POETRY AND POETICS: CORE COURSE  
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 Wednesdays from Week 2 to 10 in BS/007 with the exception of Week 6, which is a reading week.

Week 2


   We will circulate digital versions of the critical essays and we will then look at a small number of poems by Seamus Heaney, including ‘Personal Helicon’, ‘Broagh’, ‘Exposure’, ‘Alphabets’, a set of ‘Glanmore Sonnets’ and ‘The Riverbank Field’ (which hinges on a contemporary Irish reading of Virgil’s *Aeneid*). This will be the main focus. However, for those interested in a broader, non-European angle on tradition and contemporary talent, you should also look at a section of Derek Walcott’s long poem *Omeros* as a take on Homeric epic viewed from the modern Caribbean, and read the essay by Jahan Ramazani.
See also,

**Week 3 (Tuesday 10:00-12:00 in V/C/109.)**

2  Classical Poetics: Catullus, Horace (Odes), and the Latin Lyric (Brian Cummings)

*Primary Reading*

Read as widely as you can in the two poets, using a translation that keeps fairly close to the Latin, e.g. Guy Lee for both poets, David West for Horace's Odes.

We will look more closely at Catullus 11 and 51 (the latter a translation of a famous poem by Sappho, parodied by Horace, Odes 1.13) and at two or three of Horace's Odes chosen from the following: 1. 4 (*a carpe diem* poem like Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'; 1.5 (translation by Milton); 1.6 (lyric versus epic); 1.9 (translation by Dryden); 1. 37 (recalled in Marvell's 'Horatian Ode'); 2. 5; 3. 13; 3. 29 (translation by Dryden, imitation by Tennyson 'To the Rev. F. D. Maurice'); 4.1 (translation by Ben Jonson, imitation by Pope); 4.2 (high and low, Pindar and Horace).

*Secondary Reading*

One set of questions revolve around differences and continuities between ancient and modern (genre, rhetoric, poetics).

A good place to start would be two chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Lyric*, ed. F. Budelmann ( 2008, available online): 18 by A. Barchiesi on lyric in Rome, 21 by M. Silk 'Lyric and lyrics, perspectives ancient and modern'.

Two volumes in the Penguin series 'Poets in Translation', *Catullus in English* ed. J. H. Gaisser (2001) and *Horace in English* (1996) - the latter with a particularly good introduction - contain an excellent selection of translations and imitations.


T. S. Eliot's famous essay 'Andrew Marvell' contains many relevant insights and can easily be found on the internet.

See also Michael Putnam, *Poetic Interplay: Catullus and Horace* (2006).]
Week 4

3 Dante’s *De Vulgari Eloquentia* and Chaucer’s *House of Fame*. (David Bowe, Somerville College, Oxford)

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:


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

The Renaissance and the invention of English poetry: Sidney, Puttenham, Shakespeare (Brian Cummings)
Renaissance Poetics and English Renaissance Poetry

Professor Brian Cummings

In this seminar we will consider the revival of classical forms and debates about poetry in the English Renaissance alongside new models of English poetic form. The wider context for this is the European humanist revival of ancient learning and its neo-classical reformulation. A seminal moment is the rediscovery of Aristotle’s *Poetics* in the new Latin version of Giorgio Valla in 1498, followed by the Greek edition produced by Aldus Manutius in Venice in 1508. This coincided with other intellectual movements, including a reformation of rhetorical theory, and an efflorescence of vernacular poetic experiment, motivated by the fashion for Petrarch as well as by the desire to imitate Virgil or Ovid.

We will concentrate our attention on three features of these powerful new movements in the theory and composition of poetry. (1) The concept of *mimesis* in Aristotle, and its relationship to the Latin term *imitatio*. This involves two ideas, distinct in meaning but conflated because of the pun in the Latin term: the ‘imitation’ of a previous model (whether of a poet or an individual poem) in the making of a new work; and the ‘imitation’ of the world (or of things in the world) in the imaginative fiction created by poetry and poetic language. (2) An intense interest in the sixteenth century in poetic form, especially in classical metre and verse forms, and the friction created within vernacular poetry by such experiments. (3) A fascination with poetic metaphor and especially with figures of speech. This tradition was well-known from classical Latin treatises such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero’s *De Oratore*, and Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*. However, it gained new momentum from Erasmus’s dominance over the rhetorical syllabus of the sixteenth century, and from specialist treatises such as Julius Caesar Scaliger’s *Poetices* (1561), in which the argument about mimesis came full circle in an examination of metaphor, allegory and fiction.

