

POETRY REVIEW TEACHERS' NOTES: FRESH IDEAS FOR WIDER READING

Introduction

Poetry Review, one of the world's longest established and most prestigious poetry magazines, presents exciting work by poets from around the world. Past contributors include T.S. Eliot, Robert Frost, W.H. Auden, Philip Larkin, Seamus Heaney, Carol Ann Duffy and Jackie Kay. We hope, with the help of the ideas in this resource, it will provide your students with an excellent introduction to contemporary poetry and help them make connections between newly published work and their wider reading. In these notes we will draw links between well-known and historical poems and new, contemporary ones – as well as identifying some that you can use in the classroom straight away.

We are always keen to hear how teachers are using our publications, so please get in touch if you have more ideas or suggestions at: poetryclass@poetrysociety.org.uk

What the Editor says



'This issue is about connections (between poetry and politics, fiction, translation, photography, technology, history...), and includes a spread of languages, places, genres, cultures, poetic practices and critical perspectives. At the same time, I hope to suggest that what gave the debates in the poetry culture of the seventies, eighties and nineties their bite and their urgency was exactly that sense of connectedness: that by talking about poetry you were also talking about other things, and that by talking about other things you might feel your way (back) to talking about poetry.'

Patrick McGuinness, poet, novelist and Professor of English at St Anne's College, Oxford, was Guest Editor of the summer 2013 issue of *Poetry Review*. His issue focuses on poems and poets who explore journeys and translations.

1. Translation

Valerio Ferraro's poem, 'A Blaze becomes Fire' (p26), translated from the Italian in this issue by Philip Morre, is a poem about the act of translation and the power that changing single words can have on meaning.

Review the poem with the class and discuss with them what impact the change of words has – what is the difference between an embrace and a hug, for example?

If you want to extend this idea you could ask students to "translate" a well known poem using a thesaurus. For more able students, pick a poem with strong form such as a sonnet and ask them to maintain the rhyme scheme and metre as well as the meaning in their translation. You will find a worked example of Shakespeare's Sonnet 18 overleaf.

Look at the different responses that the students produce and consider the following:

- What has changed – were there metaphors or similes that were hard to translate?
- Has it helped them understand what the poet was trying to achieve with their choice of words?
- Were there any words that were untranslatable?
- Has the exercise opened up any questions or thoughts about translation in general?

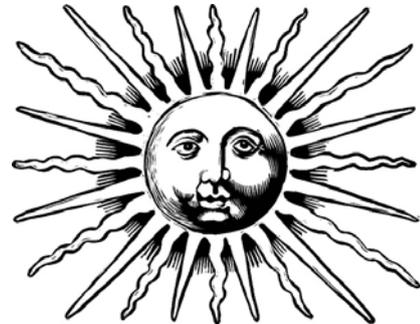
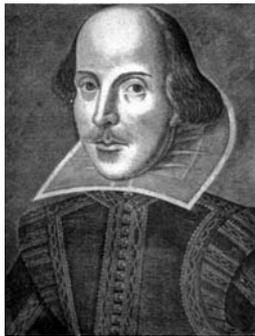
Also in this issue: Sasha Dugdale's essay on translation and journeys, 'Branchlines' (p64).

Continues overleaf



Sonnet 18 by William Shakespeare

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.



"In translation..."

*Will I liken you to a solstice morn?
You are fuller of beauty and so kind.
Strong gusts have newborn blooms from branches torn
And July's stay is far too small a time.
Some days the sun is too fierce and he burns
And many clouds can hide his radiant face
And each instance of beauty starts to turn
Through fate, or with the season's rolling haste;
However, the sun will always shine on you
And you will always keep your beauty fresh;
If the Reaper says you're his it is untrue,
Though you have entered history through death.
While humans still respire and read and gaze
This sonnet resurrects you, and it stays.*

2. Poetry's literary heritage – Emily Dickinson

Nancy Gaffield is Senior Lecturer in English Language and Linguistics at the University of Kent. In her poem 'Flow', on p12, she intersperses the first stanza of Emily Dickinson's 'I heard a Fly buzz-when I died (591)'.

Read the Dickinson poem below and discuss with the class:

- What are the main themes?
- Why did Dickinson choose to use a fly – what features of the animal supported the themes of the poem?

(i) I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

(iii) I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

(ii) The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –

(iv) With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz –
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then
I could not see to see –

Continues overleaf



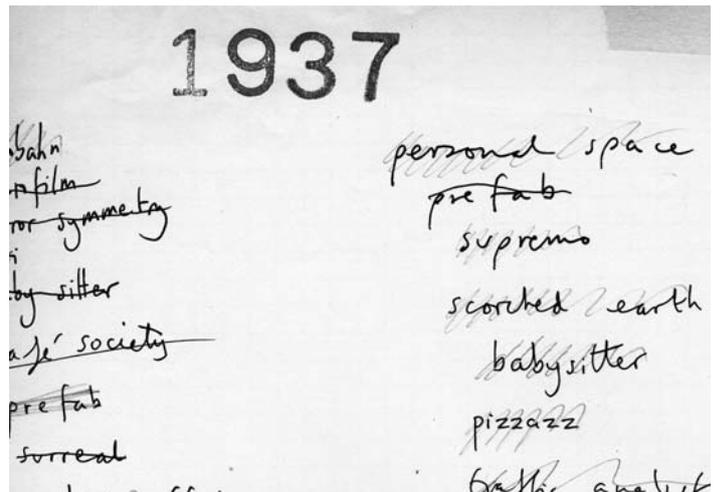
Following this discussion share Nancy Gaffield's poem with them.

- How does their reading of Dickinson's poem inform their reading of Gaffield's? Why do they think Gaffield chose to use it?
- What does the protagonist want?
- Ask students to identify other natural imagery in the poem – what impact does this have on the reader?

3. Lexicography and imagery

One of the boldest features in this issue is Jimmy Symond's 'Words of the Century' (p96-100). Jimmy spent time researching new additions to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in their research room, part of the *OED* research department. The room, measuring roughly four metres square, is filled on one side with grey filing cabinets containing hundreds of thousands of slips of rectangular paper. The slips contain the definitions of all the words in the English language, with the date of their first recorded usage.

Jimmy identified words that were first used in each year of the period 1900-2000 before exploring his own archive of photographic negatives to find images that could illustrate and imaginatively develop chosen words and phrases.



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There are a number of ways this feature could be used in the classroom:

- Pick up where Jimmy left off: <http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/recent-updates-to-the-oed/previous-updates> lists updates to the dictionary from 2000 onwards. Task students with picking a word from each update and finding or taking a picture to represent that word before presenting it back to the class.
- Create poems from the words that Jimmy has chosen – first reading the words as a list and then ordering them into a poem.
- Students could find new images for the words or words for the images to create their own version of Jimmy's project.

Poetryclass: fresh ideas for poetry learning from the Poetry Society

The Poetry Society has a wide range of free downloadable poetry lessons for teachers, created by poets with extensive experience of working in schools. Visit the Poetryclass section of the Poetry Society website to view the complete range and select a resource: www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/education/poetryclasshome/poetryclassresources

