News from the Faculty of English, Cambridge

9 WEST ROAD

vol. 17, spring 2018
Now one year into the post of Chair of the Faculty Board
I have a better sense of what is entailed. Meetings. Meetings.
Meetings. A typical day has at least one. Most have many
more. Why do academics spend so much time talking to each
other, usually in different buildings across the centre of
Cambridge, and frequently with the same people? Could we
not do it all at one time and in one place? Maybe just set aside
a whole, long day – say 8.00am until 8.00pm? Alas we know
the answer: these meetings have to be organised around other
meetings and obligations like teaching, writing papers for the
meetings, reading papers for the meetings and arranging more
meetings that come out of each meeting. Google calendar is a
fine invention.

Aside from the frequency of these events there are other
collateral effects: doing business with the same people but in
different constellations helps one construct a fairly detailed
(though undoubtedly unfair) profile of my counterparts, the
heads of the other institutions in our School (Divinity, AMES,
Philosophy, MML, Art History and Architecture, Music,
Classics). Most, I note, seem to be as concerned as I am about
the status and wider perception of the university sector. Here
I am thinking not only of Brexit (the topic of my previous
letter and prompt for the largest mailbag in the history of
9 West Road) but also the continuing pressure to widen access
and the role of Oxbridge in the wider national context, the
ongoing debate over fees, the impending restructuring of USS
pension plans, the REF... We are a worrisome lot. Most days
I receive and, alas, send emails with time stamps that most
definitely do not fall within the university's guidelines about
‘family friendly’ working hours. It seems that many of my
colleagues suffer from insomnia, or have adopted the infamous
working day of Mr Pryne (apologies Jeremy if this is wildly
inaccurate) which in fact was the working night.

There are upsides. The country at large, it appears, has a keen
interest in what we do and what we teach. My postbag has
recently contained letters sent from places as distant as
Bangkok, Sydney, Paincourtville, Louisiana, Bromley (Kent).
Closer to home we have been engaging in lively discussion and
debate on all manner of things, but when was life in
Cambridge and in particular the English Faculty not so?
To date we have yet to launch into a full scale Senate House
debate (memories of 1981 flood back, the two days I spent
listening to some of the grandest and wisest local academic
celebrities) but nothing should be ruled out. To many
outsiders and quite a few insiders this appetite for self-
investigation and continuous reflection on all aspects of what
we do is difficult to understand, but seen from the position
I occupy it has a sense of inevitability. We challenge our
students and expect them to achieve at the very highest levels,
and they in turn challenge us, returning the gift that is good
teaching. Long may it continue to be so.

Peter de Bolla
King’s College
While searching through the financial records of King Charles II in the Dorset County Archives I found a record that Charles paid for a guitar in April 1660. By the standards of a seventeenth-century king, he had been living in penury for some time by this date with linen and plate that could be inventoried on half a page. Yet there is the entry: by the Spring of 1660 Charles had acquired a guitar through agents in Paris and was paying 50 livres to have it brought, with a number of tennis raquets, to the Coudenberg Palace in Brussels, then the scene of his exile.

Soon afterwards Samuel Pepys was deputed to carry Charles’s guitar – perhaps the very instrument mentioned in the accounts – from the English coast to Whitehall upon the king’s return to the bells and bonfires of London. Pepys’s diary records several encounters with the guitar but his attitude to the instrument is always either detached or disparaging, and the diary provides no indication that he took it up during the period that it covers, ending in May 1669. So it is all the more surprising that Pepys eventually commissioned the largest collection of guitar-accompanied song to survive from seventeenth century Europe. The four manuscripts which contain this music remain little known today, like the remarkable fact that they contain a complete setting of Hamlet’s soliloquy ‘To be or not to be’ with chords for Pepys to strum as he sang.

My encounter with Pepys the guitarist has been one of the keen pleasures of completing the second part of a three-book history of the guitar in England from 1550 to the accession of Victoria in 1837. (The first part, The Guitar in Tudor England, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2015). Pepys began to cultivate the guitar because he loved to sing. He had a more than acceptable bass and sang whenever the opportunity arose: in boats on the Thames, in echoing and unfurnished rooms, on the leads of his house by moonshine. Italian song made a particular impression upon him during the diary years, but he did not understand Italian. When he heard anything sung in that language he was therefore especially sensitive to the sonority of the language and the singer’s declamation. Various entries in the diary find him reflecting that there is a ‘proper accent’ in the discourse of every country, where the meaning of the term ‘accent’ evidently reaches beyond mere emphasis on syllables to a more comprehensive sense of musicality. Pepys reasoned that the distinctive accent of each language ensured that nobody could find a song in a foreign tongue as natural or pleasing as one in their own. What he desired, it seems, was not only to hear Italian song but also to enjoy (and indeed to compose) English song marked by an Italianate concern for the sense, the rhetorical movement and the spoken enunciation of the words, the melody declaimed over a bed of block harmonies or chords. This was exactly what the baroque guitar was able to provide.

