

**London South Bank**  
University

# Module Guide

Understanding Poetry

AME-4-UNP

School of Arts and Creative  
Industries

2017-2018

Level 4

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## 1. MODULE DETAILS

<b>Module Title:</b>	Understanding Poetry
<b>Module Level:</b>	Level 4
<b>Module Reference Number:</b>	AME-4-UNP
<b>Credit Value:</b>	20
<b>Student Study Hours:</b>	150
<b>Contact Hours:</b>	60
<b>Private Study Hours:</b>	90
<b>Pre-requisite Learning (If applicable):</b>	
<b>Co-requisite Modules (If applicable):</b>	
<b>Course(s):</b>	English with Creative Writing/Drama and Performance/Media Studies/Film Studies
<b>Year and Semester</b>	Year 1: Semester 1 (2017-18)
<b>Module Coordinator:</b>	Dr Henderson Downing
<b>MC Contact Details (Tel, Email, Room)</b>	<a href="mailto:downingh@lsbu.ac.uk">downingh@lsbu.ac.uk</a>
<b>Teaching Team &amp; Contact Details (If applicable):</b>	
<b>Subject Area:</b>	English Studies
<b>Summary of Assessment Method:</b>	Presentations and a 1500 word paper (50%) 1 x 2 hour exam (50%)

## 2. SHORT DESCRIPTION

Understanding Poetry introduces key terms and techniques for developing the necessary intellectual and practical skills for critically engaging in poetic analysis. Students will encounter a wide range of poetic discourses and different poetic styles which will be situated within the cultural and historical contexts of the poets and the periods studied.

## 3. AIMS OF THE MODULE

- To explore a wide range of poetry written in English and to familiarise students with a wide range of poetic discourses
- To enable students to identify a selection of poetic styles and registers
- To enable students to write critically and analytically about a wide variety of poetry in English
- To introduce students to a selection of poetry from various periods ranging from Shakespeare's sonnets to twenty-first century lyrics
- To equip students with the skills to read independently poetry with which they are unfamiliar

## 4. LEARNING OUTCOMES

### 4.1 Knowledge and Understanding

- Critically engage with the critical vocabulary of poetic analysis in oral presentations and in writing

- Identify the basic forms of poetry written in English
- Construct a critical response to a selection of poetry in relation to their cultural and historical contexts

#### 4.2 Intellectual Skills

- Demonstrate critical skills in the close reading and analysis of texts
- Respond orally and in writing to the linguistic features of poetry
- Discuss examples of poetic production using appropriate critical terminology
- Develop an ability to use precise linguistic and critical terminology appropriate to an academic discussion of poetry

#### 4.3 Practical Skills

- Use the critical vocabulary of poetic analysis in written and oral assignments
- Produce coherent and accurately written analysis of specific poetic texts

#### 4.4 Transferable Skills

- Deliver clear and confidently expressed oral presentations
- Compose fluent and accurately written assessments
- Respond to tasks under pressure and within specific time limits
- Work effectively in groups

## 5. ASSESSMENT OF THE MODULE

1 X Presentation and 1 x 1500 word assignment based on your presentation. The assignment should be an extension and development of your presentation. (50%)

1 x 2 hour exam. You will be asked to answer 2 questions in 2 hours. (50%)

## 6. FEEDBACK

Feedback on presentations will focus on the strengths and needs of each individual. Feedback on the assignment will be given within 15 working days of the assignment deadline.

## 7. INTRODUCTION TO STUDYING THE MODULE

### 7.1 Overview of the Main Content

The first four sessions of the module introduce key terms and techniques for developing the intellectual and practical skills for critically engaging in poetic

analysis. These sessions juxtapose poems from earlier periods with more contemporary work as a way of familiarising students with a wide range of poetic discourses and different poetic styles. The majority of the remaining sessions focus on particular periods, including the Augustan poetry of the early eighteenth-century, the Romantic poetry of the nineteenth century, and Modernist poetry in the early twentieth century. These sessions will position the poems and poets under discussion into their socio-historical and cultural contexts. This will enable us to explore how the legacies of various poetic movements contribute to understanding poetry in the twenty-first century.

