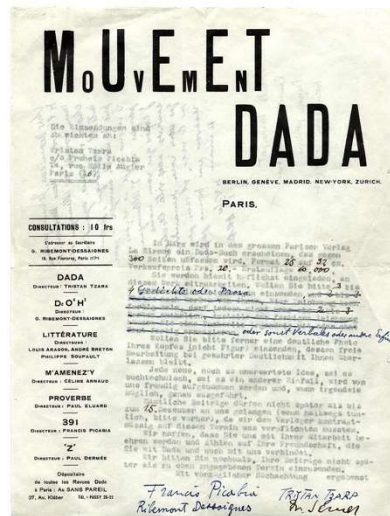


# Tallinn Summer School 2018

*This programme may be subject to minor changes*



## Creative Writing in English 20 July –27 July 2018

**Title:** CREATIVE READING/CREATIVE WRITING: POETIC APPRECIATION AND PRACTICE

**Tutor:** Dr Eric Langley (University College London)

### Description:

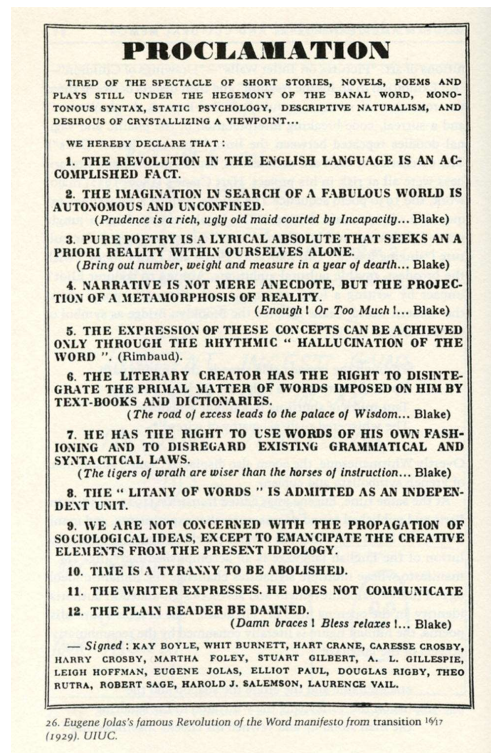
People who never read poetry don't write poems that are worth reading. ... It seems odd to me that anyone who hates reading poetry should want to write it at all. Are there amateur painters who never go to an art gallery?

(Wendy Cope, 'How to write poetry')

In these sessions, we will take seriously the suggestion that in order to *write well*, we need to develop our ability to *read well*. Each day, we will take our lead from two sources: firstly, a piece of prose-writing about poetry (a manifesto, a piece of criticism, a letter, a commentary, and so on); and secondly from a poem (predominantly twentieth and twenty-first century, ranging from canonical verse to small-press publications). Through close reading and discussion, we will seek to develop our analytic skills as we engage in the focused, playful, and seriously attentive practical criticism of a wide range of poems from a variety of poetic schools or groups. We will take our lead from, for example, the provocations of Gertude Stein – 'poetry is concerned with using and abusing, with losing and wanting, with adoring and replacing the noun' – from essays by Wallace Stevens, or Frank O'Hara, as well as the polemic writing of more recent poetic practitioners such as Denise Riley and Sina Queyres. By paying attention to how others write, we will seek to develop a reflexive practice which will enable us to be both inspired and instructed by the techniques and intentions of seminal poets: these lessons will then be employed to provoke, initiate, or even constrain our own writing, which will be the focus of each afternoon's sessions.

During this week, we will all aim to produce a number of poems, not in imitation of, but hopefully inspired by, our mornings' reading. The intention of developing our reflexive practice is not to

copy, or to produce anachronistic mimicry of period poetic forms; rather the intention is to appreciate the intent and techniques employed by a range of poets, in order to inspire and provoke our own practice. Indeed, as poet Michael Hofmann suggests, in these seminars there should be ‘no uniform, no team shirt, no battle or plan of battle, no weapons, ... no hierarchy, no ranks or badges except for homemade ones that don’t count’, and consequently, we will avoid homage, pastiche, or impersonation. We will be guided by the thoughts and methods of some brilliant poets, and enjoy the realisation that, as Hofmann concludes, ‘there are plenty of fellow travellers’.



## Course Schedule

**Room:** M-649 (MARE, 5 Uus-Sadama)

On a typical day, we will take our inspiration from a manifesto or piece of writing about poetics, discussing each essay on its own terms, and thinking through its implications on our own poetic practice. We will then spend the second session engaged in communal close reading of a particular poem or poems, before, in the afternoon exchanging feedback and beginning work on our own poetry.

