

Double Portraits: Reading Poets Side-by-Side from the Romantics to the Present

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Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop get their feet wet in Brazil, 1962.

Course Description:

“No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone,” T.S. Eliot wrote in 1919. This junior tutorial offers a gallery of double portraits: major poets whose individual achievements are clarified when twined with an important contemporary. Each week, we’ll read two poets whose work is more intelligible side-by-side. Our pairs of (nineteenth and twentieth century) poets relate to each other as collaborators, editors, rivals, lovers, correspondents, guiding lights, or cautionary examples. We’ll map these relationships of influence—both welcome and unwelcome—in the poems themselves as well as essays, letters, and archival materials.

We’ll add a frame to each week’s double-portrait by introducing a different critical method each week. While our attention will center on our chosen texts as aesthetic objects, these ways of reading and thinking about poems will give occasion and rigor to our questions about literary interpretation and poetics. What is the relationship between social networks and individual inspiration? Can poets choose their literary ancestors or decedents? How is literary form transformed through imitation and exchange? Our exploration of these questions will draw on the rich resources of Harvard’s libraries and museums.

Course Texts:

The Norton Anthology of Poetry, 5th Edition (Norton: 978-0393979206)

Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1802. (Oxford: 978-0199601967)

Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell
(Farrar, Straus: 978-0374531898)

PDFs of all other texts are available on Canvas. Please print them out and bring them to class on the assigned day.

Purpose:

This class introduces English concentrators to the advanced study of literary texts and prepares them to write and revise a 20-25 page research paper. To that end, students will learn to draw on both poetry collections and secondary texts (journal articles, academic monographs, and review essays) to formulate and pursue a viable research question.

The course is designed to enable several approaches to the research paper: students may choose to write about influence, allusion, coterie, rivalry, or collaboration using a pair of poets as a case study. Alternatively, students may choose to move from comparative investigation to focus on some aspect of a single poet's work.

While naturally the course cannot replace a survey of literary theory, it is designed to expose students to diverse approaches to writing about poetry while retaining a solid grounding in close reading. To this end, it has a hybrid structure. On the one hand, students are expected to read the assigned poems and come to section prepared to discuss and analyze the poems they find most interesting or intriguing. On the other hand, students will sign up to present a methodological approach each week and convene a discussion on the method's application to that week's literary text. Some weeks, these presentations will be drawn from assigned secondary reading; in other weeks, students will be asked to report back on an item in Houghton or the Harvard archives.

In order to prepare for final paper, students will choose a research question early in the semester and explain their projected approach in a **prospectus**. Subsequent assignments will develop this idea with regard to questions of form, context, methodology. A short **(5- 6 page) close-reading paper** offers students the chance to discuss a text with minute attention to form and hone their critical prose. It will also provide the basis for our first round of conferences.

After our class visit to the English Department Research Librarian, Odile Harter, students will complete **an annotated bibliography (of at least 4 pages)** that will list and explain the primary texts, secondary sources, and manuscript or archival materials (if any).

After students have written **a preliminary draft (of 10-15 pages)**, we will meet for another round of conferences. A **final (20-25 page) draft** is due on [TK].

Naturally, the students will also participate in the Junior Tutorial Conference at the end of the semester.

Grading:

- Attendance and participation: 10%
- Methods presentations: 10%
- Close reading paper: 10%
- Prospectus: 10%
- Annotated bibliography: 10%
- Preliminary draft (10-15 pages): 10%
- Final Paper (20-25 pages): 40%
 - NB: Submission of final paper required to pass the course.

Course Schedule:

1) This syllabus can (and should) be adapted to your research interests. After our first meeting, you will have the opportunity to rank the poet pairs which interest you most. If possible, we will place those readings earlier in the semester so we can study them together before the prospectus comes due.

2) Weeks A,B,C are units that can be substituted for numbered weeks, depending on the class's interest.

Week 1. "Reading together."

- ***First Day Anthology***: Selections from Keats, Shelley, the Brownings, Rosetti, Tennyson, Whitman, Dickinson, Pound, Stevens, Eliot, Crane, Cullen, (Langston) Hughes, Lowell, Bishop, Plath, (Ted) Hughes, Rich, Lorde, Walker, O'Hara, Baraka, Larkin, Hill, Ashbery, and Merrill.
- Harold Bloom. "A Manifesto for Antithetical Criticism" from *The Anxiety of Influence*.
Sign up for presentations.

Week 2. Wordsworth & Coleridge. Radical Collaborators.

- ***The Lyrical Ballads***
- Paul Fry. "Wordsworth in the *Rime*" in *Wordsworth and the Poetry of What We Are*.
- Neil Fraistat. "The Field of *Lyrical Ballads*" in *The Poem and the Book*.
Presentation: Book History: Individual Genius and Multiple Authorship.

Week 3. John Keats & Percy Bysshe Shelley. "...be more of an artist."

