

# Research Framework Seminars

## Poetry & Poetics

This series of seminars ranges widely in the history of Anglophone verse to set poetry in dialogue with the philosophical, theoretical and conceptual paradigms that have framed its composition, circulation and reception. Reading between the particulars of poetic artefacts and their theorisation, the seminars hold the distinction between primary and secondary texts up for scrutiny, to encourage as much discussion of the conceptual work done by poems and the historical and verbal particulars of critical texts as *vice versa*.

Poetry & Poetics seminars might typically include the following term-long courses:

### Forms and Affordances

This course focuses on poetry and poetics on and off the page. With particular attention to current work in historical poetics and the new lyric studies it considers aspects of verse-making that are as much conceptual and ideological as they are formal and technical. Topics discussed might include 'Poem', 'Rhythm', 'Rhyme', 'Space', 'Figure', 'Voice'.

### Transmission and Exchange

This course takes the cross-period dimension of the seminar series as a provocation to consider poetic interactions across time and between cultures. The course puts theories of genre, mode, influence, and translation into conversation with particular moments of poetic exchange, when verse produced in one period, place, or culture calls on, listens to, adapts or betrays that of another. Topics discussed might include 'Genre, mode and transmission', 'Sequence and collection', 'Recovery in the archive', 'Loss in translation', 'Cultural borrowing and theft', 'Between media'.

Please note this list is indicative of the types of seminars you could expect from the MPhil in English Studies course and the list may be subject to some changes. Information about a given year's seminar provision, seminar content and timetabling is provided to offer-holders over the summer prior to admission.

## Politics & Culture: Capitalism, Ecology, Decolonisation

This seminar series brings together overlapping and urgent concerns which emerge at the intersection of the environmental humanities, colonial / postcolonial studies and engagements with Marxism, capitalism, technology, materiality, feminism, class, nation and sexuality. The seminars will offer a diverse range of courses, with the aim of creating intellectual synergy between areas and consciously moving away from untenable separations (including that of the Western and non-Western). Seminars may examine, for example, decolonization and nationalism; indigeneity and ecology; the cultures of late capitalism in dialogue with gender and queer studies; or the question of race alongside class, gender, climate or archival justice. Some of the most important theoretical insights of the last several decades lead us towards thinking in terms of intersecting and intertwined phenomena and situating the text and the critic in the world. In response, this is a series of seminars that seeks to identify and elucidate connections that are not only intellectually vital but increasingly a matter of survival. Aesthetics and politics are put back into urgent dialogue.

Politics & Culture: Capitalism, Ecology, Decolonisation seminars might typically include the following term-long courses:

**Empire and Decolonization**, including topics such as ‘Empire, Modernity and Colonial Discourse’, ‘Anticolonialism and Decolonization’, ‘“Race” and Resistance’, ‘Indigeneity and Epistemology’, ‘Queering Postcolonialism’, ‘Capitalism and Postcolonial Ecologies’.

**Ecology and Writing**, including topics such as ‘Land Uses’, ‘Body Burdens and Toxic Legacies’, ‘Decolonising Nature’, ‘Planet Slum’, ‘Life On A Damaged Planet’, ‘Epigenetics and Entanglement’.

Please note this list is indicative of the types of seminars you could expect from the MPhil in English Studies course and the list may be subject to some changes. Information about a given year’s seminar provision, seminar content and timetabling is provided to offer-holders over the summer prior to admission.

## **Material Texts**

This seminar series will explore the current state of thinking about the material text, asking how changing configurations of media affect the writing, circulation, reception, and editing of literature, and how our own interpretations might be reshaped by a better understanding of textual mediation. Ranging boldly across periods, examining texts in manuscript, print, and other forms, and making extensive use of the extraordinary holdings of the University Library and other Cambridge collections, the seminar will draw a hands-on acquaintance with the stuff of books into an ongoing conversation about the philosophical, historical, political and aesthetic implications of thinking about texts as things in the world.

