

Veranstalter	Prof. Dr. Jan D. Kucharzewski
Thema	Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself: Poetry and Philosophy in American Literature from Romanticism to Modernism [ENG-7, ENG-7a, AA-V4a, AA-V4b, ENG-13, AA-MA01, AA-MA02, AA-MA5, AA7, A11, LAA10, LAA13, AA-W. AA-WB]
Art der Veranstaltung	Seminar II
Veranstaltungsnummer	53-566
Zeit	2st, Mo. 10-12 Uhr
Raum	Ü35 - 01016
Beginn	16.10.2017
Sprechstunde während der Vorlesungszeit:	Nach Vereinbarung

The modern American poet Wallace Stevens writes that "in poetry at least the imagination must not detach itself from reality." While this statement initially might appear counter-intuitive as poetry is often regarded as an aesthetic form that relies on a high degree of abstraction and compression that indicates a removal from the ever elusive "real," Stevens and other American poets believed that poetic expression is not only a means of representing a subjective perception/experience of the material world, but also a very concrete way of fundamentally understanding it. Concordantly, one of Stevens' most famous poems is titled "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself" and concludes with the speaker obtaining a "new knowledge of reality." Poetry can therefore be considered an attempt to get closer to the truths of the world by using rhyme, meter, and cadence not as devices of distancing but as organizing principles that reveal rather than obscure (even though the causal connoisseur of verse might beg to differ). As such, poetry closely aligns itself with epistemological and ontological concerns about the nature, constitution, and aspect of the real that are commonly associated with philosophical thinking.

In this reading and discussion intensive seminar we will tackle the interrelation of poetic expression and philosophical thinking in American literature from Romanticism to Modernism. Using poems by writers such as Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, William Cullen Bryant, Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, and Hilda Dolittle as well as philosophical texts by Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and Charles Saunders Pierce, we will examine the philosophical underpinnings of American poetry and also discuss poetry as a form of philosophical thinking. As the title and the text selection already indicates, this course requires a commitment to abstract thinking, a fundamental interest in the big questions, and a willingness to engage with sometimes difficult and elusive materials. I guarantee that this will be a challenging and demanding course, but I also promise a rewarding learning experience.

Course Requirements

Besides the "doh!"-requirements of attendance and participation as well as of actually reading and preparing the texts, students will be asked to produce guided reading

responses (ca. 300 words) for each session which will be collected or read out in class. There will not be oral presentations in this course.