While we will pay attention to the wider European context, the reading will be from the Elizabethan period, and will focus on three writers: Sir Philip Sidney, Sir Fulke Greville, and George Puttenham. The structure of the seminar will be based on three terms borrowed from each of the three books of Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589): *Imitation*, *Proportion*, and *Ornament*.

Editions:

*Sidney’s ‘Defence of Poesy’ and Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. G. Alexander (2004): Sidney’s *Defence*, with selections from Puttenham’s *Arte*


*Sidney, Poems*, ed. W. Ringler (1962): the numbering for all the poems are taken from here


I     Imitation

Sir Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poesy*, pp. 3-25

Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* (*A & S*), Nos. 1, 4, 34, 54, 59


II Proportion

Sidney, poems from *Old Arcadia* (*O.A*), Nos. 11 – 13

Sidney, *Certain Sonnets* (*C.S*), No. 5, 13-14

Greville, *Caelica*, No. 6


Derek Attridge, *Well-Weighed Syllables*, p. 173-87; 195-227

III Ornament


Sidney, *O.A*, Nos. 45 and 62

Sidney, *O.A*, No. 71 (compare Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, No. 332)


Sidney, *A & S*, Nos. 33, 47, 108

Fulke Greville, *Caelica*, No. 56

Use the short guide to figures of speech in Vickers, *Defence of Rhetoric*, pp. 391-8; and for longer explanations, Lanham, *Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*

Empson, *Seven Types*, pp. 45-50

Bibliography


Alexander, Introduction to *Sidney’s Defence and Selected Renaissance Criticism* (see above)


Week 6  READING WEEK

Week 7 Keats and Tennyson: Poets of Sensation (Matthew Campbell)

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 form 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’


Isobel Armstrong, Victorian Poetry (1993)


Robert Douglas Fairhurst and Seamus Perry, Tennyson Among the Poets (2009)
Week 8  Modernist poetics: Eliot, Pound, Moore, Williams, Stein, Bishop, Stevens (Hugh Haughton)

The seminar will address some major statements of poetics by Pound, Stein, Williams and Stevens, as well as a selection of representative poems from 1910 to 1930 which appear to incarnate a distinctive American poetic for the twentieth century. These will be circulated in digital form in advance, and include poems which bear on classical tradition.

Elizabeth Bishop, ‘Poem’

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)

Gertrude Stein, ‘Composition as Explanation’ (1925) from Gertrude Stein

Poems


William Carlos Williams, ‘The Great Figure’, ‘So much depends’. ‘The crowd at the ball-game’, ‘Between Walls’. ‘This is just to say’, ‘To Elsie’, ‘Sonnet in search of an author’

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

Secondary Reading:


Week 9  Don Paterson and the Contemporary Lyric Poetry (JT Welsch)

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. This will finally appear as *Ars Poetica* in 2017, but he has published pieces of his work in progress, which constitute a significant extension of, and sometimes challenge to, existing theories. In this regard, we will also consider contemporary lyric poetry in relation to the distinction Paterson makes between ‘mainstream’ and what he refers to as ‘Postmodern’ poetry.

For starting points, we'll focus at two examples of Paterson’s lyric theory, original published in two two-part essays in *Poetry Review*. Copies of these essays will be provided:


In relation to his theories, we'll consider some examples of Paterson’s own poetry, from his collection *Rain* (Faber, 2009) – copies of individual poems to be provided, although you are encouraged to look at the collection as a whole.

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).


Don Paterson – ‘The Domain of the Poem’ Oxford Podcasts: [https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/people/don-paterson](https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/people/don-paterson)


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

We will look at poems by Anne Carson, Louise Gluck, Geoffrey Hill, Denise Riley, Paul Muldoon, Alice Oswald and others, while also looking at metamorphoses of classical lyric such as Carson’s translations of Sappho and 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.