

## **Course Description**

Something new is happening at the cutting edge of literary studies: the theorization and practice of *experimental* literature and scholarship. This new movement has turned the ideals of order, tradition, and change—well known to all students of the Classics, Romanticism and the Enlightenment—into material for daring experiments that transgress mediums, genres, disciplines, cultures, and languages with implications across the Academy and, perhaps, the world. With the experimental, the very nature of the literary is not merely called into question but invited to dance. But what does experimental mean? The word ‘experimental’ denotes a practice of pushing limits, crossing boundaries, and posing radically provisional alternatives to the status quo. Experimentalism make provisional magic out of unforeseen connections, disconnections, motions between domains that we normally see as fixed and impermeable.

One key locus of the experimental is to be found in the works of the most important, exciting, boundary-pushing poets of our time: John Ashbery, Maggie Nelson, Anne Carson, Thylia Moss, Jay Wright, Geoffrey Hill, John Bricuth, John Hollander, Henri Cole, A.R. Ammons, Edgar Bowers, Edoardo Sanguineti. Many of these poets demonstrate concerns not only in avant garde styles and topics, but different disciplines and mediums. The very nature of the contemporary experiment as such entails disciplinary transgressions as well as more formal or literary innovations.

Throughout the semester we will explore the facets of such contemporary attempts along two key dividing, albeit somewhat artificial, lines (which our texts and authors may blur): form and genre/topos and media. Together these make up four key features of contemporary experiments in literature which will be read with and against scholarship that cuts across a set of contemporary debates: poetics, media theory, and interdisciplinary studies.

Here is a small preview of how we will engage with the poets and methodologies on our syllabus to construct a comprehensive picture of the experimental in contemporary poetry. We will read important texts from interdisciplinary studies and media theory to trace how Anne Carson’s use of collage clusters, shifts, and divides classical studies, contemporary philosophy and art history. Our introduction to the seminal media theorist and prophet of the internet *avant la lettre*, Marshall McLuhan will help us situate Thylia Moss’ Youtube poetry “video poams” and her written poetry within the broader context of an ecology of media. Our readings of Will Daddario and Stephen Meyer will prepare us to tease out the stakes of the subtle crossings between physics, anthropology, music, and poetics in Jay Wright’s award winning literary experiments.

This tutorial will prepare students to engage with foundational theories and methods even as it will update students to the most current developments in the field of literary studies. As we proceed through the course we may discover, through examination of the ways in which our authors experiment with received conventions along an interdisciplinary axis, a picture not only of where we are but where the arts (and perhaps the sciences) could be headed.

## **Goals**

### **General Tutorial Goals**

To undertake advanced forms of literary study which culminates in a 20-25 page paper in preparation for a senior honors thesis. To that end, we will endeavor to:

Identify, design, develop a research topic & question

Construct a scholarly bibliography that attends to that question

Places secondary literature in conversation with your ideas and those of other sources

Construct cogent arguments that derive from central claims rooted in textual analysis

### **Tutorial Specific Goals**

To achieve fluency in contemporary literary modes and theoretical discussions.

To identify commonalities between primary and secondary sources and across periods

To develop interdisciplinary analytical skills

To articulate the myriad ways in which the specific formal elements of a text inflect its rhetoric(s) and therefore the logical consequences of its content.

To write more clearly, coherently, and impactfully.

## **Graded Assignments**

**Short Essay** (Week 4, 10%): an extended close reading of a text or the application of a critical mode to a literary text. Students will have individual conferences to discuss paper post-submission.

**Prospectus & Annotated Bibliography** (Week 8, 10%): a two page page prospectus that will provide an overview of your final project and which will include an annotated bibliography of 8-10 sources. With a couple of sentences per source, you should summarize the central argument of the work you intend to include and how you plan to engage with it.

**Draft of Final Paper** (Week 11 & 13, 10%): a partial draft of your final project which will be preceded and succeeded with individual meetings to discuss argumentative structure and research trajectory.