As a bridge between each day’s critical discussion and our afternoon creative writing sessions, I will offer a representative artwork which relates to the day’s theme, period, or context (a piece of Cubist art in the session on Imagism, for example), which can – if needed – act as a point of departure for our writing, an image to unblock us, and to prompt our writing.

**Friday, 20 July:** TRIGGERING: *Getting started*

**13.00 - 14.00**

*Close reading session:* We will begin the course as we mean to go on, with a session of detailed close-reading, intended to remove any anxieties we may have about complexity, opacity, incomprehension, and uncertainty. Accordingly, informed by circulated extracts from his essay *Adagia* (1957), we will undertake a group analysis of Wallace Stevens' thrillingly elusive and challenging poetic sequence, 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird'. Once we have analyzed this wonderfully slippery and polysemous poem, we will be prepared for anything.

**Lunch break**

**14.30 - 16.00**

*Creative session:* It seems sensible to begin with these words from Richard Hugo's enjoyably unpretentious and liberating essay, 'Writing off the Subject':

I often make these remarks to a ... writing class. You'll never be a poet until you realize that everything I say today is wrong. It may be right for me, but it is wrong for you. Every moment, I am, without wanting or trying to, telling you to write like me. But I hope you learn to write like you. In a sense, I hope I don't teach you how to write but how to teach yourself how to write.

After brief discussion of Hugo's cautionary essay, and of a few extracts from Gertrude Stein's explosive 'Poetry & Grammar', we will begin with a few quick creative exercises, in response to a sequence of art-works, creating a composite poem, with numerous ways of looking at each art-work.

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**Saturday, 21 July:** IMAGERY I: *The Poetics of Objects*

**9-10.30**

*Discussion session:* In the first of two interrelated discussion sessions, we will begin with the seminal 1917 essay by Russian Formalist writer Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique,' in which he introduces the concept of "defamiliarisation" or "estrangement" in order to argue that a primary function of poetry is to reintroduce the reader to the world and its objects in new and unfamiliar terms. By so doing, he argues, we can re-encounter objects anew:

Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known.

Following our discussion of Shklovsky's object-oriented essay, we will consider the 1930s Objectivist movement, looking at short extracts from Louis Zukofsky's essays 'Program: "Objectivists" 1931' and 'Sincerity and Objectification'.

**Coffee break**

**10.45-12.15**

*Close reading session:* Particular attention will be paid to the poems by, for example, George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, Carl Rakosi, Muriel Rukeyser, Kenneth Rexroth, and Lorine

Niedecker, before discussion moves to consider the writing of Francis Ponge, Thomas A. Clark and other more contemporary poets.

### Lunch break

13.00-14.00

*Feedback and getting started:* while the group begins to work on their own poetry for the day, the tutor will give detailed feedback to individual members.

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## Sunday, 22 July: IMAGERY II: *The Poetics of Things*

11.00 - 12.30

*Discussion session:* In today's session - which develops the thinking of Sunday's seminar - we will give sustained attention to Imagist writing, often thought of as the first truly avant-garde Modernist poetic school. Its precepts may be best summarized in Ezra Pound and F. S. Flint's instructions:

- I. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective.
- II. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
- III. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.

We will discuss Pound's notoriously dogmatic essay 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste' (from *A Retrospect*), alongside extracts from a number of prefaces to Imagist poetry.

### Lunch break

14.00 - 15.30

*Close reading session:* Beginning with discussion of Pound's 'In a station of the Metro', we will then look at a range of poetry by H. D., Amy Lowell, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams. We will finish with a discussion of Archibald MacLeish's '*Ars Poetica*', which concludes, 'A poem should not mean / But be.'

15.45 - 16.45

*Feedback and getting started:* while the group begins to work on their own poetry for the day, the tutor will give detailed feedback to individual members.

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## Monday, 23 July: PERSONISM: *The poetics of immediacy and distance*

9.00 - 10.30

*Discussion session:*

To give you a vague idea, one of its minimal aspects is to address itself to one person (other than the poet himself), thus evoking overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity. ... That's part of Personism.

Today, we shall begin by discussing Frank O'Hara's punchy, playful, and provocative mock-manifesto, 'Personism: A Manifesto' (1959), where he advocates a kind of emotional immediacy that may seem entirely contrary to the poetry we have encountered so far: 'The poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages,' he explains, before declaring that 'in all modesty, I confess that it may be the death of literature as we know it.'

### Coffee break

10.45 - 12.15

*Close-reading session:*

In the light of this morning's discussion, we will read a selection of O'Hara's verse, alongside poetry from other New York school poets.

