

Contemporary Poetry

Prof. Mark Ford and Dr. Eric Langley

This module – led by two of the department’s own published poets – is designed to allow students to engage with a selection of poetry from our contemporaries, looking in detail at a deliberately small number of texts, but also allowing us to range widely across the current poetry scene. The module opens with the oldest of our texts, J. H. Prynne’s *High Pink on Chrome*, an early long-form poem from an avant-garde poet who has been variously celebrated and castigated for his provocative output, leading some to style him ‘the most important living poet’ while others describe his work as simply ‘not poetry.’ The session on Mick Imlah and Kei Miller will explore depictions of history, the use of literary traditions, and figurations of national identity in the work of these two poets. In Week 3, we will focus on recent volumes by Vahni Capildeo and Vidyan Ravinthiran. Like Miller, Capildeo is a Caribbean writer now based in the UK. Her hard-to-categorise poems reach out to her native Trinidad, sitting alongside experimental modes in recent British poetry while not exactly being *of* them. British-born Ravinthiran grew up in Leeds to Sri Lankan parents. In *Grun-tu-molani*, he has crafted a first book that delights in wrong-footing the unwary reader, from its title onwards. Beginning with questions of poetic form – what is the significance of ‘prose’ or the ‘prosaic’ for these two poets? – our discussion will roam into matters such as voice, race, migration, cultural hybridity, violence and the political role of the poet. In Week 4, we will discuss the latest collection by the philosopher Denise Riley – who by then may have won this year’s Forward Prize, following both Imlah and Miller – described as ‘a deeply moving document of maternal grief and loss by one of our finest writers.’ In the final week, students will be asked to present to the group their own choice of contemporary poem, hopefully thereby introducing all of us to a wide range of the most interesting recent writing.

Selected Reading List:

J.H. Prynne, *High Pink on Chrome* (1975), in *Poems* (Bloodaxe, 2015)

Mick Imlah, *Selected Poems* (Faber & Faber 2010)

Kei Miller, *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion* (Carcenet 2014)

Denise Riley, *Say Something Back* (Picador, 2016)

Vahni Capildeo, *Measures of Expatriation* (Carcenet, 2016)

Vidyan Ravinthiran, *Grun-tu-molani* (Bloodaxe, 2015)