**Final Paper** (Reading Period, 40%): 20-25 page paper on a major literary work analyzed in this tutorial or a text of similar nature (with instructor approval); Students are expected to incorporate at least two critical models from class readings into their arguments.

**Participation & Preparation** (30%): Given the small size of the seminar, active participation is vital to the development of the ideas embedded in this course. Participation is here defined as arriving on time to class, having read and pondered the assigned texts before class, bringing passages about which you are prepared to discuss or refer us to, and peer-reviewing your colleagues when indicated.

During the last class all students will give an ungraded conference presentation which will articulate an overview of their project.

**Required Texts** (All other primary & secondary readings will be provided as pdfs on canvas or equivalent)

John Bricuth, *Pure Products of America inc.: A Narrative Poem*

Anne Carson, *Float*

*Nox*

Henri Cole, *Gravity and Center: Selected Sonnets, 1994-2022*

John Hollander, *Reflections on Espionage: The Question of Cupcake*

Thylias Moss, *Wannabe Hoochie Mama Gallery of Realities' Red Dress Code: New and Selected Poems*

Maggie Nelson, *Bluets* (2009)

Jay Wright, *Presentable Art of Reading Absence*

*Prime Anniversary*

NB: Most of these texts may be purchased used either online or in local bookstores. The internet is *always* an excellent resource for finding books. Archive.org has 1 hour loans for some of these texts, and I will request that the Library have these books on reserve. Texts not listed here will be on the canvas site or passed out in class.

## **Unit 1: Experiments In Form: Genre & Style**

## **Week 1: Why So Experimental? The ‘Old’ Avante Garde’s Poetics**

### Primary Sources

Will Schutt (ed.; trans.), *My life, I lapped it up: Selected Poems of Edoardo Sanguineti* (2018) (very short selections)

### Secondary Sources

Shira Wolosky, *The Art of Poetry: How to Read a Poem* (2001), pp. 1-194 [Poetics]

Paolo Chirumbolo, “Edoardo Sanguineti and the Visual Arts: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue” pp. 1-13 [Interdisciplinary Studies, Media Theory]

S. Burt and Ch. Bernstein, [\*On Experiment\*](#) (Rutgers, April 10, 2014) [Poetics]

## **Week 2: Limited Fork Poetics & Youtube Poetry**

Thylias Moss, *Wannabe Hoochie Mama Gallery of Realities' Red Dress Code: New and Selected Poems* (selections)

*Video Poams* (Thylias Moss’ Youtube Channel)

### Secondary Sources

Thylias Moss, “Fork Addiction” [Poetics]

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, part 1. [Media Theory]

Johanna Drucker, “Theory as Praxis: The Poetics of Electronic Textuality” [Media Theory]

### *Optional Reading:*

Ryan Cull, “Inexhaustible Splendor’: Thylias Moss, Praise Poetry, and Racial Politics”

## **Week 3: Verse Narratives & Lyrical Science**

### Primary Sources

John Bricuth, *Pure Products of America inc.: A Narrative Poem*

*Heisenberg Variations (Selections)*

### Secondary Sources

Catherine Addison, “The Contemporary Verse Novel: A Challenge to Established Genres?” [Genre Theory, Poetics]

John Hollander, *Melodious Guile: Fictive Pattern in Poetic Language* “Introduction” [Poetics]

Kelly Cherry, *The two cultures at the end of the twentieth century: (1994)* pp. 130 (On Bricuth & Science) [Interdisciplinary Studies]

## **Week 4: Genres Between Genres, Prose-Poetry & The Conflictual Philosophies of Color**

### Primary Sources

William H. Gass, *On Being Blue: a philosophical inquiry* (1976) pp. 3-91

Maggie Nelson, *Bluets* (2009) pp. 1-95

### Secondary Sources

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Color* (short selections)

Paul Hetherington, Cassandra Atherton; *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* (2020) (selections) [Poetics]

*Optional Reading:* “M Golovchenko, Accessing Blue in Maggie Nelson’s *Bluets*” (2021)

## **Assignment 1: Short 3-5 Close Reading Paper Due at the End of Week 4** **Unit 2: Experiments in Substance: Topos & Media**