In 1665 Pepys had heard an especially influential advocate make an enthusiastic case for the guitar: his distant cousin and patron Edward Montagu, earl of Sandwich. On 17 November that year Pepys found Sandwich playing a guitar aboard his flagship and praising it ‘above all Musique in the world, because it is bass enough for a single voice, and is so portable, and manageable without much trouble’. This was a lordly commendation indeed.


Christopher Page
Sidney Sussex College
Although the title of this book cheerfully follows the format of The Poetry of Architecture, The Romance of the Gas Industry, etc., it is also meant to suggest that my topic is not simply ‘Kissing in Early Modern Poetry’, but a particular kind of poetry. A small handful of kiss-laden poems by the Roman poet Catullus, becoming fashionable with fifteenth-century Italian humanists, gave the chief precedents for the ‘Neo-Catulluan’ Renaissance kiss-poem, which is my subject. The Dutch Neo-Latin poet Janus Secundus (1511-36) turned the trend into a fully-fledged genre when he composed a sequence of nineteen Basia (‘Kisses’). Each poem is notional a ‘kiss’, and stylistic variety is playfully equated with the variety of kisses in the repertoire of the erotic savant. Published in 1541, the Basia were a great success, and over the next century, across Europe, Neo-Latin and vernacular poets took up and elaborated the ‘basium’ form.

It is the English vernacular reception of this tradition that emerges as the final focus of my study. I look closely at the continued life of the basium in works by a range of English poets, major and minor, including Sidney, Shakespeare, Drummond and Donne, as well as some less canonical authors such as Thomas Stanley and the Scottish Latin poet John Leech. By establishing the pervasive influence of one particular (and rather peculiar) genre, I hope to have suggested that the influence of continental Neo-Latin poetry on the early modern literary culture of the British Isles is too often seriously underestimated.

The book argues that the basium had a complex underlying rationale and a clear but flexible set of conventions, including an ironic treatment of masculine sexuality, as well as formal and tonal characteristics that had far-reaching influence. The poetry of kissing has tended to be regarded as a dull matter of reiterated motifs. But with its petulant wit and ostentatious gestures of imitation and repetitiousness, I see it as a space in which poetic theory, eroticism (sometimes obscenity), and mores surrounding gender and flirtation, could all be playfully explored – often in terms of one another, and with extreme self-consciousness.

It might be mentioned that the copy of this book residing in the English Faculty Library has had a few misprints and blunders corrected by the author’s penitent hand.

Alex Wong
St John’s College
I met Thom Gunn for the first time in Cambridge. It was Michaelmas Term in 1964, in my first month as an undergraduate reading English at King’s. A card arrived from Tony Tanner, our charismatic Director of Studies: I was invited to attend a reading by ‘Mr Thom Gunn’, who was briefly visiting Cambridge. I couldn’t quite believe it. Of the younger poets, only Ted Hughes was that famous and Thom had the added attraction of looking like a rock star. But I had also been reading him for a couple of years and knew his work fairly well. It would be wonderful to hear him read it.

Thom did not disappoint. He read in particular from a work in progress, the long poem ‘Misanthropos’, and I still sometimes hear him in my head reading the sixth poem of the sequence with its imitation of birdsong, much like Sir Philip Sidney or some other Elizabethan pastoralist:

[I] have heard all afternoon, over and over,
Two falling notes — a sweet disconsolate tune,
As if the bird called, from its twiggy cover,
Not now, not now, not now.

After the reading I managed to talk to him and, a few days later, the medieval scholar Helena Mennie Shire, who had taught Thom at Trinity and was now supervising me, arranged for me to meet him again in London. To my great pleasure he and I hit it off. He was in London on a bursary, staying for one year after exactly ten spent in the US, and enjoying the new sights and sounds of ‘swinging London’.

I managed to see him again a couple of times before he returned to San Francisco.

Of course, though we remained friends for forty years, I didn’t get to see him that often. He lived too far away. But we wrote one another letters – I’ve something like 190 of his – and met whenever we could. I last saw him in 2003, when he came to London to receive a literary prize. Less than six months later he was dead.

I was pleased but not greatly surprised when his publishers asked me to edit his Selected Poems. I had already edited a volume of his prose and had written a number of articles about his poetry. From the mid-1980s onwards, he used me as a sounding board for more or less everything he wrote. But I was surprised at the form my editor wanted the book to take. I had been expecting to do a new Collected Poems. He had published one in 1993. Seven years later, a new collection appeared – Boss Cupid – and then, for whatever reason, he stopped writing poems. So, sad though it was, the picture was complete.