## 7.2 Overview of Types of Classes

1 x 1 hour lecture  
2 x 1 hour seminar

Each lecture provides background information and historical context for understanding the primary topic of each week's session as well as introducing various poems and poets. The seminars provide a forum for a close reading of individual poems from which ideas suggested by the topic of the lecture can be more fully explored and developed.

## 7.3 Importance of Student Self-Managed Learning Time

Students will be given poems and other related material to read in preparation for each week's lecture. Students will also be required to read critical essays and familiarise themselves with the study and language of poetics. This preparation will considerably enhance the quality of the seminars where each student will be expected to contribute to a focused discussion of ideas prompted by the topics covered in the lectures.

# 8. THE PROGRAMME OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

### **Week 1) Introduction**

As an introduction to studying poetry in London, we will look at a selection of poems that feature the city as a common setting, navigating across two centuries (and drifting along the South Bank) from William Wordsworth's 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge' to Patience Agbabi's 'The London Eye'. By identifying the disparate visions of the metropolis in various poetic representations of London we will begin to identify the critical skills for poetic analysis that will be developed throughout the module.

Note: As a useful preparation for subsequent sessions, read the specific sections detailed below from the anthology *An Introduction to Poetry*, edited by X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia.

## **Week 2) Voice and Tone**

Whose voice speaks to us when we read a poem? How do we interpret the tone of that voice? How do voice and tone contribute to our understanding of the attitude being conveyed within the poem to its themes or topics? This session will attempt to answer these and other interrelated questions through a close analysis and discussion of a range of poems and poets from John Donne to Carol Ann Duffy.

*An Introduction to Poetry:* focus on 'The Person in the Poem' section of the 'Listening Voice' chapter and also the 'Literal Meaning: What a Poem Says First' and 'The Value of a Dictionary' sections in the 'Words' chapter.

## **Week 3) Form and Metre**

This week we will repeatedly encounter love and death in fourteen lines of poetry as we explore ideas of form and metre. Extending the analytical skills and critical vocabulary developed during the first two weeks, we will identify and track the sonnet as a verse form that recurs across the span of several centuries. This will include a comparative analysis of sonnets by William Shakespeare as well as sonnets by more contemporary poets. We will also address the importance of metre for understanding the rhythm and structure of poetry.

*An Introduction to Poetry:* focus on 'The Sonnet' section in the 'Closed Form' chapter.

## **Week 4) Image and Symbol**

The poet Ezra Pound defined an 'image' as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'. We will test Pound's definition against his own poetry before voyaging into the twin realms of imagery and the symbolic with William Carlos Williams, Billy Collins, and William Blake.

*An Introduction to Poetry:* focus on the 'Imagery' and 'Symbol' chapters.

## **Week 5) Modernism**

One of the difficulties that confront the reader of modernist poetry involves locating who is speaking. The modernist writing self is often fragmented, alienated from its surroundings, particularly when those surroundings are the modern metropolis with its historical complexity and labyrinthine strangeness, its constant psychical and sensory bombardment. In this session we will analyse several of the primary characteristics of twentieth-century Modernism through a discussion of extracts from T. S. Eliot's 'The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock' and *The Waste Land*.

*An Introduction to Poetry:* focus on the 'Open Form' chapter. As preparation for this session, read Eliot's influential essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'.

## **Week 6) Reading Week**

There will be no lecture or seminar in week 6.

## **Week 7) Presentations**

There will be no lecture or seminar in week 7. Students will give their presentations.

### **Week 8) Modernism and After**

A century or so after the period of high modernism, the diverse legacies of poets such as Pound and Eliot remain points of contestation. In this session we will consider the competing critical reactions to modernist poetry in the second half of the twentieth century – discussing poems by Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes, and Sylvia Plath. We will then trace how these reactions have shaped poetry in the new millennium.

