POETRY AND POETICS: CORE COURSE: AUTUMN 2017
Convenor: Hugh Haughton

General Reading on Poetry and Poetics:

William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930)

Seminars will take place from 11.00 to 1.00 on Thursdays from Week 2 to 10 in BS/007 with the exception of Week 6, which is a reading week.

Week 2

1 Historical Poetics – Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, Seamus Heaney’s ‘Crediting Poetry’ (Hugh Haughton)

Digital editions of the critical essays will be available on the VLE, as will a Selection of Contemporary Poems for discussion. The main focus will then look at a small number of historically oriented lyrical poems by Seamus Heaney, Eavan Boland, Geoffrey Hill, Derek Walcott and Jorie Graham. This gives us voices from Ireland, England, the USA and the Caribbean, working at different intersections between culture, history and lyric.

In the first place we will look at Heaney’s ‘Personal Helicon’, ‘Brough’, ‘Exposure’, ‘Alphabets’, ‘Glanmore Sonnets’ and ‘The Riverbank Field’ (which hinges on a contemporary Irish reading of Virgil’s Aeneid, setting these against Eavan Boland’s ‘The Latin Lesson’, ‘The Journey’, ‘Daphne with her Thighs in Bark’ and ‘The Pomegranate’. Two of these poems respond to Virgil’s Aeneid, which will be the focus of the second seminar. The idea is to frame these – or take off from these – by looking at the selected poems by Geoffrey Hill, including ‘History as Poetry’, ‘September Song’, and ‘Apology for the Revival of Ecclesiastical Architecture in England’, Jorie Graham’s ‘History’ and ‘Orpheus and Eurydice’, and Walcott’s ‘The Sea is History’ and Archipelagoes’.

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See also,


Yopie Prins, ‘What is Historical Poetics?’, Modern Language Quarterly 77:1 (March 2016)

See also Jahan Ramazani, Transnational Poetics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Week 3

2 Classical Legacies: Virgil’s Aeneid (Elizabeth Tyler)

The seminar will look at Virgilian epic and its legacies via a discussion of Aeneid Book IV, which narrates the story of Dido and Aeneas, setting this against Ovid’s later retelling of the same story from a different angle in Heroides VII (‘Dido to Aeneas’). Virgil’s poetry is formative for Western European experiences of poetry, from medieval poetry (Chaucer’s House of Fame, which you will
read next week, is much preoccupied with _Aeneid_ IV) to Seamus Heaney’s recent translation of Book VI. Key themes for discussion will allow us to look at his poetics and his inescapable but always problematic place in the canon: intertextual poetics, history and poetry, empire and poetry and women and poetry.

**Text**

_Virgil's Aeneid, Book IV._ Please read in Robert Fagles 2006 translation, available as a Penguin Classic. For those who would like to read the Latin, try the Loeb Classical Library facing-page translation by H.R. Fairclough, revised by G.P. Gould published in 1999. Copies of both will be available on the VLE but you are strongly encouraged to buy Fagles translation and to read the whole of The _Aeneid_.

_Ovid's Heroides, Letter VII._ Please read in Peter Murgatroyd, Bridget Reeves and Sarah Parker’s 2017 edition (which includes a useful headnote to each letter). For those who would like to read the Latin, try the Loeb translation by Grant Showerman, revised by G.P. Gould published in 1977 (as with the Loeb Virgil, this offers facing-page translation). Copies will be available on the VLE.

**Critical Reading**

Good places to start to approach both Virgil and Ovid are via the Cambridge Companions, both are available electronically via the university library catalogue – _Cambridge Companion to Virgil_ (ed. C. Martindale, 1997) and _Cambridge Companion to Ovid_ (ed. P. Hardie, 2002). In the Virgil companion, please read the essays by Martindale, Kennedy, Tarrant, Farrell and Oliensis. Do read in the Ovid volume if you are interested. For the seminar, we will also read Marilynn Desmond _Reading Dido: Gender, Textuality and the Medieval Aeneid_, pp. 23-45 which will be available on the VLE.

**Week 4**

3 _Dante’s De Vulgari Eloquentia and Chaucer’s House of Fame._ (Kenneth Clarke)

In this seminar we shall look at two of the most interesting explorations of poetics in the Middle Ages: a Latin treatise entitled _De vulgari eloquentia_, on the use of the vernacular, by the Italian poet, Dante Alighieri; a short dream poem by the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer, _The House of Fame_. Dante’s _DVE_ was written in the first years of his exile from Florence and it remains a compelling account of poetry in the vernacular. Chaucer’s _HF_ is a vibrant exploration of writing, and after, what the poet ‘does’ and what then happens to that text. It is a revolutionary piece of English writing.

**On Dante, see:**


Marianne Shapiro, _De vulgari eloquentia: Dante’s Book of Exile_ (Lincoln, Neb.; London: University of


**On Chaucer, see:**

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, ed. by Nick Havely, Durham Medieval and Renaissance Texts, 3, 2nd edn, (Durham & Toronto: Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Durham University / Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2013); obviously the edition in *The Riverside Chaucer* is also excellent, and also recommended.