Why not add Boss Cupid to the Collected, write a biographical introduction, append a few extra notes and float the full record out into the world?

Things were not as simple as that. It appeared that the Collected Poems had not done well – surprisingly, because The Man with Night Sweats, with its elegies for friends who had died of AIDS, had been published the previous year and sold better than any of his collections. I suppose Thom had lost the glamorous image he’d had when young and, despite this recent success, the impression it made does not seem to have stuck. So my editor Paul Keegan suggested that I edit a large hard-covered selection, the very best of Gunn, and supplement it with notes drawn from his writings and conversation. Over the next few years, I worked my way through multitudes of letters, notebooks, diaries, interviews, notes for poetry readings, essays and articles, at the same time dredging my memory for things I remembered him saying.

I hugely enjoyed putting the book together and I think the result is very nearly unique. Thom’s prose is beautiful – spare, limpid, accurate, memorable but not at all ostentatious. He also wrote terrific letters and talked compellingly. His conversations with himself in the notebooks and diaries came as a complete surprise and similarly stick in the mind. Nothing he says challenges the primacy of the poems, but all of it, in my view, illuminates those poems to some degree.

As for the poems themselves, I am sure fellow enthusiasts will quarrel with my selection, but they remain for me what they already seemed in the early 1960s: the best poems in English by anyone of the post-war generations.

Clive Wilmer
Emeritus Fellow in English
Sidney Sussex College

Link to recording of Clive’s talk about Thom Gunn: <https://specialcollections-blog.lib.cam.ac.uk/?p=15664>.

THOM GUNN, SELECTED POEMS, ed. Clive Wilmer
(FABER & FABER, 2017)
Through ongoing reading groups, workshops, major international and interdisciplinary conferences (5 of them hosted by Crossroads at Cambridge so far), we have been working to uncover the specific intervention of literary texts and approaches in a wider conversation about the process, ethics and psychology of knowing in the period, more obviously ongoing between Theology, Natural Philosophy, Economics and Law: why we need it, how to get there, where to stop, and how to recognise it once it has been attained as well as the places where it cannot go. Subsequent disciplinary segregation has obscured the understood relations among these fields: epistemic transactions which vexed and shaped the period’s experience of knowledge, and its textures. In examining intersections between literary forms and apparently disparate areas of thinking about ways of knowing, we address certain key research questions. How can we recover unexpected transactions across what may now seem distinct areas of thinking? What happens to the story of early modern knowledge as we know it, once we take on board the evidence of imaginative writing and practice? And crucially, how do these cognate practices engage with literary constitutions of knowledge?

But the interrelation does not stop at affiliation and extraction. Literary forms bring their own predilections and tyrannies: so it can also take the form of self-critique, or complicity. At stake, methodologically, is the yield of disciplinary thresholds and crossings over: what is the aesthetic, ethical or epistemological purchase of a particular imaginary speaking withershins, disrupting or coming up short against a different mimetic paradigm? A founding concept that we have had to re-examine radically as our research has unfolded is that of the ‘literary’. We have found that literature is a methodologically productive thread to run through our fields, precisely because it registers the emergence of a discursive self-understanding in conversation with other, more defined domains. For the boundaries between the disciplines we explore turn out to be fluid and porous in this period, but sometimes also resistant.

The project’s outputs have taken the form of innovative and boldly interdisciplinary workshops, ambitious collaborative volumes (both of essays and of primary material – the latter in progress), and individual publications of essays or monographs by the team members. In addition, we have a stand-alone series of four edited volumes with Palgrave Macmillan, each dedicated to one of the project’s four main interdisciplinary strands: Crossroads of Knowledge in Early Modern Literature (2018–20). The first of these volumes, Literature, Belief and Knowledge in Early Modern England: Knowing Faith, edited by Subha Mukherji and Tim Stuart-Burge, is due to be published early in 2018; the subsequent volumes of the series are in the works: Change and Exchange: Literature and Economics in Early Modern England; ‘Devices of Fancy’: Literature and Science in Early Modern England; Knowing Justice: Law and Poetics, Early Modern and Beyond. A mould-breaking collaborative volume, Blind Spots of Knowledge in Shakespeare and his World: A Conversation, edited by Subha Mukherji, is also forthcoming early in 2018 with MIP University Press.

Our robust Visiting Fellowship programme has brought distinguished scholars to Cambridge, who have contributed richly not only to the project’s work but also, often, to CRASSH and to various early modern research fora at English: these include Michael Witmore, Deborah Shapiro, Regina Schwartz, Lorraine Daston, Brian Cummings, Valerie Forman, Jonathan Sawday and Cari Sullivan; in 2018, we look forward to welcoming Kathy Eden, Lorna Huston, Torrance Kirby and Richard Sherwin.