### **Week 9) American Poetry**

This session provides an introduction to American poetry through the recurring theme of song and its relation to identity. We will track the convergences and divergences between the work of various American poets including Emily Dickinson, Langston Hughes, Allen Ginsberg, and Maggie Nelson.

*An Introduction to Poetry*: focus on the ‘Two Critical Casebooks’ chapter.

### **Week 10) The Romantics**

This session will introduce some of the major poets of the Romantic period and position their work within its cultural and historical context. We will discuss William Wordsworth’s influential Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (a collection of poems by Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge) and the poetry of William Blake before engaging in a close analysis of poems by John Keats.

*An Introduction to Poetry*: focus on the ‘Reading a Poem’ chapter. As further preparation for this session, read Wordsworth’s ‘Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*’.

### **Week 11) The Augustans**

As an introduction to the poetry of the Augustan period and its historical context, we will look at excerpts from Alexander Pope’s mock-epic poem *The Rape of the Lock*. According to T. S. Eliot, ‘unless we are able to enjoy the work of Pope, we cannot arrive at a full understanding of English poetry’. We will interrogate Eliot’s claim by asking what kind of connections can be made between *The Rape of the Lock* and other poems studied in previous weeks. This will not only refresh our memories regarding the contents of the module, but also prompt us to consider the ways in which the poems we have discussed enter into dialogue with each other and with our own reading practices.

### **Week 12) Module Review/Exam Revision.**

This session will include a one hour ‘mock’ exam as well as a chance to review the material covered during the module in relation to exam revision.

## **9. LEARNING RESOURCES**

### **9.1 Core Materials**

X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia (eds) *An Introduction to Poetry* (any edition, but the later the better)

As detailed above, this anthology of poems and introductory essays provides a useful critical companion to the topics covered in the module.

To fulfil the requirements of the group assignment and to prepare for the exam, you will also be expected to read more of the work of those poets studied on the module than the individual poems covered in the lectures and seminars.

## 9.2 Optional Materials

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| Attridge, Derek 1995                     | <i>Poetic Rhythm</i> , Cambridge, Cambridge University Press   |
| Barnet, Sylvan 2004                      | <i>An Introduction to Literature: Fiction, Poetry, Drama</i> , New York, Longman                     |
| Corcoran, Neil, ed., 2003                | <i>The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry</i> . Cambridge, Cambridge University |
| Day, Aidan, 1998                         | <i>Romanticism</i> , London, Routledge   |
| Easthope, Anthony 2003                   | <i>Poetry as Discourse</i> , London, Routledge   |
| Eliot, T. S. 1997                        | <i>The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism</i> , London, Faber                               |
| Fenton, James 2003                       | <i>An Introduction to English Poetry</i> , London, Penguin   |
| Fenton, James 2003                       | <i>The Strength of Poetry</i> , Oxford, Oxford University Press                                      |
| Hobsbaum, Philip 1996                    | <i>Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form</i> , London, Routledge  |
| Lennard, John 1996                       | <i>The Poetry Handbook</i> , Oxford, Oxford University Press   |
| Moody, A. D., ed. 1994                   | <i>The Cambridge Companion to T. S. Eliot</i> , Cambridge, Cambridge University                      |
| Nelson, Cary, ed., 2012                  | <i>The Oxford Handbook of Modern and Contemporary American Poetry</i> , Oxford, Oxford University    |
| O'Flinn, Paul 2001                       | <i>How to Study Romantic Poetry</i> , Basingstoke, Palgrave  |
| Padel, Ruth 2004                         | <i>52 Ways of Looking at a Poem</i> , London, Vintage  |
| Roberts, Neil, ed., 2001                 | <i>A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry</i> . Oxford: Blackwell                                   |
| Robinson, Daniel 2010                    | <i>William Wordsworth's Poetry: A Reader's Guide</i> , London: Continuum                             |
| Spurr, Barry, 2006                       | <i>Studying Poetry</i> , Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan   |
| Strand, Mark and Eavan Boland, eds, 2000 | <i>The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms</i> . New York, Norton                   |
| Wolosky, Shira 2001                      | <i>The Art of Poetry: How to Read a Poem</i> , Oxford, Oxford University Press                       |

Please note that you are not expected to read all of the material on this reading list. However, as many of these books cover the poets and topics that you will encounter on this module, it is worth familiarising yourself with their contents. This will enable you to deepen your research into those aspects of the module that you plan to address in your presentation, essay, and exam revision.

