

“Go, Little Book” – First Books of Major Poets

Course Instructor: Michael Allen
Email: michaelpatrickallen@g.harvard.edu
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description:

What was it like to read the major poets of the 20th century as they first appeared? Contemporary readers almost always encounter these writers sprinkled in anthologies or gathered magisterially in a *Collected*, *Selected*, or even *Complete* edition. In this tutorial we will read them between their first covers, restoring the book as a coherent aesthetic unit. Each week we will explore a first book published between 1917 and 1960 along with essays, letters, and archival materials that illuminate its form and context.

Along the way, this tutorial provides an atlas of ways of writing about poetry. Each week pairs a book of poems with a different methodical approach. While never losing sight of the poems as compelling aesthetic objects, we will explore questions of literary sociology (who decides which poetry books are published and read?) and theory (just who is the “I” in a lyric?), technique (how do poets revise?) and tendency (what does it mean to belong to a movement or a tradition?). In these investigations, we will draw upon the archival riches that have accrued from Harvard’s deep connection to twentieth century poetry.

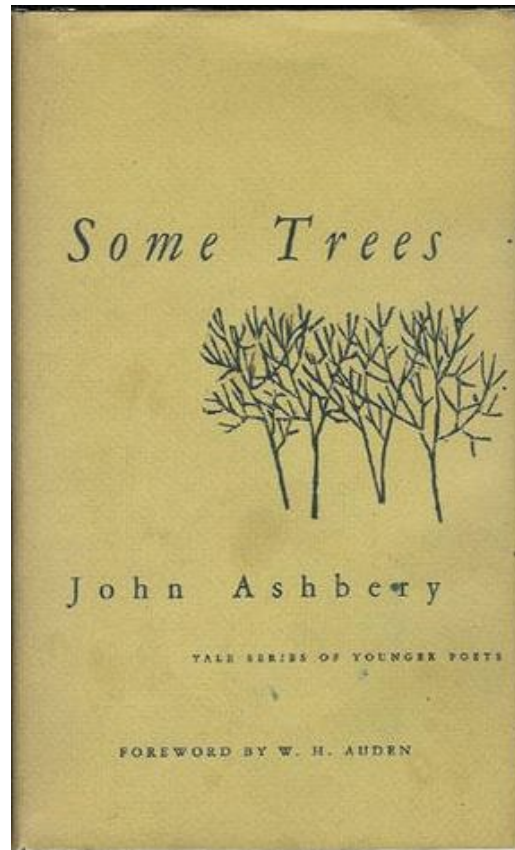
Course Texts:

NB: Where possible, we will read the poems in reissues of the original collections. In every case you will have the opportunity to examine and handle the books as they first appeared. I will provide a facsimile of these first books and/or place them on reserve.

If you have difficulty obtaining any of the books on this list, let me know as soon as possible. Other assigned texts will be posted on Canvas; please bring them with you to class.

T.S. Eliot. *Prufrock and Other Observations*. (Faber 978-0571207206)
 Wallace Stevens. *Harmonium*. (Faber 978-0571207794)
 Marianne Moore. *Observations* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux 978-0374226862)
 Langston Hughes. *The Weary Blues* (Knopf 978-0385352970)
 Hart Crane. *The White Buildings* (Liverlight 978-0871401793)
 W.H. Auden. *Poems* (Faber 978-0571283514)
 Gwendolyn Brooks. *Selected Poems* (Harper 978-0060882969) + Missing Poems Packet (to be distributed)
 Elizabeth Bishop. *Poems*. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 978-0374532369)
 Robert Lowell. *Lord Weary’s Castle; The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (Harvest 978-0156535007)
 Adrienne Rich. *A Change of World*. (Norton 978-0393352573)
 John Ashbery. *Collected Poems, 1956-1987*. (Library of America 978-1598530285)

Sylvia Plath. *The Colossus and Other Poems*. (Vintage 978-0375704468)



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 (at least) two approaches to the research paper: students may choose to write about first books, early style, literary apprenticeship, and related subjects using their chosen poet(s) as a case study. Alternatively, students may choose to draw on their intensive study of a poet's earliest published work in addressing the poet's corpus as a whole.