On 2–4 July 2018, we will hold a major conference in Cambridge, on ‘Law and Poetics: Early Modern and Beyond’. This will have an innovative format and embed a public event, Law and the Arts, consisting of a talk/demonstration by artist Carey Young (creation, Before the Law); a theatrical show, Staging Trials, Performing Law, directed by Adele Thomas (Globe/Orestes); and a high-profile inter-professional round table including a judge and a jury advisor. The award of a CHRG grant of £20,000 has equipped us, through a collaborative programme with The Humanities
Digital Workshop at Washington University, St Louis, to use digital text-mining tools to chart early modern semantic registers of knowing, and to set up a collaborative pilot-study with Anupam Basu (Washington University) on ‘Mapping Renaissance Literary Knowledge’ which is to continue into 2018. Subha Mukherji, Jane Partner (CR Visual Arts Advisor) and Lizzie Swann are also working towards an online exhibition on Renaissance Spaces of Knowing: Privacy and Performance (2018), in collaboration with the Fitzwilliam Museum, to bring the material and textual cultures of knowledge into dialogue, and disseminate our findings to a broader public audience.

The project has energised the research culture of the Faculty, and drawn on other research initiatives currently ongoing, as well as creating synergies with the interdisciplinary culture of CRASSH. Our reading groups have brought together members from Humanities departments across Cambridge, as well as Visiting Scholars. It has created widely international networks and collaborations, on a variety of scales, and taken its members across the world to disseminate their findings and to learn from other projects and scholars in diverse fields in the US, Europe and Asia. Visiting Fellows and speakers have kept returning and participating in our project activities. But it has been particularly heartening to receive support from so many of our colleagues here (in English and other Departments), who have been absorbed into the growing Honorary membership of the Crossroads community. We are also delighted by the participation of graduate students and younger members of the research community from the English Faculty in our events. We very much hope to continue involving the wider Faculty in our ongoing work.

Subha Mukherji, on behalf of the Crossroads team

Fitzwilliam College

Note: The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013)/ ERC grant agreement no. 617849.

I grew up in New York City, and I studied at Harvard for both my BA and PhD. My first real experience of the UK was here in Cambridge, when I came to study for the MPhil in the History of Art department. Then I was a Junior Research Fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, from 2012 to 2016, and most recently a Research Fellow at the Warburg Institute in 2016–17. Before fully realising my academic vocation, I worked at literary and art magazines, first at Grand Street and later at Artforum, with a stop in-between to write for an Eastern Europe travel guide.

My research so far has principally been in the fields of medieval studies, material texts, and archival history and theory. Its central themes are the aesthetics and materiality of writing, and the role of visual culture in documentation, historical knowledge, and political power. I wrote about many of these in my first book, Art of Documentation: Documents and Visual Culture in Medieval England (2015), which looks at the fundamental connection between documentary writing and English art of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. I argued that the discourses of documentation suggest an essential and consequential connection between objects and events: written documents offered a powerful and widely disseminated model for how ephemeral actions and relationships can manifest themselves in enduring material form. Literary and visual culture embraced and reinforced that model, such that the real-life authority of the document has come to be taken for granted – whether in systems of social control such as passports, or in cultural rituals such as the veneration of Magna Carta and the Declaration of Independence.

In the course of this research, I’ve written about a wide range of texts and images, from illuminated manuscripts, commonplace books, maps, archival inventories, chronicles, poetry, polemic, stained glass, sculpture, and architecture. A lot of my research involves manuscripts and documents, which one reason I am particularly excited to join the English Faculty, with its strength in material text studies and the wonderful collections here in Cambridge. I only just began to explore these as a student here, and then came back for more as a Research Assistant for manuscript catalogue projects at the University Library and the Fitzwilliam Museum and Colleges.

This research has also led me to many other enjoyable collaborations with a range of institutions. I’ve had a longstanding relationship with the Paul Mellon Centre, and I recently co-edited a special issue of their journal British Art Studies; I’m also co-editing a forthcoming volume of British Museum Research Publications. This is part of a collaboration with the Museum’s Prehistory and Europe department on a project called ‘Seals and Status, 800–1700’, about the constitutive role of seals and sealing – as both sculptural objects and performative practices – in hierarchies of social, institutional, and representational status.

My research continues to develop interests in medieval literature and visual culture, in documents and archives, and in the cultural construction of historical knowledge. Some current projects investigate: the image of the bureaucratic text; the theoretical implications of non-textual objects in archives; and ‘the past of the past’. Specifically, the last is an endeavour to understand the significance both medieval and modern authors ascribe to vision in historical knowledge, and ultimately the wider role of visuality in constructing both the medieval idea of antiquity and the modern idea of the Middle Ages.
How, in fact, do we ‘animate’ the archive? What kind of responsibility do we have to its subjects? As academics, as artists, as interested observers – how do we negotiate the archive’s silences and the inevitable gaps in the materials at our disposal? Is there room for the imagination in the telling of history? These are just some of the questions They Taught Me Laughing to Keep From Crying attempted to engage with.

