. 27:
- Jan. 29: Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926) (*)
Langston Hughes, "The Weary Blues," *The Weary Blues* (1926) (*)
Sterling Brown, "Ma Rainey," *Southern Road* (1932) (*)
"Vamping (Early Jazz Poems)" section in *Jazz Poems*, ed. Kevin Young (2006)
recommended reading: Ralph Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues" (1945)
in *Living with Music*
- Feb. 3: Langston Hughes, *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) (*)
- Feb. 5:
- Feb. 10: Sidney Bechet, selections from *Treat It Gentle* (1960) (*)
George Lewis, "Singing Omar's Song: A (Re)construction of Great Black Music," *Lenox Avenue* 4 (1998)
- Feb. 12: Louis Armstrong, selections from *Louis Armstrong in His Own Words* (1999)
- Feb. 17:
- Feb. 19: Ralph Ellison, "The Golden Age, Time Past" (1959); "The Charlie Christian Story" (1958); "On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz" (1962); "Ralph Ellison's Territorial Vantage" (1976) in Ellison, *Living with Music*
Langston Hughes, "Bop" (*)
Ishmael Reed, "Poetry Makes Rhythm in Philosophy" (1978) (*)
Lorenzo Thomas, "Historiography" (1981) (*)
recommended reading: Scott DeVeaux, "Spitballs and Tricky Riffs," *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History* (1997) (*)
- Feb. 24: James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" (1958) (*)
- Feb. 26: selected liner notes by Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus, Bill Evans, Sun Ra (*)
- March 3: Langston Hughes, *Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz* (1961) (*)
"Bop (Bird & Beyond)" section in *Jazz Poems*, ed. Kevin Young (2006)
- March 5: **[take-home midterm distributed]**
- March 10: **[take-home midterm due]**
Amiri Baraka, "How You Sound?" *The New American Poetry* (1959) (*)
Amiri Baraka, "Rhythm & Blues"; "A Poem for Willie Best"; "Black Dada Nihilismus," in *The Dead Lecturer* (1964) (*)
Amiri Baraka, "Leadbelly Gives an Autograph"; "Black Art," in *Black Magic* (1969) (*)
Amiri Baraka, "In the Tradition" (1982) (*)
Amiri Baraka, "In Walked Us"; "Blues, Poetry, and the New Music,"

in *The Music* (1987) (*)

recommended reading:

Stephen Henderson, "Introduction: The Form of Things Unknown,"
Understanding the New Black Poetry (1973) (*)

Kimberly Benston, "Performing Blackness: Re/Placing Afro-American
Poetry," *Black Literature in the 1990s* (1989) (*)

Ralph Ellison, "Blues People" (1964) in *Living with Music*

March 12:

[Spring Break]

March 24: "Horn Section" and "Muting (for Billie Holiday)" sections in
Jazz Poems, ed. Kevin Young (2006)

Ed Roberson, "Ask For 'How High the Moon'" (1995) (*)

March 26: "Sheets of Sound (Coltrane & Co.)" section in *Jazz Poems*, ed. Kevin Young (2006)

Sonia Sanchez, "a/coltrane/poem," *WE a BaddDDD People* (1961) (*)

Amus Mor, "The Coming of John" (*)

A. B. Spellman, "did john's music kill him?" (1973) (*)

Amiri Baraka, "AM/TRAK," *Poetry for the Advanced* (1979) (*)

Michael Harper, "Brother John," in *Dear John, Dear Coltrane* (1985) (*)

John Taggart, "Giant Steps" (*)

recommended reading:

Sascha Feinstein, "From 'Alabama' to A Love Supreme: The Evolution
of the John Coltrane Poem," *The Southern Review* (1996) (*)

Aldon Nielsen, "Out There a Minute: the Omniverse of Jazz and Text,"
Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism (1997) (*)

March 31: "Free Jazz" section in *Jazz Poems*, ed. Kevin Young (2006)

Cecil Taylor, "Sound Structure of Subculture Becoming Major Breath/Naked
Fire Gesture," liner notes to *Unit Structures* (1966) (*)

Cecil Taylor, "The Musician" (1976) (*)

Cecil Taylor and Mary Lou Williams, liner notes to *Embraced* (1978) (*)

Cecil Taylor, selections from *Chinampas* [CD recording] (*)

recommended reading: Fred Moten, "Sound in Florescence: Cecil Taylor Floating
Garden," *Sound States* (1997) (*)

April 2: Joseph Jarman, "Non-Cognitive Aspects of the City," *Black Case* (1977) (*)

April 7: Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (1975)

April 9:

April 14: Michael Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976)

April 16:

April 21: Jackie Kay, *Bessie Smith* (1997) (*)

April 23:

April 28: Nathaniel Mackey, *Bedouin Hornbook* (1986) (*)

Nathaniel Mackey, "Song of the Andoumboulou: 6," in *Eroding Witness* (1985) (*)

Nathaniel Mackey, "Cante Moro" (1994) (*)

April 30:

Fri., May 8 final paper due by 12:00 PM in my mailbox in 602 Philosophy Hall

Readings marked (*) will be made available for download and printing through the Courseworks website. Required books are available at Book Culture on W. 112th Street, and will be placed on library reserve: *Living with Music: Ralph Ellison's Jazz Writings*; *Jazz Poems*, ed. Young; Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*; Michael Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter*.

Course requirements:

- 1) Weekly informal response papers, one page maximum (to be submitted electronically). Responses are due by midnight each Monday night, and I will often use them as reference points in my lecture each Tuesday. You can respond to the readings for the week (raising questions, commenting on key themes) or take up subjects from previous in-class discussion (elaborating an argument, or making connections between texts). [10% of final grade]
- 2) One take-home midterm exam (distributed in class on March 5; due at the beginning of class on March 10). The format will be discussed in advance. [30% of final grade]
- 3) One final essay (approximately 10-12 pages, typed and doubled spaced) on a topic related to the themes discussed in the course. You must get my approval for your chosen topic by the April 23 class. [50% of final grade]

You are expected to keep up with the reading, and to be in class on time. Regular attendance, thorough preparation, and participation are expected [10% of final grade]. More than three unexcused absences will affect your grade. To be excused, absences due to serious illness or extracurricular activities must be documented. Documentation requires a signed letter or e-mail from a physician, coach, or activity director including e-mail and telephone contact information.