

## Modern and Contemporary MPhil

### Cultures of Rhythm, 1840–1920

Convenor: Dr. Ewan Jones

**Introduction:** This seminar will trace the emergence and transformation of the concept of ‘rhythm’ across the period 1840–1920, and the manner in which this process draws literary culture into a sustained and complex engagement with other disciplinary forms. Rhythm might at first seem so pervasive a phenomenon as to be an unchanging, ahistorical entity; yet prior to the nineteenth century it is in fact conspicuous by its absence: eighteenth-century subjects use the term sparingly; and when they do employ it, they tend to mean something very different by it. As the concept became increasingly prominent across the nineteenth century, so did its potential applications multiply: it became, among other things, a means of understanding the specific laws of English poetry (in distinction to classical precedent); an indispensable resource for the developing sciences of heat, energy and thermodynamics; a means of understanding continuities and disjunctions of social experience; an opportunity to explore the normative or non-normative body; and part of a broader effort to recover cultural origin(s). This seminar will explore how literary culture contributed critically to such fields, with each seminar divided thematically in such a way that nevertheless produces a cumulative intellectual history. This itinerary—which cuts across the standard distinction between the Victorian and modernist periods—aims to put critical pressure on what the concept of rhythm can mean for our own cultural situation.

**Course Structure:** 6 x 1.5 seminars in weeks 1–6 of Lent Term. All primary materials will be uploaded onto Moodle in good time before the first session. Students should aim to read all of the core texts, and as much secondary material as is feasible. Each student will provide **one** written response to a week’s reading, and deliver **one** oral presentation.

**Essays:** Essays need not be confined to the material covered across the six seminars, but can range widely across both historical and discursive context. I will be happy to discuss prospective questions; all students planning to write a coursework essay for this seminar are encouraged to meet with me for a 30-minute supervision. The sixth and final seminar will feature an essay workshop.

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#### **Week One: Social Rhythms**

‘It is at least open to suggestion’, writes Geoffrey Hill, ‘that the [nineteenth century] was marked by a drastic breaking of tempo and by an equally severe disturbance of the supposedly normative patterns of speech’. This first seminar will consider the accuracy and nature of such a claim, during a period in which the concept of rhythm was for the first time being consistently employed as a means of relating individual and communal experiences. Poetry from the 1840s and 50s not only displayed a newfound appetite for engaging with contemporary social concerns, but also—and more pertinently—employed its intrinsic formal means so as to think such concerns differently. In this respect, we will consider work by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson and George Eliot, in its relation to political economy, metrical innovation and the social manifold.

#### **Core Reading:**

George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859), Chapters 17 & 18.

Alfred Tennyson, 'Locksley Hall' (1842); 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After' (1886)'.

Geoffrey Hill, 'Redeeming the Time', in *Geoffrey Hill: Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 88–108.

Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 49–81.

### **Secondary Reading:**

E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, 38 (December 1967), 56–97.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'Of the Refrain', in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1987), 310–350.

Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London: Routledge, 2004), 476–518.

### **Week Two: Physiological Rhythms**

Herbert Spencer was among the first Victorians to seize upon rhythm, as a means of tracing the development of art and culture to a physiological origin—an origin that Spencer deemed to be 'emotional human speech'. The following decades would extend and challenge this treatment of corporeality in a number of ways. While what became known as the 'fleshly school of poetry' has become a critical commonplace, this seminar will consider a number of lesser-known poets and thinkers, who explored the sensuous, erotic and devotional body in ways that often run counter to the standard account of Victorian culture. These include the poet and aphorist Coventry Patmore, most widely known for extended epithalamium *The Angel in the House*—a work that has, however, overshadowed his otherwise various and surprisingly corporeal output; and Alice Meynell, who both theorized and practiced rhythm as a peculiarly gendered aspect of experience.

### **Core Reading:**

Coventry Patmore, *The Unknown Eros* (1877), in *The Poems of Coventry Patmore*, ed. Frederick Page (London: Oxford University Press, 1949).

Alice Meynell, 'The Rhythm of Life', in *The Rhythm of Life and Other Essays* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893).

---, 'Renouncement', 'Cradle Song at Twilight', 'The Modern Mother', in *The Poems of Alice Meynell* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940).

Marcel Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body', *Economy and Society*, 2.1 (1973), 70–88.

Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 45-77.

### **Secondary Reading:**

Amittai F. Aviram, *Telling Rhythm: Body and Meaning in Poetry* (Ann Arbor, 1994), 223–246.

Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', *Signs* 7. 1 (Autumn, 1981), 13–35.

Herbert Spencer, 'The Origin and Function of Music' (1857).

Thomas Maitland [Robert Buchanan], 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti', *Contemporary Review* 18 (1871), 334–350.

### **Week Three: 'Primitive' Rhythms**

The discourse on rhythm was both nourished and troubled by increasing proto-anthropological research into so-called 'primitive' music. We will chart the passage of such ideas through the late nineteenth century drive to comprehend and chronicle folk traditions, be they recognisable precursors to contemporary vernacular forms (as in Frances James Child's monumental collection of English and Scottish ballads), or indigenous compositions that remain unassimilated to the Western tradition (as in native American songs and chants).