Part academic talk, part performance piece, the show was devised for Being Human: A Festival of the Humanities, a UK-wide series of public events showcasing humanities research, by a small team of interdisciplinary scholars and artists. I joined up with Doug Haynes and Joanna Pawlik from the University of Sussex, Cambridge-based performance artist Harold Offeh, and actor Jamal Johnson to undertake almost a year of research, writing, and rehearsal based on the University of Sussex’s archives. The show was finally performed in November to a large, appreciative audience at the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts, where it was supported by other events exploring similar themes as part of As Waves of One Sea: Transatlantic Encounters in African American Culture.

The keystone of the project was the archive of Rosey E. Pool (1905-1971), held by the University of Sussex. Scholar, poet, Civil Rights activist, and sometime tutor of Anne Frank, Pool led a remarkable life: as a Dutch Jew she was interned by the Nazis, only to dramatically escape with the help of her Dutch Resistance comrades. After the War she returned to her passion for African American poetry and spent the rest of her life supporting the work of African American writers such as Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes. She became good friends with Hughes and with his assistance she encountered the work of other writers such as Owen Dodson and Chester Himes.

We thought more people should know about this incredible woman and, through telling her story, we hoped to introduce our audience to some of the more obscure African American writers she championed. But we also didn’t want to shy away from the ethical issues that attend to the representation of an archival subject who can no longer speak for herself: how, for instance, were we to deal with Rosey Pool’s sexuality, given that she lived with a female companion for most of her life but died before the heyday of Gay Liberation, when she might have been more likely to declare a same-sex attachment? Through the show we also attempted to tease out some of the more problematic aspects of Pool’s identification with African Americans’ oppression: eliding the differences between their respective experiences, she famously wrote of the yellow Star of David she was forced by the Nazis to wear, ‘that piece of yellow cotton became my black skin’. Against the historical backdrop of anti-Fascist and African American activism, we encouraged the audience to reflect on the potential problems implied by that elision.

Combining the experience and expertise of both academics and performing arts professionals and presented in an entertaining, slightly surreal style (our model was BBC’s The One Show – albeit at an unusual angle!), we found the ‘performance lecture’ was a format flexible enough to deal with these kinds of critical issues in a non-didactic fashion – in a way that a broad public could engage with and enjoy. More information at: http://diarmuidhester.com/blog/

Diarmuid Hester
Leverhulme Early Career Research Fellow
Faculty of English
The year has brought us a new gold standard in medieval studies with the publication of Barry Windeatt’s edition of the Revelations of Julian of Norwich. Those who first came to the works of the Middle English mystics through Barry Windeatt’s lectures, or who know Julian’s writings through his excellent Oxford World’s Classics translation, will be particularly pleased to see the Revelations given the scholarly treatment they deserve by someone who has done so much to ensure the promotion of women’s writing in Middle English. The anchor of Julian of Norwich is the earliest author writing in English who can be securely identified as a woman, and her work is among the most profound and beautiful of all medieval religious texts. At the age of thirty and believing herself to be on the brink of death, Julian recounts that she had a vision in which the image of a crucifix held before her eyes began to trickle blood. What followed were sixteen versions of her text. The Short Text with its circumstantial process of interpretation and exploration, she produced two core of the original work. In addition, the volume presents us with a text as close to Julian’s original language as the complicated history of the text’s survival allows. With its meticulous textual and linguistic apparatus, it is a true masterpiece. In addition, the volume presents us with a text as close to Julian’s original language as the complicated history of the text’s survival allows. The notes and commentary engage with responses to Julian from the texts’ survival of the Reformation to the most recent critical works, and the whole is placed within an intellectual framework that elucidates the principal themes. These are, of course, themes that have struck the modern intellectual framework that elucidates the principal themes. Each engages with their provisional ways of thinking and (un)believing. Each engages with their provisional ways of thinking and (un)believing. With its problematical nature, the text has been the subject of much critical attention. Barry Windeatt’s edition offers new readers and medieval scholars alike a fresh view of Julian’s writings.

Julian was a source of inspiration for some of the greatest writers of the last century—famously, for T. S. Eliot, but also D. H. Lawrence, Iris Murdoch, and many others. Barry Windeatt has now provided us with a text for the twenty-first century, and new readers and medieval scholars alike will find themselves expertly guided by this major contribution to the discipline. Barry Windeatt, ed., Revelations of Divine Love: The Short Text and the Long Text (Oxford University Press, 2016), ixviii + 378pp. ISBN 978 0198112068.