### Lunch break

13.00 - 14.00

*Feedback and getting started:* while the group begins to work on their own poetry for the day, the tutor will give detailed feedback to individual members.

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**Tuesday, 24 July:** POETRY AND THE CITY: *The Poetics of Place*

9.00 - 10.30

*Discussion session:* We will begin by reading the 'Preface' to Stephen Rodefer's *Four Lectures*:

My program is simple: to surrender to the city and survive its inundation. To read it and in reading, order it to read itself.

Rodefer was one of the original L A N G U A G E poets - friends with the Beats and the Black Mountain poets - and lived in many iconic cities, from New York and London, San Francisco to Paris. We will discuss the role of place and space, topography and geography, in a selection of contemporary poetry. I will offer some extracts from the work of Walter Benjamin, and the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, to think about the poetic figure of the *flâneur*.

10.30 - 12.15

*Field trip:* we will head out of the seminar room in this session, to have a walk around Tallinn and the local environment, gathering information and taking inspiration from our locality. Details of our itinerary TBC.

### Lunch break

13.00 - 14.00

*Feedback and getting started:* while the group begins to work on their own poetry for the day, the tutor will give detailed feedback to individual members.

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**Wednesday, 25 July: ELEGIES: *The Poetics of Recuperation***

9.00 – 10.30

*Discussion session:*

Any death causes the collapse of the simplest referring language. As if the grammatical subject of the sentence and the human subject have been felled together by the one blow.  
(Denise Riley, *Time...*)

We will begin today's explorations with discussion of Denise Riley's 2012 essay, *Time Lived, Without its Flow*, alongside extracts from Riley's earlier philosophy and prose. This extraordinarily moving and affective text is less a poetic manifesto than it is an account of loss, an encounter with grief, and a consideration of poetry's role in recuperation.

**Coffee break**

10.45 - 12.15

*Close-reading session:* In the light of Riley's powerful piece of prose, we will read a selection of recent poems from Riley's *Say Something Back* (2016), Alice Oswald's *Falling Awake* (2016), Emily Berry's *Stranger, Baby* (2017), Ian Patterson's 2017 prize-winning poem 'The Plenty of Nothing', and – a slightly older collection – Douglas Dunn's *Elegies* (1985). While most of these collections relate directly to bereavement, we will think more broadly about the elegiac capabilities of poetry before spending the final session of the day on our own poetic practices, having thought sensitively and discretely about how the lyric voice reacts to loss, either private or more generally.

**Lunch break**

13.00 – 14.00

*Feedback and getting started:* while the group begins to work on their own poetry for the day, the tutor will give detailed feedback to individual members.

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**Thursday, 26 July: CONTEMPORARY MANIFESTOS**

9.00 – 10.30

*Discussion and close-reading session:*

Lyric Conceptualism imagines herself a boat, fluid, without handles, able to slip through definitions, anchor at will.

(Sina Queyres)

In a break from our usual structure, today we will consider a number of short extracts from contemporary manifestos alongside individual poems, covering as much ground as possible during the day. We will encounter, for example, the Canadian poet, Sina Queyres: the Scottish poet and author, John Burnside ('Strong Words'); fellow Scot, Kathleen Jamie ('Holding Fast');

two poets with Guyanese roots, Fred D'Aguiar ('Further Adventures in the Skin Trade') and Grace Nichols ('The Poetry I Feel Closest To').

#### Coffee break

10.45 - 12.15

*Further discussion and close-reading session:* We will continue on our tour of extracts and poetry from contemporary manifesto writers, perhaps aiming to finish with the extraordinary call-to-noise by Franco Marinetti, *Zang Tumb Tumb!*

#### Lunch break

13.00 - 14.00

*Feedback and getting started:* while the tutor gives detailed feedback to individual members, the group will start to select what they wish to present on the last day.

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### Friday, 27 July: PRESENTATIONS

10.00 - 14.00

In this final session, each participant will present **at least one** of their own poems written during the course (or even, perhaps, their own manifesto ... !), briefly introducing it and reflecting on their process and intentions, before receiving constructive feedback from the group.

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## Course Requirements:

Bring your laptops for writing and contact, notebooks plus loose paper, folder for handouts, etc. Active participation in workshops and discussions is required. At the end of the course participants are expected to present a selection of creative pieces before the group and submit a portfolio.

The language of the course is English (Level: advanced to proficiency level of English).

The course offers academic credit (upon full participation and completion of the course - 3 ECTS).

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Tallinn Summer and Winter Schools (Registration, cultural programme) [tss@tlu.ee](mailto:tss@tlu.ee)

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