

Lecture 1 Introduction

1.

---Syllabus and requirements.

---This course will use visual images from Sterling and Beinecke libraries to suggest some of the material, historical, and biographical dimensions of modern poetry.

---Modern poetry was first published in Little Magazines (examples: Blast, Rogue, Broom, The Criterion). Contrast the covers of Yeats's The Wind Among the Reeds (1899), Eliot's Prufrock and Other Observations (1917), and Hughes's The Weary Blues (1926); self-conscious Irishness, lavishness and romance of Yeats's book v. the flat, impersonal design of Eliot's, v. the honky-tonk singer on Hughes's.

2.

---Poems always project an image of the poet who creates them. While the poet is creating her or his poems, she or he is also creating a poet, a public image of the poet, and this is an evolving project, a work in progress.

---Examples: photographs of Pound in 1913 (London), 1923 (Paris), 1946 (intake photo at St Elizabeth's Hospital), and 1971 (Rappallo); Eliot as Harvard student (1907) and as editor of Faber and Faber (c. 1950); Pound's descent into infamy and indignity and Eliot's rise to cultural power and prestige: these are key, interlocking stories in modern poetry, and two versions of the fate of modern poetry as a whole.

---Moore old and young.

3.

---Moore: poetry should include "business documents and school-books" ("Poetry"); Eliot: macaronic quotation from the end of The Waste Land; modern poetry "must be difficult" ("The Metaphysical Poets"); modern poetry comes out of the Babel, the special linguistic environment, of the modern metropolis (image from Blast by Wandsworth of "Rotterdam")

---the metropolis is a symbol of the ambivalence of modernity: its simultaneous promise and threat (Hughes's "125th Street" and "Harlem"; cover of Blast "War Number"; Alfred Stieglitz's photo of Manhattan, "City of Ambition"; photos of Brooklyn Bridge by Walker Evans).

4.

---for Crane, the modern city promises "new thresholds, new anatomies" ("The Wine Menagerie"); he asks Brooklyn Bridge "to lend a myth to God" ("Proem: To Brooklyn Bridge," The Bridge; photo of Crane by Evans);

---for Stevens as for Crane, when modernity takes away God, it reveals the poet's God-like power to create the world through imagination, which created God in the first place (photos of Stevens as choirboy and as insurance executive)

---Modern poetry in most of our poets is utopian, Promethean, seeking absolutes, primary truths. But there are alternatives, skeptical poetries that subject modernism to critique and

revision: for example, Auden: "Poetry makes nothing happen" ("In Memory of W.B. Yeats"; photo of Auden at Oxford with his inscription: "The cerebral life would pay"); Bishop: "The world is a mist. And then the world is / minute and vast and clear" ("Sandpiper"; photo of Bishop by George Platt Lynes, c. 1940).

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