Jacqueline Tatoula
Clare College

LISTENING TO THE UNKNOWN:

**Ghostly sounds in Thomas Hardy and Walter de la Mare**

One night in January 1928, three days before his death, Hardy listened to Florence read aloud de la Mare’s ‘The Listener’ (1911). When ‘the silence surged softly backward’ after the final line, he said, ‘That is possibly the finest poem of this century!’ It was the only poem by a living writer that Hardy asked for on his deathbed. For de la Mare, Hardy’s poetry was indelible. ‘Your poems are another life to me’, he wrote in 1918, ‘[they] just know me by heart’.

Many reciprocal echoes can be heard between Hardy’s and de la Mare’s works. Their writings resonate most in moments of listening to the unknown, which seem to evoke an elusive presence. My thesis explores this shared preoccupation: to reach beyond the known through writing. The uncertainties of auditory perception and both writers’ attention to minute, ghostly sounds that escape recognition correlate with their provisional ways of thinking and (un)believing. Each engages with ghostly sensations inherent in readily experience: of recalling voices of invoking presences, of waiting in expectancy, and of moving through the subvocal and physical sounds of words.

Echos resound in hollows. In the vacant church, the ear strains for a hint of something beyond. Reading gravestones seems to become a metaphor for reading poetry: one pauses and endeavours to understand words of the absent. Names recall voices. Is it ever possible to hear such voices: what happens when one encounters indecipherable inscriptions? The question of ‘whither’ also permeates both poets’ writings concerning suicide. A crucial issue is miscommunication between the living and the dead, the writer and the reader. Like heliographic signals, messages from the absent carry secrets that can only be shared by those who know the language. These enigmas culminate in displaced sounds that almost convey meaning, but are hollow, sounding in the self’s absence: ‘strange ventriloquisms’, in Hardy’s words, such as a bird’s wing creaking, water dripping, or wind rustling over a spectral lyre.

Alongside their poetry and prose, I draw on unpublished manuscripts, such as essays, plays, and fragmentary notes. Both writers listen for voices of the dead not only of those in their lives, but also in literary language. I interweave other writers into my analysis: Thomas Browne, Robert Burton, William Wordsworth, and Emily Brontë.

I am organizing a conference with Anna Nickerson: Reading Walter de la Mare, 1873–1956: a voice which has no follow (20–21 September 2018). This will explore de la Mare’s wide-ranging oeuvre and re-evaluate his place in literary history, with a concert featuring musical adaptations of his poetry. https://readingwalterdelamare.wordpress.com/

Yui Kajita
PhD student,
Newnham College
In Darkest Capital
The Collected Poems of Drew Milne

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‘Drew Milne is a formalist par excellence. He is a syllable counter, a shape shifter, and above all he is a sonic machine. His native inclination as a formalist is at once modernist and Marxist. But one could also say, simply, that Milne is a late Romantic lyric-poet with a political imagination. His latest turn to lichen introduces a sense of scale to the vulnerable and tenuous relationship we have to the natural world and gives a plaintive urgency to his song.’ Peter Gizzi

In Darkest Capital gathers all of Drew Milne’s poems up to 2017, including two major uncollected sequences, ‘Blueprints & Ziggurats’ and ‘Lichens for Marxists’. A Scottish poet working out of the modernist avant-garde, through pop and art rock, Milne moves between Beckett and Brecht, through punk and beyond. Along the way there are homages to Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Frank O’Hara, Kurt Schwitters, Ian Hamilton Finlay, John Cage and Tom Raworth. His poems do not break down into form and content but insist on a continuity between lyrical purpose and critical thinking. An ark of ecological resistances to late capitalism, Milne’s Collected Poems captures the ‘skewed luxuriance’ (Guardian) of his eco-socialist poetics.

Drew Milne was born in 1964 and grew up in Scotland. He lives and works in Cambridge. In 1995 he was Writer in Residence at the Tate Gallery, London. His books of poetry include Sheet Mettle (1994), Bench Marks (1998), The Damage (2001), Mars Disarmed (2001), and Go Figure (2003), and, with John Kinsella, Reactor Red Shoes (2013). He edited Marxist Literary Theory (1996), with Terry Eagleton, and Modern Critical Thought (2003). Since 1997 he’s been the Judith E Wilson Lecturer in Drama & Poetry, Faculty of English, Cambridge.

Available at www.carcanet.co.uk

NEW EDITION OF SHAKESPEARE’S POEMS

In November Routledge published a new edition of Shakespeare’s Complete Poems by me and Cathy Shrank, who teaches at the University of Sheffield. It’s an addition to the Annotated English Poets series, which used to be published by Longman. Unlike other prominent editions of Shakespeare, the emphasis is more on the commentary than on a long critical introduction. We hope we’ve provided notes which explain the language of the poems, but which also bring it to life in its contemporary context. This might be a sense that Shakespeare was exploring a new or emerging meaning for a word, or it could be that it had some specific resonances inside or outside literature.

