Modern Poetry and the Actual World  
Fall 2012 – IDSEM-UG-1603  
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30-4:45  
Professor Lisa Goldfarb

COURSE DESCRIPTION
Although lyric poetry is the art of language that we reserve for the expression of the emotional dimension of our human experience, lyric poets also importantly use the forms and conventions of their art to respond to the shape and substance of the world they inhabit; that is, the historical, political, and physical aspects of the world – the “actual world” – in which they live. This course has two principal aims: first, to help us to develop skills in the reading of modern lyric poetry, and, second, to consider the complex relation between modern poetry and the actual world. In the first half of the class, we will study the forms and conventions of lyric poetry and work on developing our poetic sensibilities. In the second half, we will focus our attention on the relationship of modern poets to the concrete or actual world and focus our study on W.H. Auden and Wallace Stevens, two poets who address the pressing questions of their day, and the world they shared in strikingly different ways. However different their approaches, both poets ponder questions of faith and secularity, consider heroism and loss in a century marked by war, and probe our human relationship to nature in answer to an increasingly industrialized and technological world. Readings will include texts that consider how to read lyric poetry, a representative selection of modern lyric poetry, the works of Auden and Stevens, as well as the philosophical, historical, and political narratives to which they refer and that inform their work.

REQUIRED TEXTS

W.H. Auden, Selected Poems (Vintage)

Wallace Stevens, The Palm at the End of the Mind (Vintage)

Freud, The Future of an Illusion (W.W. Norton and Co.)

Nietzsche, Ecce Homo (Penguin Classics)

Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel (Vintage)


Course packet – at Unique Copy Center

In addition to the above texts, from time to time I will be distributing additional materials, materials will be on reserve in the library, and also posted on Blackboard.
Unless otherwise indicated, all books, required and recommended should be available at
the NYU Bookstore

COURSE ROUTINES: READINGS AND WRITING

*Modern Poetry and the Actual World* is designed to present students with a wide
spectrum of modern poems, and to help students develop strategies for the reading of
poetry, particularly of the modern era. As the description indicates, we are looking to
accomplish two aims in the course: to become skilled readers of poetry, and to ponder the
relationship between modern poetry and the tangible world (of time and space,
historically, politically, physically). To accomplish those aims, each week’s readings will
include works that address the nature of poetic language and how we read it, commentary
on poems, as well as material that provides literary, philosophical and historical context
so that we can better grapple with the specifically modern aspect of the poetry. We will
likewise be wrestling with the temper of the times and specifically modern contours of
the world; that is, the debates of the times and the modern crises to which the poets are
responding and with which they are deeply engaged.

For each class in which poetry is assigned students will be expected to have read the
poems very closely. As writing about poetry helps us to read more closely, each student
will write a very brief observational response to each assigned poem (one sentence).
Responses should be typed and brought to each class to be shared with the group. In
addition, students will write an extended observation to the one poem per week on which
they choose to focus (no more than one page). From time to time, if students would like
to memorize and recite a poem in place of or as part of the longer weekly assignments,
we can certainly make arrangements. Both short and extended responses will be collected
at the end of each week.

During those weeks in which we are considering philosophical, literary-critical, and
historical material, each student will be expected to compose a few questions about a
particular passage, or consider the pertinence of a particular idea to a poem or particular
poet. These responses should accompany the extended poetic reading. All responses
should be no more than a page (extended reading and questions).

In addition to these weekly writing assignments, there will be three papers to be
submitted for the class. The first two will be five pages, and the last a paper of about 8-10
pages (no more than 10 pages).

Please keep in mind that all written work must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch
margins on all sides. Formal papers must be documented according to the *MLA
Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT SUBMISSION OF PAPERS: Papers should be handed in
both in hard copy on the date that they are due and also submitted as email attachments.
All weekly assignments should be submitted in hard copy on Thursdays, unless otherwise indicated.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADES
*Modern Poetry and the Actual World* is a seminar course that develops through class discussion. It is crucial that you attend class regularly, and that you arrive on time. If you cannot attend class due to illness or emergency, please call or email me so that you can be prepared for the next class. Your participation in class is vital to the success of the class, as is your timely submission of all written work.

Grades are based on the quality of all written work (brief responses, extended readings, and final paper) and class participation. Please note that excessive absences (more than two) can jeopardize your course grade.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please be mindful that you must properly document all quoted and paraphrased material. As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction in accordance with the [Student Discipline Rules](#) of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study.

OFFICE HOURS
My office is in room (715 Broadway – 804) and my office phone number is 998-7323. You can also reach me easily by email at lisa.goldfarb@nyu.edu

My office hours for fall: Tuesday and Thursday 2:15-3:15 and 4:45-5:45, and by appointment
* Please note that it is always best to arrange appointments in advance by emailing and confirming the date and time.