Material Texts seminars might typically include the following term-long courses:

### **Texts, Media, Readers**

This course of seminars - taught in the University Library and making extensive use of its collections and historical printing room - looks at the ways in which literary texts are produced and transmitted, in manuscript, print, and other media. It pays particular attention to the material technologies and processes that make texts, and that make meanings, and their implications for editors and critics.

Topics discussed might include: 'The state of the field: theories and practices', 'From manuscript to reader: writers, editors, annotators', 'Reproducing texts: technologies and values from manuscript to digital', 'Textual technologies: paratexts, incl. prefaces, indices, diagrams, annotation, etc.', 'Text, design, image: illustrations, artists' books, typography, page design, etc.', 'Making texts - practical exercise and reflection in the historical printing room.'

### **Textual Cultures**

This course of seminars - taught in the University Library and making extensive use of its collections - looks at material texts as things in the world. Ranging from the medieval to the digital ages, we will examine the range of forms, contexts, and conditions within which literary texts are made, circulated, valued, consumed, collected, and contested.

Topics discussed might include: 'Print cultures (magazines, broadsides, pamphlets, newspapers, printed ephemera)', 'What is a book? (including manuscript, anthology, Sammelband, serial publication, play text)', 'Books in public: marketing, collections, readerships, kinds of value', 'My book: readers, owners, use, reception', 'Texts and the state: copyright, licensing, property, censorship', 'Books across the globe: colonisation, migration, export, suppression'.

Please note this list is indicative of the types of seminars you could expect from the MPhil in English Studies course and the list may be subject to some changes. Information about a given year's seminar provision, seminar content and timetabling is provided to offer-holders over the summer prior to admission.

## **Narrative and Its Mediations**

Narrative lies at the heart of everything we do. Every culture constructs narratives about its origins and its purposes, its ambitions and its failures. Stories make sense of things. This strand of seminars will consider some of the uses and attractions of narrative — from offering advice to encouraging empathy, from documenting experience to enabling us to imagine alternative realities. Seminars will also consider how narrative operates across different genres and media: that is, how narrative works in particular literary genres, but also what happens when we think about narrative in aural and visual media, in the form of song, painting, film, gaming and much more.

Narrative and Its Mediations seminars might typically include the following term-long courses:

### **Some Uses of Narrative**

This course of seminars explores what it is that stories enable us to do: how they store and transmit cultural knowledge; how they teach us to operate in the world and enable us to imagine new ways of living; how they establish and disrupt identities. Texts from a variety of genres, cultures and periods will be read in the context of key theoretical debates on these questions. Topics discussed might include: 'Origin and identity', 'Advice', 'Testimony', 'Empathy', 'Speculation', 'Entertainment'.

### **Narrative Media**

This series offers an introduction to thinking about narrative beyond the page. Seminars examine works from a variety of old and new media (from song to TV, painting to gaming) and consider how the particular properties of each medium shape the way in which stories are told. They explore the ways in which narrative theory might work across diverse media, and the extent to which new media necessitate new theoretical approaches. Topics discussed might include: 'Song and story', 'Narrative in Painting', 'Narrative in Film', 'Serial TV', 'Graphic Narrative', 'Gaming'.

Please note this list is indicative of the types of seminars you could expect from the MPhil in English Studies course and the list may be subject to some changes. Information about a given year's seminar provision, seminar content and timetabling is provided to offer-holders over the summer prior to admission.

## **Literature & Philosophy**

This series of seminars places literary and philosophical texts drawn from a range of periods in conversation, asks how these different modes of thinking and writing address common concerns, and considers what each can teach the other. Both 'literature' and 'philosophy' are understood broadly in this context, the one as encompassing diverse genres of creative writing (poetry, plays, fiction, life writing, polemic), the other as embracing multiple forms of abstract intellectual enquiry ranging from discussions of cognition and language philosophy to ethics, aesthetics, and (in a wide sense) theology. The emphasis is on treating the different kinds of texts explored here on their own terms first, before bringing them into dialogue to see how each — the literary and the philosophical — challenges and complements the other, and how this relationship changes over time. (No prior knowledge of philosophy is required for these seminars.)