- John Keats. "Sonnet. To Chatterton," "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be," "To Autumn," *The Letters of John Keats* (selections).
- Shelley. "Adonais."
- Peter Sacks. "Shelley: 'Adonais'" from *The English Elegy*.
Presentation: Psychoanalytic Criticism. Anxiety and Intertextuality.

Week 4. Robert Browning & Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Love and Hate.

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning. *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (selections).
- Robert Browning. *Men and Women* (selections)

- Ina Sessions. “The Dramatic Monologue.” *PMLA*.
- Daniel Karlin. “Personal Hatred” in *Browning’s Hatred*.

Presentation: Genre Criticism. *Literary Kinds*.

Close reading paper due (4-5 pages).

Week 5. Christina Rossetti & Alfred (Lord) Tennyson. Echoes of the Past.

- Christina Rossetti. “Song,” “Remember,” “Echo,” “In an Artist’s Studio,” “Up-Hill,” “The Convent Threshold,” “Passing Away, Saith the World, Passing Away,” “Amor Mundi,” “Goblin Market.”
- Alfred (Lord) Tennyson. *In Memoriam* (selections), “Mariana,” “The Kraken,” “The Lady of Shallot,” “Ulysses,” “Tears, Idle Tear,” “Tithonus,” “Charge of the Light Brigade,” “Crossing the Bar.”
- Angela Leighton. “Politics and Goblins” in *Victorian Women Poets*
- Eric Griffiths. “Tennyson’s Breath” in *The Printed Voice in Victorian Poetry*

Presentation: Historicism. *The Sound of Newsprint*.

Meeting at Widener with Odile Harter to Discuss Research.

Week 6. Walt Whitman & Emily Dickinson. Publicity and Privacy.

- Walt Whitman. *The Leaves of Grass* (selections).
- Emily Dickinson. “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” “I’m Nobody! Who are You?,” “Wild nights – Wild nights!,” “There’s a Certain Slant of Light,” “I Felt a Funeral, in my Brain,” “After great pain, a formal feeling comes,” “The Soul selects her own Society,” “The Heart asks Pleasure – first,” “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun,” “Renunciation is a Piercing Virtue,” “Publication is a piercing Virtue,” “Further in Summer Than the Birds.”
- Virginia Jackson. “Lyric Reading” in *Dickinson’s Misery*.
- Stephanie Burt. “What is this Thing Called Lyric?” *Modern Philology*.

Presentation: The New Lyric Studies. *Something overheard, something understood?*

Prospectus Due

Week 7. T.S. Eliot & Hart Crane. Unreal Cities, Mythical Methods.

- T.S. Eliot. *The Waste Land*, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth.”
- Hart Crane. *The Bridge*, “Letter to Harriet Munroe.”
- Franco Moretti. “From *The Waste Land* to the Artificial Paradise.”

Presentation: Marxist Criticism. *Mass Culture meets High Modernism*.

Annotated bibliography (4-5 pages) due.

Week 8. Ezra Pound & Wallace Stevens. Whose Modernism?

- Ezra Pound. *The Pisan Cantos* (selections).
- Wallace Stevens. “The Snow Man,” “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” “Sunday Morning,” “Anecdote of the Jar,” “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” “The Idea of Order at Key West,” “Of Mere Being”
- Hugh Kenner. “In the Cage” in *The Pound Era*.
- Marjorie Perloff. “Pound/Stevens: Whose Era?” *New Literary History*.

Presentation: Genealogy: *Dividing Legacies*.

Week 9. Countée Cullen & Langston Hughes. The Racial Mountain.

- Countée Cullen. “Yet Do I Marvell,” “Atlantic City Waiter,” “Incident,” “For a Lady I Know,” “Heritage,” “Threnody for a Brown Girl.”
- Langston Hughes. “The Weary Blues,” “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “Dream Variations,” “Song for a Dark Girl,” “Harlem,” “Theme for English B,” “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.”
- Henry Louis Gates. “Figures of Signification” in *The Signifying Monkey*.
- Evie Shokie. “Introduction” in *Renegade Poetics*.

Presentation: *African American Studies. Aesthetics and the Color-Line.*

Week 10. Robert Lowell & Elizabeth Bishop. Words in Air.

- Robert Lowell. “The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket,” “Rebellion,” “My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow,” “For the Union Dead,” “Mr. Edwards and the Spider,” “Skunk Hour.” *The Dolphin* (selections).
- Elizabeth Bishop. “Casabianca,” “The Fish,” “Sandpiper,” “The Armadillo,” “Sestina,” “In the Waiting Room,” “The Moose,” “One Art.”
- Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop. *Words in Air* (selections).

