

Paper 2 Topics

Paper 2 (7 pages) is due on Friday May 4. In the first paper, you concentrated on one poem. In this paper, focus on two or more texts. ("Texts" could mean two parts of a longer poem; two poems; a poem and a letter; a poem and an essay, or something else.) The topics below propose possible directions for the paper. You may write on a topic of your own choosing; and even if you write on one of the topics below, you'll have to refine your focus and argument. Begin work soon, and take time to discuss your work with each other, with your Teaching Fellow, and, if you would like, with me (email me for a meeting time). If you write on the poet you did in Paper 1, discuss another poet as well. Choose a poet or poets from our syllabus, but you may write on poems (or use a poet's letters or prose) not included on the syllabus. Keep in mind that this paper is not much longer than Paper 1, and so you will need to make your comments pointed and precise.

1. Frost, Yeats, Stevens, and Bishop wrote some of their most important poetry in old age. Consider whether these poets have late styles that perceptibly differ from their earlier ones. How your answer may vary according to the poet in question. What do they write about? What is their language like? To what extent do late poems develop or repeat themes or images from earlier poems? Do late poems find solutions to old problems? How do these poets approach death? How do they view the end of their writing or the fate of their writing?

This topic could be turned around in a paper on poems that act as a starting place or preface to a career or body of work (sometimes poems that are placed first in a given collection---e.g., "The Map" by Bishop, "Legend" by Crane).

2. Pound, Eliot, Crane, and Moore use quotations in their poetry (in the texture of their lines as well as framing devices in epigraphs). Discuss this practice in one or two of these poets. Why and how do these authors invoke other authors? What kinds of writing does each poet quote from? Does the poem in some way interpret the quotation (or the text it quotes from)? Or is there a way in which the quotation interprets the poem that quotes it--directs our interpretation of it by framing it in a particular context?

Consider what the practice of quotation implies about a given poet. Is quotation an act of homage (or aggression) toward the text or author quoted? Does the poet who quotes give up claims to originality (or inspiration)? Or does she or he claim inspiration of another sort? Is quotation used in some way as a mask for the poet? You might analyze Hughes's use of African-American dialect as a form of quotation (for example, in "The Weary Blues," where there is both a dialect speaker and a non-dialect narrator).

3. Or you might write about the use of dramatic speakers in Hughes, Pound, Eliot, Yeats, or Bishop's "Crusoe in England." Can you specify the relation between poet and dramatic

speaker? What alternatives does the speaker represent to the point of view of the poet? Does the poet notably distance himself or herself from the dramatic character, or use that character as a surrogate of some kind? Certain characters suggest points of view more marginalized, and some perhaps more authoritative than (or authoritative in way different from), the poet's own.

4. Discuss how one or two poets imagine the audience for a particular poem or poems. What kinds of reader does the poet project? Consider all the ways in which a poem gives a sense of the reader it seeks. These may include direct address--as, for example, when Crane speaks to Whitman in "Cape Hatteras," as well as subtle effects of diction, form, and reference. What attitudes does a poet strike toward the reader? Is the reader seen as a collaborator, a competitor, a nuisance, a friend? Does the poet imagine more than one type of reader; and if so, what is the relation between them? (Here you might discuss Frost's temperamental duplicity, his way of speaking on multiple levels at once.) Most important: how does the way a poem imagines its reader help us to read it? How, in the act of imagining a reader, does a poet imagine herself? You might look at a poet's letters or criticism for further ideas; you could consider Crane's, Auden's, or Bishop's love poems, or Auden's "Atlantis" (which could be read next to "Directive"), or a poem in which one poet addresses another author, living or dead (as in Bishop's "North Haven" or Auden's elegy for Yeats).

5. Modern poets were interested in other art forms, wrote about other art forms, and sometimes proposed their own poems as versions of them. Think of Hughes's use of jazz and blues, or Crane's interest in Charlie Chaplin and film, or his or Williams's interest in modern photography and painting, or Auden's or Bishop's or Yeats's poems about (actual or imaginary) works of art--or the presentation of Moore's or H.D.'s or Williams's poems as distinctive visual objects on the page. What draws the poet to another art form? How does he or she define the nature of his or her poetry in relation to it? Choose a poem or poems that you can study in relation to a specific artwork (you would have a slightly different topic with the imaginary art in Stevens, Bishop, and Auden).

6. Modern poetry is a metropolitan art, made in and out of the modern city. Explore this notion in particular poems by Moore, Crane, Hughes, Williams, Stevens, or Eliot (choosing either two poems by one of these poets or one poem each by two of them). Consider the city not only as a particular place but as a set of conditions for perception, thought, and communication.

In contrast, some modern poets root themselves in a particular region, people, or, as Stevens puts it, "climate." You might consider the role of region in Frost, Stevens, Auden, Hardy, Thomas, Williams, or Bishop (or Hughes as a kind of regionalist). How do the poetic manifestations and significances of a poet's "region" develop from one poem to another? What are the imaginative characteristics of the "regions" of different poets?

More possibilities: the hero in Moore and Stevens or the War Poets; animals in Moore and Bishop; how poetry defines its relation to science in Moore, in Crane, or in Auden (see his elegy for Freud); how a particular example of that distinctive modern form, the

sequence poem, works (many poems by Eliot, Crane, Yeats, Stevens, Auden); the "genuine" in Moore, Hughes, Auden, or Bishop; trash in Yeats, Crane, or Eliot; the American in Williams, Moore, or Hughes; color in Stevens, Moore, Bishop, Williams, or H.D. (this can be linked to topic 5); repetition in Hughes, Auden, Eliot, Stevens, or Bishop (this too can be linked to topic 5, if you write about poetry and music); gender in H.D., Moore, Bishop, Williams, or the War Poets, or (adapting topic 3) the female speakers imagined by male poets (Yeats, Eliot, Crane, or Hughes).