## 10. POEMS

### Week 1: Introduction

1) 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802'

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty:  
This City now doth, like a garment, wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
Never did sun more beautifully steep  
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;  
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;  
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

William Wordsworth (1807)

2) 'The London Eye'

Through my gold-tinted Gucci sunglasses,  
the sightseers. Big Ben's quarter chime  
strikes the convoy of number 12 buses  
that bleeds into the city's monochrome.

Through somebody's zoom lens, me shouting  
to you, *Hello! . . . on . . . bridge . . . 'minster!*  
The aerial view postcard, the man writing  
squat words like black cabs in rush hour.

The South Bank buzzes with a rising treble.  
You kiss my cheek, formal as a blind date.  
We enter Cupid's capsule, a thought bubble  
where I think, 'Space age!', you think, 'She was late.'

Big Ben strikes six. My SKIN .Beat™ blinks, replies  
18.02. We're moving anticlockwise.

Patience Agbabi (2008)



## Week 2: Voice and Tone

### 1) 'My Papa's Waltz'

The whiskey on your breath  
Could make a small boy dizzy;  
But I hung on like death:  
Such waltzing was not easy.

We romped until the pans  
Slid from the kitchen shelf;  
My mother's countenance  
Could not unfrown itself.

The hand that held my wrist  
Was battered on one knuckle;  
At every step you missed  
My right ear scraped a buckle.

You beat time on my head  
With a palm caked hard by dirt,  
Then waltzed me off to bed  
Still clinging to your shirt.

Theodore Roethke (1948)

### 2) 'This Be The Verse'

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.  
They may not mean to, but they do.  
They fill you with the faults they had  
And add some extra just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn  
By fools in old-style hats and coats.  
Who half the time were sappy-stern  
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.  
It deepens like a coastal shelf.  
Get out as early as you can,  
And don't have any kids yourself.

Philip Larkin (1971)

3) 'The Flea'

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is;  
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;  
    Yet this enjoys before it woo,  
    And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two;  
    And this, alas! is more than we would do.

O stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.  
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,  
And cloister'd in these living walls of jet.  
    Though use make you apt to kill me,  
    Let not to that self-murder added be,  
    And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since  
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?  
Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee?  
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou  
Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now.  
'Tis true ; then learn how false fears be;  
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,  
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

John Donne (1633)

4) 'Mrs Darwin'

*7 April 1852.*

Went to the Zoo.

I said to Him –

Something about that Chimpanzee over there reminds  
me of you.

Carol Ann Duffy (1994)

5) 'Hawk Roosting'

I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.

Inaction, no falsifying dream

Between my hooked head and hooked feet:

Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.

The convenience of the high trees!

The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray

Are of advantage to me;

And the earth's face upward for my inspection.

My feet are locked upon the rough bark.

It took the whole of Creation

To produce my foot, my each feather:

Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly -

I kill where I please because it is all mine.

There is no sophistry in my body:

My manners are tearing off heads -

The allotment of death.

For the one path of my flight is direct

Through the bones of the living.

No arguments assert my right:

The sun is behind me.

Nothing has changed since I began.

My eye has permitted no change.

I am going to keep things like this.

Ted Hughes (1960)

### Week Three: Form and Metre – The Sonnet

#### 1) 'Death be not proud' (from *Holy Sonnets*)

Death be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so,  
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,  
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me;  
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,  
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,  
And soonest our best men with thee do go,  
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.  
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,  
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,  
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,  
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?  
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,  
And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.