## **Week 5: The Breakdown of Linguistic Boundaries: Spycraft, Cryptographic Science, and A New Linguistics**

### Primary Sources

John Hollander, *Reflections on Espionage: The Question of Cupcake*

Geoffrey Hill, *Mercian Hymns*

### Secondary Sources

Matthew Sperling, *Visionary Philology Geoffrey Hill and the Study of Words* (2014)  
“Introduction” & “Chapter 1” [Poetics]

Shawn James Rosenheim, *The Cryptographic Imagination: Secret Writing from Edgar Poe to the Internet* (2020) “Introduction” [Poetics, Interdisciplinary Studies]

## **Week 6: Linguistic Frustration and Digression as Interdisciplinary Poetics**

### Primary Sources

John Ashbery, *Flowchart*  
*Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*

### Secondary Sources

Srikanth Reddy *Changing Subjects: Digressions in Modern American Poetry*, “New Digressions: John Ashbery and the Changing Subjects of the Twenty-First Century” [Poetics]

Roland Benedikter, Judith Hilber, “The Post-Modern Mind. A Reconsideration of John Ashbery’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (1975) from the Viewpoint of an Interdisciplinary History of Ideas” [Interdisciplinary Studies]

## **Week 7: Beyond Digression Lies A Scrapbook Epitaph: Poetry as Multimodal Collage**

### Primary Sources

Anne Carson, *Nox* (2010)

## Secondary Sources

Laura Jansen, *Anne Carson: Antiquity* (2021) (selections) [Interdisciplinary Studies]

Mark Andrejevic, "The Work of Being Watched: Interactive Media and the Exploitation of Self-Disclosure" [Media Theory]

Magda Dragu, *Form and Meaning in Avant-garde Collage and Montage* (2020) (short selections) [Media Theory]

Optional Readings:

Tanis MacDonald, "Night in a Box, Anne Carson's Nox and the Materiality of Elegy" [Poetics, Media Theory]

## **Week 8: Pushing Beyond All Bounds: Music, Physics, and the Multidisciplinary Ritual**

### Primary Sources

Jay Wright, *Presentable Art of Reading Absence* (2009)  
*Prime Anniversary* (2019)

Optional Reading: *The Tuning of Grammar and Syntax* (aphorisms) (2023)

### Secondary Sources

Will Daddario, *Pitch and Revelation Reconfigurations of Reading, Poetry, and Philosophy through the Work of Jay Wright* (2022) pp. 319-426 [Poetics, Interdisciplinary Studies]

Steven Meyer, "To Feel an Equation: Physiological Aesthetics, Modern Physics, and the Poetry of Jay Wright" (2020) pp 325-344 [Interdisciplinary Studies, Poetics]

## **Prospectus and Annotated Bibliography due at the end of Week 8**

## **Week 9: Scientism & Sanitation: Trash Eulogies in the Anthropocene**

### Primary Sources

A.R. Ammons *Garbage: A Poem* (1993)

### Secondary Sources

A.R. Ammons and the poetics of widening scope (1994) “The Poet and the Scientist”, “Epilogue: A Note on Ammon’s Garbage” pp. 19-30; 220-225 [Interdisciplinary Studies]

Chris Witmore, “Anthropoiesis Revisited: Hominization Through the Incorporation of Nonhumans” p.1-13 [Interdisciplinary Studies]

Laura Grindstaff, “Class, Trash and Cultural Hierarchy” [Media Theory]

## ***Unit 3: Further Examinations of Experiments in Form, Content, Media***

## **Week 10: Readers, Make Your Own Poetry!**

### Primary Sources

Anne Carson, *Float* (2016)

### Secondary Sources

Jessica Fisher, “Anne Carson’s Stereoscopic Poetics” [Poetics]

Opening up the black boxes: Media archaeology, ‘anarchaeology’ and media materiality  
Michael Goddard [Media Theory]

### *Optional Readings:*

Annette Skade, “And how does it alter you to see it there floating? Nox, Float and the Reader.”