**Week 5**

**4 Poetry and Manuscript Culture in Early Modern England (Richard Rowland)**

In this seminar we will begin by looking at poetry from the court of Henry VIII, exploring especially poems – including some by Thomas Wyatt – found in the Devonshire Manuscript, and we will think about the involvement of women in the compilation and transmission of this verse. We will be working largely with photocopies which will be distributed in the previous seminar, but it would be helpful to read some poems in advance: Wyatt’s ‘Whoso list to hunt’ and ‘They flee from me’, and, from the Devonshire MS, ‘Take hede be tyme leste ye be spyede’, and ‘Suffryng in sorow’; the latter can be found here:

file:///C:/Users/user/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/Temporary%20Internet%20Files/Content.IE5/DNXNDBRX/46.pdf

We shall pause briefly to look also at a couple of Shakespeare sonnets (2 and 29), and Donne’s ‘Valediction Forbidding Mourning’, before moving on to explore some poems from the beginning of the seventeenth century by Anne Southwell, and from the end of that century by Jane Barker; copies of all these will be provided.

**Background Reading**

According to Alfred Tennyson’s friend Arthur Henry Hallam, Keats and Shelley were, ‘both poets of sensation rather than reflection. Susceptible of the slightest impulse from external nature, their fine organs trembled into emotion at colours, and sounds, and movements, unperceived or unregarded by duller temperaments. Rich and clear were their perceptions of visible forms; full and deep their feelings of music. So vivid was the delight attending the simple exertions of eye and ear, that it became mingled more and more with their train of active thought, and tended to absorb their whole being into the energy of sense…’. Working from this famous quotation, this session will look at the English poetry of sensation as it moved from Romantic to early Victorian, testing ideas of the energy of sense and its companion, wallowing and idleness. It will end looking forward to the decadence imported into English poetry from symbolism and German idealist thought.


**Alfred Tennyson**, ‘A Spirit Haunts the Year’s Last Hours’; ‘The Lotos-Eaters’; ‘Tears Idle Tears’


Week 8 Modernist poetics: Eliot, Pound, Moore, Williams, Stein, Bishop, Stevens (Nicoletta Asciuto)

The seminar will address poems and statements of poetics by T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, using a selection of representative poems from 1910 to 1930 which embody a distinctive new American poetic for the twentieth century. These will be circulated in digital form on VLE, and include poems which bear on classical tradition.

Robert Frost, ‘The Figure a Poem Makes’ (1939) from *Collected Prose of Robert Frost* ed Mark Richardson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010)


Marianne Moore, ‘Poetry’ (1921)


Wallace Stevens, ‘The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words’ in *The Necessary Angel* (Knopf, 1951)

William Carlos Williams, ‘The Poem as a Field of Action’ from *Selected Essays* (New Directions, 1954)


Poems


Robert Frost, ‘The Oven Bird’, ‘To E.T.’, ‘For Once then Something’, ‘The Road not Taken’

Editions


*Secondary Reading*


**Week 9**

**The Place for Contemporary Poetry: Don Paterson and Ben Lerner**

(JT Welsch)

Amidst the endless run of think-pieces on the alleged death of poetry, we'll consider the case made for contemporary poetics by Don Paterson and Ben Lerner.

Don Paterson is unusual among contemporary poets in that, in addition to being one of the country's leading writers of lyric poetry and the editor of one of its most influential poetry publishing operations, Picador, he is developing a sophisticated theory of the lyric, which will finally appear as *Ars Poetica* in 2017. The US poet and novelist Ben Lerner has gained enormous praise for his poetry collections and especially his autobiographical fiction (which includes
Earlier this year, he was awarded a MacArthur ‘Genius’ grant ($625k over 5 years) to develop his work further. This summer also saw publication of his essay, *The Hatred of Poetry*.

In this seminar, we’ll compare Paterson’s argument for language’s ‘natural’ power and Lerner’s more idealistic notion of poetry’s failures, reading a selection of each poet’s critical writing:


- Paterson, ‘The Dark Art of Poetry’ (TS Eliot Lecture, November 2004). (Electronic copy VLE – and link to the lecture)

  *The Hatred of Poetry* (Fitzcaralldo Editions, 2016). An expanded version of ‘Diary’ in *LRB*.

In addition to these, we’ll consider examples from Paterson and Lerner’s own poetry (photocopies to be provided). Please also read:

- Selections from Don Paterson, *Rain* (Faber, 2009) and Ben Lerner, *Mean Free Path* (2010). (Photocopies provided.)


Further Reading:

- Derek Attridge, ‘Don Paterson’s *Ars Poetica*’ (pp. 21-33) and ‘Form in Poetry: An Interview between Don Paterson and Derek Attridge’ (pp. 75-84), in *Don Paterson: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Natalie Pollard (Edinburgh UP, 2014).

**Week 10 The Contemporary Lyric II (Hugh Haughton):**

We will look at recent theories of lyric as well as contemporary poems by Anne Carson, Louise Gluck, F.R. Langley, Geoffrey Hill, Denise Riley, Paul Muldoon, Alice Oswald and others, including the large-scale documentary makeover of lyric in Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Penguin, 2014). Our terms of reference will come from critical and theoretical essays in the volumes below.


H.H.