It was a great pleasure to collaborate with someone I’ve known since we were both undergraduates in Cambridge. In fact we met while writing for the university newspaper, Varsity. Once or twice I was reminded of those days by the awkwardness of spacing when text is squeezed into narrow columns, but (not surprisingly) that is handled by the technical experts, not by the editors.

My part of the edition is the narrative poems, Venus and Adonis and Lucrece. The most challenging thing about annotation, I found, was the need to restrain most of my impulses towards interpretation and appreciation. We want to enable readers to get the most out of the poems, not to tell them ‘this bit’s so great!’ or ‘this bit’s so strange!’. I’m pleased to say that I now think the poems are considerably greater and stranger than I did when we started, and I believe that must be a good sign. Cathy Shrank took on the rest, a task dominated by the Sonnets, which pose many difficult questions to an editor; I think she has done superb work, showing both the careful consistency and the creative imagination that those questions require. One thing we haven’t done is rock the scholarly boat by claiming a new poem for the Shakespeare canon, or controversially omitting one; but then again, that boat’s always already rocking, so one person’s prudent shrewdness is another person’s wild speculation.

Raphael Lyne
Murray Edwards College
How is a poem made? From what constellation of inner and outer worlds does it issue forth? In her forthcoming book *T. S. Eliot and the Dynamic Imagination*, Sarah Kennedy (Downing College) asks these questions in relation to T. S. Eliot’s poetics. Seeking out those dynamic images most striking in their resonance and recurrence: the ‘sea-change’, the ‘light invisible’ and the ‘dark ghost’, she makes the case for these sustained metaphors as constitutive of the poet’s imagination and art.

T. S. Eliot was a poet haunted by recurrence. His work is full of moments of luminous recognitions, moments in which a writer discovers both subject and proleptic image of the imaginative process. Kennedy’s book examines such moments of recognition and invocation by reference to three clusters of imagery, drawing on the contemporary languages of literary criticism, psychology, physics and anthropology. Eliot’s transposition of these registers, at turns wary and beguiled, interweaves modern understandings of originary processes in the human and natural world with a poet’s preoccupation with language. The metaphors arising from these intersections generate the imaginative logic of Eliot’s poetry.

*T. S. Eliot and the Dynamic Imagination* will be published by Cambridge University Press in March 2018.

The Institute of Continuing Education, based at Madingley Hall, has just launched the University of Cambridge Centre for Creative Writing. The Centre aims to offer a home and meeting place for writers and readers in Cambridge and beyond. It will provide lively events, courses and performances, and a place for retreats, reflection and inspiration. If you’d like to join us in building this exciting new phase in the development of the centre, please do get in touch (www.ice.cam.ac.uk/centre-creative-writing). We’re delighted to be supporting the BBC National Short Story Award in a three-year partnership starting in 2018 and will be celebrating the form with a day symposium at Madingley Hall on 7 July 2018.

NEW BOOK ON T. S. ELIOT
The Faculty of English is part of a new collaboration between the BBC and the University of Cambridge to support the BBC National Short Story Award, the BBC Young Writers’ Award and the BBC Student Critics’ Award.

www.english.cam.ac.uk/bbcshortstory/

The Centre for John Clare Studies organised a symposium on ‘John Clare and the Art of Bird Watching’ in September 2017.

www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/poet-activist-bird-watcher-exploring-john-clare-as-nature-writer

A new medieval studies website was launched in January 2017.

www.medievalstudies.group.cam.ac.uk

PhD student Alex Assaly convened a series of film screenings in the Faculty: From Swing to Afro Futurism, alongside an exhibition of books and LPs: Reclaiming the Legends: Myth and the Black Arts Movement.

Gillian Beer has won the Truman Capote Prize for her book, Alice in Space: The Sideways Victorian World of Lewis Carroll.

Joanna Bellis has published The Hundred Years War in Literature, 1337-1600.

Paul Hartle has edited the first complete edition of the poetry of Charles Cotton (1630-1687).

Jane Hughes has published The Pepys Library and the Historic Collections of Magdalene College Cambridge.

Mary Jacobus has published Reading C. T. Studdley: Poetry in Paint.


Hester Lee-Jeffreies has prepared for publication the final book of the late Anne Barton, The Shakespearean Forest.

Paul Hartle and Adrian Poole have edited The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne.

Jane Hughes has published The Pepys Library and the Historic Collections of Magdalene College Cambridge.

Mary Jacobus has published Reading C. T. Studdley: Poetry in Paint.


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Hester Lee-Jeffreies has prepared for publication the final book of the late Anne Barton, The Shakespearean Forest.

Elspeth Hume has won the National Book Award for Poetry.

Isobel Maddison edited a special issue of the journal Women: A Cultural Review on the writing of Elizabeth von Arnim.