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 poetry collections 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 its 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. For some weeks, I have assigned a small number of later poems so we can better understand the arch of a poet's career.

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:

Week 1. "Go, Little Book" [Please Complete Readings Before Class]

- Selections from Eliot, Stevens, Moore, Hughes, Crane, Auden, Brooks, Bishop, Lowell, Rich, Ashbery, Hill, Plath
- Jesse Zuba. "Introduction: The History of a Poetic Career" from *The First Book Sign up for presentations.*

Week 2. T.S. Eliot - *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917)

Mandatory Junior Tutorial Workshop this Week: [time and date TK]

- Helen Vendler. "Inventing Prufrock" from *Coming of Age as a Poet.*
- Hugh Kenner. "Possum in Arcady" from *The Invisible Poet.*

Presentation: Genetic Criticism: "Prufrock's Pervigilium."

Optional reading:

- Robert Crawford. “Introduction” from *Young Eliot*.

Week 3. Wallace Stevens - *Harmonium* (1923)

- Later poem: “The Idea of Order at Key West”
- Harold Bloom. “Harmonium I-III” from *Poems of Our Climate*.
- Helen Vendler. “Fugal Requiems” from *On Extended Wings*

Presentation: Influence and Intertextuality. Keats and Stevens.

Optional reading:

- Scarlet Barron. “Introduction” from *Strandentwinding Cable*

Week 4. Marianne Moore – *Observations* (1924)

Mandatory Junior Tutorial Workshop this Week: [time and date TK]

- Gerard Genette. “Introduction” from *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*
- From the Modernist Periodicals Project: Issues of *Others* and *The Dial*.

Presentation: Book History. Poets and Editors.

Close reading paper due (4-5 pages).

Optional Reading:

- Evan Kindley. “Picking and Choosing: Marianne Moore Among the Agonists,” *English Literary History*
- Christina Britzolakis “Making Modernism Safe for Democracy” in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*.

Week 5. Langston Hughes - *The Weary Blues* (1925)

- Jahan Ramazani. “Poetry and Song” from *Poetry and Its Others*.
- Steven C. Tracey. “Folklore and the Harlem Renaissance” in Langston Hughes and the Blues.

Presentation: Comparative and Panaesthetic Criticism. Song Lyrics and Lyric Poetry.

Meeting at Widener with Odile Harter to Discuss Research.

Optional Reading:

- Countee Cullen. From *Color*.

Week 6. Hart Crane – *The White Buildings* (1926)

Mandatory Junior Tutorial Workshop this Week: [time and date TK]

- Langdon Hammer. “Modernism in Reverse” from *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus Faced Modernism*.
- Hart Crane. “Letter to Harriet Munroe.”

Presentation: Aesthetic Theory. What was Modernism?

Prospectus (1-2 pages) due.

Optional Reading:

- T.S. Eliot. “Ulysses, Order and Myth” from *The Dial*.

Week 7. W.H. Auden – *Poems* (1933)

- Geoffrey Grigson. “Auden as a Monster.” *New Verse*.
- Randall Jarrell. “Lecture 1.” from *Randall Jarrell on Auden*.
- Later poems: “Sept. 1, 1939,” “In Memory of W.B. Yeats,” “Under Which Lyre.”

Presentation: Historicism. Learning from contemporary reviews.

Optional Reading:

- W.H. Auden. “Making, Knowing, Judging.”
- Hannah Sullivan. “‘Still doing it by hand’: Auden and the typewriter.” in *Auden at Work*.
- Valentine Cunningham. “Introduction” from *British Writers of the Thirties*.

Week 8. Gwendolyn Brooks – *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945)

- Barbara Johnson. “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion.” *Diacritics*.
- Stephanie Burt. “Soldiers, Babysitters, Delinquents, and Mutants” from *Forms of Youth*.

Presentation: Semiotics. Who speaks and who listens to a lyric?

Annotated bibliography (4-5 pages) due.

