POETRY AND POETICS: CORE COURSE: AUTUMN 2019
Convenor: Hugh Haughton

General Reading on Poetry and Poetics:

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

Seminars for the Core Course will be on Monday mornings from 11.00 to 1.00 in the Spring Lane Building, SLB/106 weekly from Monday 7th October to Monday 2nd December – with the exception of Reading Week (4th November) when there will be no seminar.

**Week 2**


Derek Walcott, ‘What the Twilight Said’ from *What the Twilight Said* (London: Faber, 1999) VLE


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 contemporary 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’, ‘Broagh’, ‘Exposure’, ‘Alphabets’, ‘Glannmore 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*.

Two of these poems respond to Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which will be the focus of the second seminar.

See also,


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

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:


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, *OA*, Nos. 45 and 62

Sidney, *OA*, 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)


Empson, William, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930)


**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 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’

**Arthur Henry Hallam.** ‘On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry and the Lyric Poems of Alfred Tennyson’


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**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

Alex Davis ed., Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry (Cambridge: CUP, 2007)


**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 poetry). 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* (Fitzcaraldo 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  (Hugh Haughton):**

Beginning with some poems by W.S. Graham, 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, John Burnside, R.F. Langley, Don Paterson, 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, and readings will be made available through an on-line anthology.


H.H.