SYLLABUS

WEEK 1 – Introduction to course framework / Thinking about the modern lyric
September 4 / 6
* Introduction to course and the modern lyric
* Poems for discussion:
  Baudelaire – “To a passing woman”
  Marianne Moore – “Poetry”
  Auden – “Musée des Beaux Arts”
  Stevens – “To the Roaring Wind”
* Writing: Submit by Friday (my office, 804) a one-page response to one of the above poems. Be sure to think about the poem’s design, its characteristic voice and mood, and the questions it raises about modernity.

WEEK 2 – Private and Public Life
September 11
• Reading: Vendler: “The Poem as Life” (3-26)
• Poems for discussion: Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (V200),
  Baudelaire, “Harmony of Evening” (FP 146), “Invitation to the Voyage” (FP 148)

September 13
• Reading: Vendler, “The Poem as Arranged Life” (27-72)
• Poems for discussion: Eliot, “Preludes” (V 461); Pound, “In a Station of the
  Metro” (561); Baudelaire, “Spleen” I and III (FP152, 153)
• Additional poems: Langston Hughes, “Theme for English B” (V19); Dylan
  Thomas, “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” (20); Sylvia Plath, “Daddy”
  (V21); Margaret Atwood, “Footnote to the Amnesty Report on Torture” (V73)
• Writing: Write a one-page extended reading of one of the assigned or additional
  poems paying attention to the poem’s shape, its voicing, and how it “arranges”
  life publicly and privately.

WEEK 3 – The Imagined Self and Close Poetic Analysis
September 18
• Reading: Edward Hirsch, preface and 1-31 (packet); Helen Vendler, “Describing
  Poems” 107-134
• Poems for discussion: Valéry, “The Spinner” (FP 478), “Footsteps” (FP 488),
  “The Bee”; Robert Frost, “Mending Wall” (V144); Pound, “The River Merchant’s
  Wife: A Letter” (V 145); Bishop “At the Fishhouses” (V388)
• Additional poems: Eluard, “The curve of your eyes” (710 FP); Charles Wright,
  “Self Portrait” (V211); Rimbaud, “May Bohemian Life” (FP 288); Gwendolyn
  Brooks, “The Bean Eaters” (V405)
• Writing (Submit by Friday, my office, 804): Write a one-page extended reading
  on one of the assigned or additional poems, focusing on how the poem constructs
  a sense of self. Be sure to continue to be attention to the overall shape of the
  poem, its internal and outer form.

September 20
• CLASS CANCELED

WEEK 4 – Space, Time, and History
September 25
• Reading: Kern, from The Culture of Time and Space (10-36, 131-181) (packet)
• Poems for discussion: Apollinaire, “Zone” (FP 540), “Aim” (FP 566); Cendrars,
  “Dawn” (FP 599); A.R. Ammons “The City Limits” (V 372); Hart Crane, “To
  Brooklyn Bridge” (V448)
September 27
• Vendler, “Poetry and Social Identity” (213-227); “History and Regionality (239-
  255)
• Poems for discussion: Lowell, “For the Union Dead” (V 266); Louise Erdrich,
  “The Strange People” (V 465); Cendrars, “Construction” (FP 594); Apollinaire,
  “The Landoor Road Emigrant” (FP 553)
• Additional Poems: Owen, “Dulce et Decorum Est” (V 247); Yeats, “Easter
  1916” (V 263); Allen Ginsberg; “America” (V 471)
• Writing: Write a one-page extended reading on one of the assigned or additional poems, primarily concerning yourself with how the poem meditates on or reflects modern notions time and space.

WEEK 5 – The Emergence of the Modern and Its Distinct Voice
October 2
• Reading for discussion: Nietzsche, Ecce Homo
October 4
• Reading for discussion: Continued work on Ecce Homo
• Poems for discussion: Rimbaud, “The Drunken Boat” (FP 295); “After the Flood” (FP 306); Yeats, “The Second Coming” (V 651), “Sailing to Byzantium” (650); Jacob, “In the Silent Forest” (FP 528)
• Consider: Do you hear echoes of Nietzsche’s voice or reverberations of the issues he addresses in any of the assigned poems?
• PAPER #1 DUE – CLOSE READING OF ONE ASSIGNED POEM

Week 6 – Freud and the Crisis of Belief in Modern Poetry
October 9
• Reading for discussion: Freud, The Future of an Illusion
October 11
• Reading for discussion: William James, “The Will to Believe” (handout)
• Introduction to work on Auden and Stevens
• Poems for discussion: Auden, “In Memory of Sigmund Freud” (100); Stevens, “The Owl in the Sarcophagus” (302)
• Additional poems: Rimbaud, “Morning of Intoxication” (FP 309), “City” (FP 311); Hopkins, “No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief” (V 499), Hardy, “Afterwards” (V 486)
• Write a brief reflection (no more than a page) in which you address the relation between Freud’s or James’ meditations on belief with either Stevens’ “The Owl in the Sarcophagus” or Auden’s “In Memory of Sigmund Freud.”