John Donne (c. 1610)

#### 2) 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells,  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, -  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.  
What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds.

Wilfred Owen (c. 1917)

### 3) 'Leda and the Swan'

A sudden blow: the great wings beating still  
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed  
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,  
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.

How can those terrified vague fingers push  
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?  
And how can body, laid in that white rush,  
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?

A shudder in the loins engenders there  
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower  
And Agamemnon dead.

    Being so caught up,  
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,  
Did she put on his knowledge with his power  
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

W. B. Yeats (1924)

### 4) 'Anne Hathaway'

*'Item I gyve unto my wife my second best bed ...'*  
(from Shakespeare's will)

The bed we loved in was a spinning world  
of forests, castles, torchlight, clifftops, seas  
where we would dive for pearls. My lover's words  
were shooting stars which fell to earth as kisses  
on these lips; my body now a softer rhyme  
to his, now echo, assonance; his touch  
a verb dancing in the centre of a noun.  
Some nights, I dreamed he'd written me, the bed  
a page beneath his writer's hands. Romance  
and drama played by touch, by scent, by taste.  
In the other bed, the best, our guests dozed on,  
dribbling their prose. My living laughing love -  
I hold him in the casket of my widow's head  
as he held me upon that next best bed.

Carol Ann Duffy (1999)

## 5) Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;  
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,  
By chance or nature's changing course untrimmed.  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
Nor shall Death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st.  
    So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
    So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

William Shakespeare (1609)

## 6) Sonnet 130

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;  
I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.  
    And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
    As any she belied with false compare.

William Shakespeare (1609)



## 5) 'Introduction to Poetry'

I ask them to take a poem  
and hold it up to the light  
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem  
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room  
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope  
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose  
to find out what it really means.

Billy Collins (1988)

## 6) 'Embrace'

You know the parlor trick.  
Wrap your arms around your own body  
and from the back it looks like  
someone is embracing you,  
her hands grasping your shirt,  
her fingernails teasing your neck.

From the front it is another story.  
You never looked so alone,  
your crossed elbows and screwy grin.  
You could be waiting for a tailor  
to fit you for a straitjacket,  
one that would hold you really tight.

Billy Collins (1988)

## 7) 'Ozymandias'

I met a traveller from an antique land  
Who said: "Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:  
And on the pedestal these words appear:  
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1818)

## 8) 'Text'

I tend the mobile now  
like an injured bird.

We text, text, text  
our significant words.

I re-read your first,  
your second, your third,

look for your small xx,  
feeling absurd.

The codes we send  
arrive with a broken chord.

I try to picture your hands,  
their image is blurred.

Nothing my thumbs press  
will ever be heard.

Carol Ann Duffy (2005)

## Week 5: Modernism

### 1) 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table;  
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
The muttering retreats  
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:  
Streets that follow like a tedious argument  
Of insidious intent  
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .  
Oh. Do not ask, 'What is it?'  
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo [. . .]

And indeed there will be time  
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street  
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;  
There will be time, there will be time  
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;  
There will be time to murder and create,  
And time for all the works and days of hands  
That lift and drop a question on your plate;  
Time for you and time for me,  
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,  
And for a hundred visions and revisions,  
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'  
Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair –  
(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')  
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin –  
(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')  
Do I dare

Disturb the universe?  
In a minute there is time  
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all –  
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,  
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;  
I know the voices dying with a dying fall  
Beneath the music from a farther room.  
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all –  
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,  
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,  
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,  
Then how should I begin  
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?  
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all –  
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare  
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)  
Is it perfume from a dress  
That makes me so digress?  
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.  
And should I then presume?  
And how should I begin? [. . .]

No!. I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do  
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,  
Deferential, glad to be of use,  
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;  
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;  
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous –  
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.  
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves  
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back  
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

T. S. Eliot (1915)

### **Week 6: Reading Week**

### **Week 7: Presentations**

### **Week 8: Modernism and After**

Poems for this session will be distributed before the Reading Week.