The following, term-long courses (each of which could be taken independently of the other) are typical of the sort of seminars that will be offered for this option.

### **Language, Faith and Beauty**

A course of six sessions organised around the themes of language, faith and beauty. We begin by asking seminar members to examine some philosophical attempts to characterise language and to test the adequacy of those ideas against their own experiences of different kinds of literary language. The discussion in later sessions then turns to some ways in which belief and faith have been defined and imagined, both by theological and secular writers, and in literary and argumentative genres. The course concludes by concentrating on beauty — questions such as what beauty has meant to literary and philosophical authors, and to what uses it has been put in different periods and contexts.

### **Persons, Bodies, Boundaries**

A course of six sessions, this time organised around the themes of person, body, and the boundary between self and others. Here, we begin by exploring how ideas of person, character and soul have been understood (and controverted) in some writings of different eras. We then turn to consider the role that so-called embodied thinking has played in extending ideas of the person beyond the mind. We look at how writers, whether modern or early modern, have imagined the body as cognitively empowered, and at how attention has come to be understood in more than simply mental terms. Later sessions then extend these considerations into the ethical realm by exploring questions such as in what forms pain has been expressed and what significances have been attached to it, why solipsism has been found appealing as well as entrapping, and what limits have been put upon sympathy in different periods and by different kinds of writer.

Please note this list is indicative of the types of seminars you could expect from the MPhil in English Studies course and the list may be subject to some changes. Information about a given year's seminar provision, seminar content and timetabling is provided to offer-holders over the summer prior to admission.

## **Bodies, Performance, Gender**

This series of seminars examines the role of the body in a variety of literary texts drawn from the middle ages through to the twenty-first century. The aim of this course is to introduce and interrogate some of the ways in which these writings depict and explore embodiment. We will be aided in our investigations by approaches to the body philosophical, anthropological, psychoanalytic, medical and political. Throughout the course, we will explore how different epochs and cultural contexts have thought about subjectivity, gender, sexuality and embodied identity more generally. The course will consider the body's potential to work with or against social and cultural norms; it asks how our understanding of literary texts might be enhanced by reading them side-by-side with critical and methodological approaches that foreground the body.

Bodies, Performance, Gender seminars might typically include the following term-long courses:

### **Genders, Sexuality, Embodiment**

This course focuses on the ways in which ideas of gender, sexuality, and embodiment are explored and represented in texts from the medieval period to the present-day. It examines the ways literature conceptualizes the relationships between gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Paying particular attention to current work on sexuality and queer theory, the seminar aims to introduce students to a variety of critical and methodological approaches while considering the value of historical context, or critical anachronism, for understanding gender and sexuality. Topics discussed might include: 'Sexual histories', 'Genders', 'The lesbian pre-modern', 'Passionate embodiment', 'Queer temporalities, trans historicities', 'Gender, emotion, and affect'.

### **Cultural Bodies**

This course explores historical and theoretical perspectives on the place of the body in culture. The seminars are intended to act as introductions to issues that arise around bodies – whether material, imagined and symbolic – and around their theoretical elaboration. The course introduces salient writers and thinkers whose work opens avenues of interrogation into everyday, gendered, racialised, labouring (or idle), transgressive (or compliant) bodies. Topics discussed might include: 'Material bodies', 'Immaterial bodies', 'Psychic bodies', 'Bodies in movement', 'Racialized bodies', 'Bodies in space'.

Please note this list is indicative of the types of seminars you could expect from the MPhil in English Studies course and the list may be subject to some changes. Information about a given year's seminar provision, seminar content and timetabling is provided to offer-holders over the summer prior to admission.