Katherine Berta, “Float, by Anne Carson”

## **Week 11: Unusual Sonnets: New Thoughts and Philosophies, Old Forms and Mediums**

### Primary Sources

Henri Cole, *Gravity and Center: Selected Sonnets, 1994-2022* (selections)

### Secondary Sources

Langdon Hammer, "Apollo and Dionysus: Henri Cole combines the formal and the sensual" pp. 64-65 [Poetics]

## **Week 12: Curveballs, Meter, and Monologues: When Seeming Traditional Never Looked So Experimental**

We will spend the first hour and a half discussing Bowers poems and the last thirty minutes workshopping your partial first drafts—**circulated 48 hours before class.**

### Primary Sources

Edgar Bowers, *Collected Poems* (selections) (1997)

### Secondary Sources

Timothy Steele, "Intelligence perfecting the mute keys: Edgar Bowers and Music" [Interdisciplinary Studies]

Helen P Trimpi, "Contexts for "Being," "Divinity," and "Self" in Valéry and Edgar Bowers" (1977) (selections relevant to Bowers) [Poetics]

## **Week 13: Final Paper Workshop & Presentations**

Students will distribute and review their colleague's substantial drafts at least 72 hours before class. During this class we will methodically examine each draft and offer constructive suggestions regarding the following 5 aspects of good composition: thesis, argumentative structure, organization, close reading, and clarity. Students will be expected to give a 5-minute conference presentation on their papers.

Final Paper Due TBD

### **Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas or writing without giving them proper credit. Consequences of plagiarism can range from failure on assignment to course dismissal or more serious repercussions. You are solely responsible for adhering to Harvard FAS's Honor Code as well as for being in possession of a complete understanding of Harvard's policies with respect to academic integrity (<https://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/book/academic-integrity>). Ignorance of the rules, misapplication or misinterpretation of such rules, time constraints, "wrong draft" submissions, or being overwhelmed by multiple tasks shall not constitute an acceptable excuse. Please contact me rather than risk plagiarism. No excuse shall be deemed acceptable for any failure to uphold academic integrity. For more information about academic integrity and citation rules, see (<https://usingsources.fas.harvard.edu>)

### **Collaboration**

You are certainly encouraged to talk with other students about the course and its readings, and to read each other's work. In individual assignments (e.g. drafts, annotated Bibliographies, prospectus), academic collaboration and external sources must be cited; The submission of any works containing text generated by Chat GPT or other text generation software is strictly forbidden. While editing and providing specific feedback is allowed, writing another student's assignment for them is not.

### **Attendance**

Your attendance in this tutorial is quintessential to your personal success and to the success of the group, this includes attending any events, one on one meetings, or other required events. I offer each student one 'free' tutorial absence to be used in the case of sickness, travel, etc. no explanation required. However, missing more than one class will decrease your participation grade; egregious absences may result in failure of the course. Lack of punctuality, i.e. tardiness, will aggregate into absences, so for every two times you are late you will be marked down for 1 absence. If you have extenuating circumstances, you must communicate with me in a timely manner so that we can discuss how to address them.

### **Due Dates & Late Grades**

Assignments are due by 11:59pm on the date listed in the schedule. Barring extreme circumstances, Final papers must be submitted by the deadline. If you believe that you will need to avail yourself of an extension, please contact me before the deadline.

## **Email**

Email will be the primary mode of communication outside of class; you'll want to check your inbox regularly. I'll use our course listserv to distribute important info throughout the semester—from emailing you handouts to adjusting assignments and deadlines. You are responsible for checking your email on a daily basis. If you have a question that you need to ask me by email, be sure to give me at least 72 hours, or you may not get a response until it's too late. Also, please let me know if you'd like to use a non-Harvard email address. For common queries or general communications, please make every effort to attend office hours.

## **Accommodations for students with disabilities**

I am invested in your success in this course. If at any time you require accommodations please let me know so that we can work together to meet your needs. If such accommodations are required, please contact the Disability Access Office (DAO). More information about the DAO and accommodations may be found here (<https://accessibility.harvard.edu>) and here (<https://aeo.fas.harvard.edu>).