### **Week 9: 'I Too, Sing America'**

#### 1) 'I, Too'

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed –

I, too am America.

Langston Hughes (1926)

2) 'The Weary Blues'

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,  
Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,  
    I heard a Negro play.  
Down on Lennox Avenue the other night  
By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light  
    He did a lazy sway . . .  
    He did a lazy sway . . .  
To the tune of those Weary Blues.  
With his ebony hands on each ivory key  
He made that poor piano moan with melancholy.  
    O Blues!  
Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool  
He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.  
    Sweet Blues!  
Coming from a black man's soul.  
    O Blues!  
In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone  
I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan –  
    "Ain't got nobody in all this world,  
    Ain't got nobody but ma self.  
    I's gwine to quit ma frownin'  
    And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.  
He played a few chords then he sang some more –  
    "I got the Weary Blues  
    And I can't be satisfied.  
    Got the Weary Blues  
    And can't be satisfied –  
    I ain't happy no mo'  
    And I wish that I had died."

And far into the night he crooned that tune.  
The stars went out and so did the moon.  
The singer stopped playing and went to bed  
While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.  
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

Langston Hughes (1926)

### 3) 'America'

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.  
America two dollars and twenty seven cents January 17, 1956.  
I can't stand my own mind.  
America when will we end the human war?  
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.  
I don't feel good don't bother me.  
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.  
America when will you be angelic?  
When will you take off your clothes?  
When will you look at yourself through the grave?  
When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?  
America why are your libraries full of tears?  
America when will you send your eggs to India?  
I'm sick of your insane demands.  
When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my good looks?  
America after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world.  
Your machinery is too much for me.  
You made me want to be a saint.  
There must be some other way to settle this argument.  
Burroughs is in Tangiers I don't think he'll come back it's sinister.  
Are you being sinister or is this some form of practical joke?  
I'm trying to come to the point.  
I refuse to give up my obsession.  
America stop pushing I know what I'm doing.  
America the plum blossoms are falling.  
I haven't read the newspapers for months, everyday somebody goes on trial for murder.  
America I feel sentimental about the Wobblies.  
America I used to be a communist when I was a kid I'm not sorry.  
I smoke marijuana every chance I get.  
I sit in my house for days on end and stare at the roses in the closet.  
When I go to Chinatown I get drunk and never get laid.  
My mind is made up there's going to be trouble.  
You should have seen me reading Marx.  
My psychoanalyst thinks I'm perfectly right.  
I won't say the Lord's Prayer.  
I have mystical visions and cosmic vibrations.  
America I still haven't told you what you did to Uncle Max after he came  
over from Russia.  
I'm addressing you.  
Are you going to let your emotional life be run by Time Magazine?  
I'm obsessed by Time Magazine.  
I read it every week.  
Its cover stares at me every time I slink past the corner candystore.

I read it in the basement of the Berkeley Public Library.  
It's always telling me about responsibility. Businessmen are serious.  
Movie producers are serious. Everybody's serious but me.  
It occurs to me that I am America.  
I am talking to myself again [ . . . ]

Allen Ginsberg (1956)

4) 'Because I could not stop for Death'

Because I could not stop for Death –  
He kindly stopped for me –  
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –  
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste  
And I had put away  
My labor and my leisure too,  
For his Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove  
At Recess – in the Ring –  
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –  
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –  
The Dews drew quivering and chill –  
For only Gossamer, my Gown –  
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed  
A Swelling of the Ground –  
The Roof was scarcely visible –  
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet  
Feels shorter than the Day  
I first surmised the Horses Heads  
Were towards Eternity –

Emily Dickinson (c. 1863)

5) 'I felt a Funeral, in my Brain'

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,  
And Mourners to and fro  
Kept treading – treading – till it seemed  
That Sense was breaking though –

And when they all were seated,  
A Service, like a Drum –  
Kept beating – beating – till I thought  
My Mind was going numb –