WEEK 7 – Close Study of Auden
October 16
• FALL BREAK – NO CLASS
October 18
• Introduction to study of Auden – Biographical and Contextual Overview
• Reading for discussion – Mendelson, Early Auden, Selections (TBA)
• Poems for discussion: “Who stands, the crux left of the watershed” (3), “It was Easter as I walked in the public gardens” (9), “Since you are going to begin to-day” (14), “Consider this and in our time” (pg. 16), “This lunar beauty” (17)
• Additional poems: “What is that sound” (pg. 27), “Look, stranger, at this island now” (43), “Casino” (47), “Spain” (pg. 54), “In Time of War” (particular sections to focus on TBA, 72)
• Additional poems: “Journey to Iceland” (49) “Lay your sleeping head” (53) “Orpheus” (59), “As I walked out one evening” (66)
• Writing: Write a one-page extended reading on one of the additional poems for
study.

**WEEK 8 – Close Study of Auden**

October 23
- Essays for discussion, from Auden’s *The Dyer’s Hand* (“The Poet and the City”) (packet)

October 25
- Poems for discussion: “September 1, 1939” (95), “Song for St. Cecelia’s Day” (106), “The Quest” (entire) (108), “In Sickness and in Health” (120)
- Additional poems: “Refugee Blues” (91), “Calypso” (94), “Law, say the gardeners” (98), revisit “In Memory of Sigmund Freud” (100), “At the Grave of Henry James” (128)
- Writing: Write a one-page reflection on the relationship between Auden’s prose and his poetry. How do his meditations on the city figure into one of the poems that you have read? How does he envision the city? These are some questions you might consider.

**WEEK 9 – Close Study of Auden**

October 30
- Reading for discussion – Some critical commentary on Auden (Mendelson, Jenkins, Sharpe - handout)
- “Memorial for a City” (196)

November 1
- Write a one-page extended reading in which you consider one of the above poems (or one section of a long series such as “Horae Canonicae” or “Bucolics” in relation to some critical commentary on Auden.

**WEEK 10 – Close Study of Auden and his Poetic Influence**

November 6

November 8
- Poems for discussion: “Archeology” (317); Robert Hayden, “Frederick Douglass” (489), “Mourning Poem for the Queen of Sunday” (489), Joseph Brodsky (TBA)
PAPER #2 DUE (PAPER TOPICS TBA)

WEEK 11 – Close Study of Stevens
November 13 – Introduction to the study of Stevens – Biographical and Contextual Overview
• Reading for discussion: Joan Richardson, from the biography (selections, handout)

November 15
• Reading: Review William James, “The Will To Believe” (handout)
• Writing: Choose one of the additional poems (or one poem in the longer sequences) and write a one-page extended reading.

WEEK 12 – Close Study of Stevens
November 20
• Reading for discussion: “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” (NA 1-36)
• Poems for discussion: “The Man with the Blue Guitar” (133)
• Writing: Choose one section of “The Man with the Blue Guitar” and write an extended reading. Do you see a connection between Stevens’ reflections in prose and this long series of poems?

November 22 – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

WEEK 13 – Close Study of Stevens
November 27
• Reading for discussion: “Effects of Analogy” (NA 105-130) and “Imagination as Value” (NA 133-156)

November 29
• Additional poems: “Martial Cadenza” (handout), “Yellow Afternoon” (handout), “Flyer’s Fall” (270), “The House was Quiet and the World was Calm” (279)
• Writing: Choose one Stevens poem and write an extended reading on one page. Please consider Stevens’ abstract way of addressing the issues of his day in one of the assigned or additional poems.
WEEK 14 – Close Study of Stevens

December 4
- Reading: Some critical commentary on Stevens (TBA)
- Reading: Santayana, “The Function of Poetry” (handout)

December 6
- Poems for discussion: “To an Old Philosopher in Rome” (371), “The Poem that Took the Place of a Mountain” (374), “The Plain Sense of Things” (382), “The Planet on the Table” (386)

FINAL PAPER DUE (PAPER TOPICS TBA)

WEEK 15 – Stevens and his Influences / Course Review

December 11
- Poems for discussion: “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself” (pg. 387), “Of Mere Being” (398)
- Stevens’ influences: Selected poems of Ashbery, Rich, Graham, Hirsch (handouts)

December 13
- Continued discussion of Stevens’ influences
- Discussions of the contours of the course, and our favorite and most challenging poems