Robert Macfarlane has published The Lost Words (with Jackie Morris) and The Gifts of Reading.

Robert Macfarlane and Orietta da Rold have been awarded British Academy mid-career fellowships.

Joe Mosbenoka has published A Stain in the Blood: The Remarkable Voyage of Sir Kenelm Digby.

Ian Patterson won the Forward Prize for best single poem for The Pleniy of Nothing, an elegy for his late wife, Jenny Diski.

Jason Scott Warren and Andrew Zurcher have edited Text, Food and the Early Modern Reader: Eating Words.

David Trotter has co-edited Writing, Medium, Machine: Modern Technographies.

James Wade has edited Sir Torrent of Portugal.


Laura Wright has co-edited Multilingual Practices in Language History.

Other items of news can be found at: www.english.cam.ac.uk/
Reclining quietly with a book; an ear glued to the Hi-Fi; sifting a library stack; the TV flickering; a website gone live. Few poets have inspired such remarkable scenes and modes of interpretation, and in this respect Dylan Thomas demands special attention. Our means of access and response to Thomas’s work have never been more eclectic, and the purpose of this essay collection is to throw new light on what it means to ‘read’ such a various art. In thinking beyond the parameters of lingering interpretative communities, the contributors to Reading Dylan Thomas each attend in detail to the problems and pleasures of deciphering Thomas in the wake of his centenary year – 2014 – teasing out his debts and influences, and suggesting ways to understand his own idiosyncratic reading practices. From short stories to memoirs, poems to broadcasts, letters to films, manuscripts to LPs, paintings to websites, the material considered in this volume lays the groundwork for a new consideration of Thomas’s distinctive versatility, and his importance as a multimedia modernist.

The volume started life as a conference in October 2014, hosted and generously supported by the Faculty of English. Among its contributors are Deborah Bowman, Leo Mellor, and Rod Mengham; the person responsible for its cover-art is India Lewis, an alumna of Jesus College.

Ned Allen
Christ’s College
We had a most rewarding year in 2017, with two intensive summer courses at Homerton College on *Woolf’s Rooms* and *Reading Bloomsbury*, and Study Days at Stapleford Granary, taught almost entirely by members of the Cambridge English Faculty. We ranged across *Alice in Wonderland*, *Tragedy*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Creative Writing*, *The Waste Land*, and *Mrs Dalloway*. We ended the year with a dazzling afternoon of conversation and reading with Ali Smith and Gillian Beer, following the publication of Ali’s new novel, *Winter*.

In spring 2018 we have another great programme of Study Days at Stapleford Granary, taught by Cambridge scholars: [http://staplefordgranary.org.uk/whats-on/](http://staplefordgranary.org.uk/whats-on/).

- **28 January**, Reading *Great Expectations* with Corinna Russell and Jan-Melissa Schramm
- **18 February**, Introduction to Tennyson with Ewan Jones and Oliver Goldstein
- **17 March**, E. M. Forster: *For Love of Italy* with Alison Hennegan and Jeremy Thurlow.

Our autumn courses in 2018 include: Reading *A Room of One’s Own*, Understanding *King Lear*, and First World War Writing. We are also planning a charity study day in 2018 on *Refugee Writings* with Ali Smith and others to raise money for refugee support.

In 2018, our Woolf summer course will be on *Woolf and Politics*, exploring her thinking on education, women, and above all the pressing matters of peace and war in the 1920s and 1930s. With lectures by Frances Spalding, Peter Jones, Trudi Tate, Alison Hennegan, and Claire Nicholson. Our inspiring supervisors include Alison Hennegan, Steve Watts, Clare Walker Gore, Aoife Byrne, and Nadine Tschacktsch. There will be lectures, supervisions, walks, talks, and readings, as well as time to read and think and visit Cambridge bookshops.

Further details: [www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/2018/](http://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/2018/).

Our second summer course in 2018 is on *Women Writers: Emily Bronte to Elizabeth Bowen*. [www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/women-2018/](http://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/women-2018/).

Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, and Elizabeth Bowen.

Finally, in partnership with Lucy Cavendish College, we continue to offer a series of free talks on Virginia Woolf and her contemporaries. We have had superb talks by Gillian Beer, Nanette O’Brien, Susan Sellers, Frances Spalding, and Claire Davison and look forward in spring 2018 to David Trotter on Katherine Mansfield and Aoife Byrne on Elizabeth Bowen. We hope to put on an all-day reading of *To the Lighthouse* at Lucy Cavendish, later in the year. Details will be posted on the website. [www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/virginia-woolf-talks/](http://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/virginia-woolf-talks/)

Town and gown all welcome.

Trudi Tate
Clare Hall
Literature Cambridge
[www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/](http://www.literaturecambridge.co.uk/)