Optional Reading:

- Studs Turkel. “An Interview with Gwendolyn Brooks.”

Week 9. Elizabeth Bishop – *North & South* (1946)

- Later poems: “In the Waiting Room,” “One Art.”
- Craig Dworkin. “The Stutter of Form” in *The Sound of Poetry / The Poetry of Sound*.
- James Longenbach. “Elizabeth Bishop’s Social Conscience” from *Modern Poetry After Modernism*.
- **Presentation: Disability Studies. “Stammering Elocution” in “Casabianca”**

Optional Reading:

- Bonnie Costello. “Active Displacements in Perspective” in *Elizabeth Bishop: Questions of Mastery*.

Week 10. Robert Lowell – *Lord Weary’s Castle* (1946)

- Later poems: “Skunk Hour,” “For the Union Dead.”
- Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop. Selections from *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence Between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*.

Presentation: Archival Research. Describe an item from the Lowell Collection at Houghton.

Class Visit to Houghton.

Optional Reading:

- Randall Jarrell. “From the Kingdom of Necessity.” *The Nation*.
- Stephen James. “The Burden of Power” in *Shades of Authority*.

Week 11. Adrienne Rich – *A Change of World* (1956)

- Later poem: “Diving into the Wreck”
- Pierre Bourdieu. “The Market in Symbolic Goods” from *The Field of Cultural Production*.

- James English. “Taste Management” in *The Economy of Prestige*
Presentation: The Sociology of Literature. Yale Younger Poets.
Preliminary Draft Due. Conferences. Visit Departmental Teaching Fellow.

Optional reading:

- Adrienne Rich. “The Tensions of Anne Bradstreet” in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*
- W.H. Auden. “Introduction.”

Week 12. John Ashbery – *Some Trees* (1956)

- Later poems: “Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror,” “Daffy Duck in Hollywood”
- John Shoptaw. “You All Now Know” in *On the Outside Looking Out*
- Aidan Wasley. “The Gay Apprentice” in *The Age of Auden*.

Presentation: Biographical Criticism. “The poetic medium of W.H. Auden.”
[Ashbery’s Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis in the Harvard University Archives]

Optional reading:

- Peter A. Stitt. “John Ashbery, The Art of Poetry No. 33” in *The Paris Review*.

Week 13. Sylvia Plath – *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960)

- Later poems: “Parliament Hill Fields,” “Daddy,” “Morning Song.”
- Seamus Heaney. “The Indefatigable Hoof-Taps” in *The Government of the Tongue*.
- Helen Vendler. “Sylvia Plath—Reconstructing the Colossus” in *Coming of Age as a Poet*.

Presentation: Formalism.

Final Draft Due (20-25 pages)

Be sure to attend the Junior Tutorial Conference on TBD.

Depending on the interests of the class, one of the following offerings may be substituted for one of the weeks above:

***Week X. H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) – *Sea Garden* (1916)**

- Eileen Gregory. “Rose Cut in Rock: Sappho and H.D.’s ‘Sea Garden.’” *Contemporary Literature*.
- Ezra Pound. “Imagism” and “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” [sic]. *Poetry*.
- Hélène Cixous. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” *Signs*. Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen.

Presentation: Écriture féminine: Imagism, “Amygism,” Feminism

Optional reading:

- Hugh Kenner. “Imagism” in *The Pound Era*.
- Ezra Pound. “A Retrospect” in *Pavannes and Divagations*.

***Week X. Seamus Heaney – *Death of a Naturalist* (1966)**

- Peter McDonald. “The Fate of Identity” in *Mistaken Identities*.
- Christopher Ricks. “Growing Up.” *The New Statesman*.
- Helen Vendler. “Anonymities” in *Seamus Heaney*.

Presentation: *Postcolonial Approaches*

Optional reading:

- Seamus Heaney. “Mossbawn” and “Belfast” in *Preoccupations*.
- Justin Quinn. “Postcolonial Poetry of Ireland” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Poetry*.
- Edward Said. “Yeats and Decolonization” *The Edward Said Reader*.

Course Policies:

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.