And then I heard them lift a Box  
And creak across my Soul  
With those same Boots of Lead, again,  
Then Space – began to toll

As all the Heavens were a Bell,  
And Being, but an Ear,  
And I, and Silence, some strange Race  
Wrecked, solitary, here –

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,  
And I dropped down, and down –  
And hit a World, at every plunge,  
And Finished knowing – then –

Emily Dickinson (c. 1863)

6) 'Spirit'

*The spirit of Jane*  
*lives on in you,*  
my mother says

trying to describe  
who I am. I feel like the girl  
in the late-night movie

who gazes up in horror  
at the portrait of  
her freaky ancestor

as she realizes

they wear the same  
gaudy pendant

round their necks.  
For as long as I can  
remember, my grandfather

has made the same slip:  
he sits in the kitchen,  
his gelatinous blue eyes

fixed on me. *Well Jane,*  
he says, *I think I'll have*  
*another cup of coffee.*

Maggie Nelson (2005)

7) 'Koan'  
from *Jane*

*Not yet, says*  
a scrap of garbage  
floated by

the wind.  
*Not yet, says*  
a limb of

lightning,  
shrouded by  
clouds.

*A girl in a boat,*  
*the boat full of holes.*  
Closer.

*A slit sky.*  
*A slit sky and a bowl.*  
Almost.

Maggie Nelson (2003)

## 8) 'Thanksgiving'

Can beauty save us? Yesterday  
I looked at the river and a sliver  
of moon and knew the answer;

today I fell asleep in a spot of sun  
behind a Vermont barn, woke to  
darkness, a thin whistle of wind

and the answer changed. Inside the barn  
the boys build bongos out of  
copper piping, electrical tape, and

jars. All the children here have  
leaky brown eyes, and a certain precision  
of gesture. Even the maple syrup

tastes like liquor. After dinner  
I sit the cutest little boy on my knee  
and read him a book about the history of cod

absentmindedly explaining overfishing,  
the slave trade. People for rum? He asks,  
incredulously. Yes, I nod. People for rum.

Maggie Nelson (2008)

## **Week 10: The Romantics**

### 1) 'The Sick Rose'

O Rose, thou art sick.  
The invisible worm  
That flies in the night  
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed  
Of crimson joy:  
And his dark secret love  
Does thy life destroy.

William Blake (1794)

## 2) 'London'

I wander through each chartered street  
Near where the chartered Thames does flow,  
And mark in every face I meet  
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every man,  
In every infant's cry of fear,  
In every voice, in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear –

How the chimney-sweeper's cry  
Every blackening church appalls,  
And the hapless soldier's sigh  
Runs in blood down palace walls;

But most through the midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful harlot's curse  
Blasts the new-born infant's tear  
And blights with plagues the marriage hearse.

William Blake (1794)

## 3) 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils,  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they  
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:-  
A poet could not but be gay

In such a jocund company:  
I gazed – and gazed – but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

William Wordsworth (1807)

#### 4) 'Ode On A Grecian Urn'

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,  
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express  
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,  
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?  
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:  
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave  
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;  
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,  
Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;  
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;  
And, happy melodist, unwearied,  
For ever piping songs for ever new;  
More happy love! more happy, happy love!  
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,  
For ever panting, and for ever young;  
All breathing human passion far above,

That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,  
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?

To what green altar, O mysterious priest,  
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,  
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?  
What little town by river or sea shore,  
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,  
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?  
And, little town, the streets for evermore  
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell  
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede  
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,  
With forest branches and the trodden weed;  
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought  
As doth Eternity: Cold Pastoral!  
When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,  
Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

John Keats (1820)

5) 'Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art – '

Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art –  
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night  
And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,  
The moving waters at their priestlike task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,  
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask  
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors –  
No – yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,  
Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,  
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
And so live ever – or else swoon to death.

John Keats (1819)

## **Week 11: The Augustans**

Extracts from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* will be given out in advance of the session on the Augustans.

## **Week 12: Module Review/Exam Revision**