Modern Poetry and the Actual World  
Spring 2017 – IDSEM-UG-1603  
Tuesday and Thursday, 3:30-4:45  
Silver, 409  
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.

LEARNING GOALS  
• Students will learn skills and develop strategies in the close reading of modern lyric poetry.  
• Students will learn how to write analytically and critically about modern lyric poetry.  
• Students will learn specifically about the historical arc of modern lyric poetry, and study the complex relationship between the tumultuous twentieth century and the lyric forms that emerged from and expressed it.  
• Students will study two masters of the modern lyric in English – Wallace Stevens and W.H. Auden – and will learn how their poetry developed from early to late work.  
• Stevens will study central philosophical and historical texts and learn about the narratives and thought that informed the poetry (and art) of the twentieth century.

REQUIRED TEXTS  
W.H. Auden, *Selected Poems* (Vintage)


Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* (Penguin Classics)

Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel* (Vintage)

Milosz, Czeslaw, *A Book of Luminous Things* (Harcourt, Brace)


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 NYU Classes.

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 should be 8-10 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.

Grades will be calculated as follows:
Informal papers and class participation: 25%
Paper #1 – 25%
Paper #2 – 25%
Paper # 3—25%
Paper #3 – 25%

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

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, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.
OFFICE HOURS
My office is in room 604 (1 Washington Place) and my office phone number is 998-7325. You can also reach me easily by email at lisa.goldfarb@nyu.edu

My office hours for fall:
Tuesday – 9:30-10:30; 2:00-3:00; 5:00-5:30
Thursday – 9:30-10:30; 2:00-3:00; 5:00-5:30

• Please note that it is always important to arrange appointments in advance by emailing and then confirming the date and time.

SYLLABUS
WEEK 1 – Introduction to course framework / Thinking about the modern lyric
January 24
• Introduction to course and the modern lyric
• Poems for discussion:
  Baudelaire – “To a passing woman”
  Marianne Moore – “Poetry”

January 26
• Poems for discussion:
  Auden – “Musée des Beaux Arts”
  Stevens – “To the Roaring Wind”
• Writing: Submit 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
January 31
• Reading: Vendler: “The Poem as Life” (3-15)
• Poems for discussion: Robert Hass, “Late Spring” (LT 27) Baudelaire, “Harmony of Evening” (FP 146), “Invitation to the Voyage” (FP 148)

February 2
• Reading: Vendler, “The Poem as Arranged Life” (27-65)
• Poems for discussion: Frost, “The Most of It” (LT 46); William Carlos Williams “The Red Wheelbarrow” (LT 66); Baudelaire, “Spleen I” and “Spleen III” (FP 152, 153)
• Additional poems: Jean Follain, “Music of the Spheres” (LT 7); De Andrade, “In the Middle of the Road” (LT 8); Li-Young Lee, “Irises” (LT 1773)
• 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**

*February 7*
- Reading: Edward Hirsch, preface and 1-31 (packet); Helen Vendler, “Describing Poems” (111-138)

*February 9*
- Poems for discussion: Valéry, “The Spinner” (FP 478), “Footsteps” (FP 488), “The Bee” (FP 486); Robert Creeley, “Like They Say” (LT18); Mary Oliver, “Wild Geese” (LT 40); Theodore Roethke “Moss Gathering” (LT 23)
- Additional poems: Eluard, “The curve of your eyes” (710 FP); Whitman, “I Am the Poet” (LT 53); Rimbaud, “My Bohemian Life” (FP 288); Edward Field, “A Journey” (LT 98)
- Writing: 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.