Presentation: *Archival Research. Class Visit to Houghton.*

Week 11. Frank O’Hara & Amiri Baraka. The New York School / The Black Arts Movement

- Frank O’Hara. “Why I am Not a Painter,” “Having a Coke with You,” “The Day Lady Died,” “Rhapsody,” “Poem [the eager note on my door said ‘Call me’].”
- Amiri Baraka. “Black Art,” “Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note,” “SOS.”
- Daniel Albright. “Mousike” in *Panaesthetics: On The Unity and Diversity of the Arts*

Presentation. *Panaesthetic Criticism. Ut pictura poesis.*

Visit to the Harvard Art Museums

Week 12. Adrienne Rich & Alice Walker & Audre Lorde. Solidarity.

- Adrienne Rich. “Aunt Jenifer’s Tigers,” “Storm Warnings,” “Diving into the Wreck,” “Power,” “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision.”
- Alice Walker. “Women,” “Outcast,” “On Striping Bark from Myself,” “Good Night, Willie Lee, I’ll See You in the Morning.”
- Audre Lorde. “Hanging Fire,” “Coal,” “Now That I am Forever with Child,” “Love Poem”.
- James English. “The Game and Its Players” in *The Economy of Prestige*

Presentation. *Literary Sociology. 1974 National Book Award.*

Week 13. Gwendolyn Brooks, Terrance Hayes, et. al. Group Portrait.

- *The Golden Shovel Anthology*. Eds. Peter Kahn, Ravi Shankar, and Patricia Smith.
- Caroline Levine. “Network” in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*.
- Angela Leighton. “Forms Matter” in *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word*

Presentation: Formalism. “Our beautiful flaw and terrible ornament.”

Week A. Rupert Brooke & Isaac Rosenberg. “...passive suffering is not a theme for poetry.”

- Rupert Brooke. “Sonnet,” “Peace,” “Safety,” “The Old Vicarage, Grantchester,” “The Soldier”
- Isaac Rosenberg. “Break of Day in the Trenches,” “Louse Hunting,” “Dead Man’s Dump,” “Marching,” “A Worm Fed on the Heart of Corinth”
- Geoffrey Hill. “Tacit Pledges” in *Collected Critical Writings*.
- Paul Fussell. “Oh What a Literary War” in *The Great War and Modern Memory*.
Presentation: Ethical Theory. *Poetry and the Unspeakable*.

Week B. Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. Red in tooth and claw.

- Sylvia Plath. “The Colossus,” “Morning Song,” “Tulips,” “Elm,” “Daddy,” “Ariel,” “Lady Lazarus,” “Parliament Hill Fields,” “The Applicant,” “Poppies in October.”
- Ted Hughes. “The Thought-Fox,” “The Thought-Fox,” “An Otter,” “Pike,” “Second Glance at a Jaguar,” “Wodwo,” “Crow’s First Lesson.”
- Seamus Heaney. “The Indefatigable Hoof-Taps” in *The Government of the Tongue*.
- Jonathan Bate. “Poets, Apes, and Other Animals” in *The Song of the Earth*.
**Presentation. Ecocriticism. *Inhuman Sublimity*.
Class visit to Woodberry Poetry Room.**

Week C. Philip Larkin & Geoffrey Hill. Reading Backward.

- Geoffrey Hill. “In Memory of Jane Fraser,” “Two Formal Elegies,” “Ovid in the Third Reich,” “September Song,” *Mercian Hymns* (selections).
- Philip Larkin. “Church Going,” “An Arundel Tomb,” “MCMXIV,” “Talking in Bed,” “The Whitsun Weddings,” “Sad Steps,” “If This Be the Verse,” “Aubade,” “Introduction” in *All What Jazz*.
- W.H. Auden. “Two Poets” in *The Collected Works of W.H. Auden*.
Presentation. Aesthetic Theory. *What became of English Modernism?*

Final Draft Due (20-25 pages)

Be sure to attend the Junior Tutorial Conference on TBD.

Course Policies:

Ethos

This seminar is egalitarian. All members of our tutorial are entitled to respect and attention, and we are all responsible for its success. Please let me know at once if anything interferes with your full participation and commitment to the course.

Plagiarism and Collaboration

Intellectual labor is inherently cumulative and collaborative. In this class, accurate citation is both an ethical and practical imperative. If you are unsure about whether or how to indicate your reliance on a source, please ask! Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated.

Please consult the Harvard Honor Code:

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

Devices

Laptops and tablets, especially internet-connected laptops and tablets, compete for attention with the human beings in the tutorial. Please minimize their use. If you wish to download PDFs from Canvas instead of printing them, I ask that you disable your WiFi connection before class starts. Make sure you bring a (physical) notebook and something to write with.

Attendance and Due Dates

Attendance and participation are required. Please come to class having read and considered all of the assigned material for that week. If you are unable to attend class for some reason please let me know in advance.

Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due in my mailbox in the Barker Center at 5 PM. Come speak to me well in advance if something will prevent you from turning in the assignment on time. "Retroactive" extensions will not be granted and I will deduct half a grade (e.g. A- → B+) each day until the paper is turned in.

Email

I will attempt to answer all email within 24 hours. Assignments and other course announcements may be distributed by email; you are responsible for checking it regularly.