### **Core Reading:**

Francis Barton Gummere, 'Rhythm as the Essential Fact of Poetry', in *The Beginnings of Poetry* (1901), 30–115.

Susan Stewart, 'Scandals of the Ballad', *Representations*, 32 (Autumn 1990), 134–56.

*The path on the rainbow, an anthology of songs and chants from the Indians of North America*, ed. George W. Cronin (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1918 [extracts]).

Frances James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, 5 Vols. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1882–1898 [extracts]).

### **Secondary Reading:**

Mary Austin, *The American Rhythm: Studies and Reëxpressions of Amerindian Songs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 430), 1–43.

Richard Wallaschek, 'Origin of Music', in *Primitive Music* (London: 1893), 230–262.

T. S. Eliot, 'The Beating of a Drum', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 34. 1 (6 October 1923), 11–18.

### **Week Four: Scientific Rhythms**

### **Primary Reading:**

Over the second half of the nineteenth century, rhythm became increasingly important as a means of characterising the essence, properties and processes of phenomena previously inaccessible to scientific enquiry—phenomena that ranged from sound waves, to radiant light, to the second law of thermodynamics. ‘After having for some years supposed myself alone in the belief that all motion is rhythmical’, remarked Herbert Spencer, ‘I discovered that my friend Professor Tyndall also held this doctrine’. In demonstrating the breadth with which a rhythmical materialism could be applied, John Tyndall at the same time showed how frequently such scientific enquiry drew from and fed into verse culture. We will consider how the new sciences of acoustics and energy altered the structure of thought, on the level not just of philosophical speculation but also of immediate experience.

John Tyndall, *Sound* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867), 224–240; ‘The Belfast Address’, in *Fragments of Science* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1879).

Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and the Comfort of the Resurrection’.

Algernon Charles Swinburne, ‘The Garden of Proserpine’; ‘Discord’; ‘Concord’.

Veit Erlman, ‘The Labyrinth of Reason: Hermann von Helmholtz’s Physiological Acoustics and the Loss of Certainty’, in *Reason and Resonance* (New York: Zone, 2010), 217–270.

### **Secondary Reading:**

Edmund Gurney, *The Power of Sound* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1880 [extracts]).

Gillian Beer, ‘Helmholtz, Tyndall, Hopkins: Leaps of the Prepared Imagination’, *Comparative Literature* 13 (1992), 117–45.

Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, 1986), 20–51.

Sidney Lanier, *The Science of Verse* (New York: Scribner, 1909 [extracts]).

### **Week Five: Urban Rhythms**

Anglophone verse over the nineteenth century is notable for its exclusion of the city, which is all the more striking in comparison to the French tradition of Baudelaire and the symbolists. Yet this position changes radically on the cusp of the twentieth century, as a series of works explore the changing rhythms of urban modernity. We will consider Hope Mirrlees’s still-neglected *Paris: A Poem*, in this regard, in addition to the cues that such work may have taken from developments in the visual arts. Such work interrogates the feasibility of Henri Lefebvre’s intended science of ‘rhythmanalysis’: the study of society according to rhythmic continuity and change.

### **Core Texts:**

Hope Mirrlees, *Paris: A Poem* (1919).

Virginia Woolf, ‘Street Music’ (1905).

Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Continuum, 2004), 1–37.

### **Secondary Reading:**

Walter Benjamin, 'Toys and Play' (1930).

Daniel Tiffany, *Infidel Politics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 161–215.

Charles Madge & Humphrey Jennings, eds., *May the Twelfth, Mass-Observation Day-Surveys 1937, by over two hundred observers* (London: Faber and Faber 1937).

### **Week Six: Racial Rhythms**

This concluding seminar will investigate the complex and sustained relationship between modernist verse and racial theories of rhythm. That association cuts across standard distinctions between high and popular art forms: Mina Loy's *Anglo-Mongrels*, for instance, engages critically (if not always unproblematically) with the metropolitan, avant-garde discourse on race; while the debates between Countee Cullen, Sterling Brown and Langston Hughes demonstrated the perilous balance between nativist accounts of 'primal rhythm', on the one hand, and a reversion to extrinsic poetic 'tradition', on the other.

### **Primary Reading:**

Ben Glaser, 'Folk Iambics, Intertextuality, and Sterling Brown's Outline for the Study of the Poetry of American Negroes', *PMLA* 129. 3 (May 2014).

Mina Loy, 'Exodus' and 'English Rose', from *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose: 1923–1925*, in *The Last Lunar Bedeker* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982), 111–130.

Countee Cullen, *Caroling Dusk: An Anthology of Verse by Black Poets of the Twenties* (extracts).

Haun Saussy, *The Ethnography of Rhythm: Orality and its Technologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 127–155.

### **Secondary Reading:**

Aaron Copeland, 'Jazz Structure and Influence', *Aaron Copland: A Reader: Selected Writings 1923–1972* (Routledge, 2004), 83–87.

Michael Golston, *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry* (New York: 2008), 12–58.

Langston Hughes, *The First Book of Rhythm* (Franklin Watts: 1954 [extracts]).