**WEEK 4 – Space, Time, and History**

*February 14*
- 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); Kinnell “Daybreak” (LT 35 372); Szymborska, “Seen from Above” (LT 41)

*February 16*
- Vendler, “Poetry and Social Identity” (213-227); “History and Regionality (239-255)
- Poems for discussion: Whitman, “A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim” (LT 187); Herbert, “Elegy of Fortinbras” (LT 301); Cendrars, “Construction” (FP 594); Apollinaire, “The Landor Road Emigrant” (FP 553)
- Additional Poems: Rosewicz, “A Voice” (LT 207); Lazard, “Ordinance on Arrival” (LT 304); Cavafy, “Waiting for the Barbarians” (LT 305)
- 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**

*February 21*
- Reading for discussion: Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

*February 23*
- Reading for discussion: Continued work on *Ecce Homo*
- Poems for discussion: Rimbaud, “The Drunken Boat” (FP 295); “After the Flood” (FP 306); Machado, “Rainbow at Night” (LT 93), Elizabeth Bishop, “Brazil, January 1, 1502” (LT 121); 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  
February 28  
• Reading for discussion: Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*

March 2  
• 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” (456)  
• Additional poems: Rimbaud, “Morning of Intoxication” (FP 309), “City” (FP 311); Rexroth, “Signature of All Things” (Part I) (LT 144), Levertov, “Contraband” (LT 278)  
• 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  
March 7  
• Introduction to the study of Auden: Biographical and Contextual Overview

March 9  
• 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 today” (14), “Consider this and in our time” (16), “This lunar beauty” (17)  
• Additional poems: “O what is that sound” (27), “Look, stranger, at this island now” (43), “Casino” (47), “Spain” (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 – MARCH 13-17 Spring Break**

**WEEK 9** – Close Study of Auden  
March 21  
• Essays for discussion, from Auden’s *The Dyer’s Hand* (“The Poet and the City”) (packet)  

March 23
• 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?

WEEK 10
March 28
• Reading for discussion – Some critical commentary on Auden (Mendelson, Jenkins, Sharpe - handout)
• Writing: By Friday, March 31 (leave in mailbox at my office, 604): Write a one-page extended reading in which you consider one of the above poems in relation to some critical commentary on Auden.

March 30 – Class canceled

WEEK 11 – Close Study of Auden and his Poetic Influence
April 4
• Auden, “Making, Judging, Knowing” (to be distributed)
April 6
• Poems for discussion: “Archeology” (317); Robert Hayden, “Frederick Douglass” (V489), “Mourning Poem for the Queen of Sunday” (V489), Joseph Brodsky (TBA)

PAPER #2 DUE (PAPER TOPICS TBA)

WEEK 12 – Close Study of Stevens
April 11
• Introduction to the study of Stevens – Biographical and Contextual Overview
• Poems for discussion: “Domination of Black” (9), “The Snow Man” (10), “The Emperor of Ice Cream” (68)
April 13
  • Writing: Choose one of the additional poems (or one poem in the longer sequences) and write a one-page extended reading.

WEEK 13 – Close Study of Stevens
April 18
  • William James, Review “The Will to Believe” (handout)
  • Reading for discussion: “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words” (NA 1-36)

April 20
  • Poems for discussion: “The Man with the Blue Guitar” (175)
  • 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?

WEEK 14 – Close Study of Stevens
April 25
  • Reading for discussion: “Effects of Analogy” (NA 107-130)

April 27
  • Reading for discussion: “Imagination as Value” (NA 133-156)
  • Poems for discussion: “Examination of a Hero in Time of War” (290), “Less and Less Human, O Savage Spirit” (344)
  • Additional poems: “Martial Cadenza” (252), “Yellow Afternoon” (251) “Flyer’s Fall” (354)
  • 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 15 – Close Study of Stevens and Stevens and his Influences
May 2
  • Reading: Some critical commentary on Stevens (TBA)
  • Reading: Santayana, “The Function of Poetry” (handout)
May 4

• Stevens and his Influences / Course Review
• Poems for discussion: “The Course of a Particular” (554), “Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself” (565)
• Stevens’ influences: Selected poems of Ashbery, Merrill, Rich, Howe (handouts)
• Discussion of contours of the course and our favorite and most challenging poems
• **FINAL PAPER DUE (PAPER TOPICS TBA)**