

## Poetry Masterclass: Opening to the World – three new voices

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**Start date** 31 October 2016**End date** 3 November 2016**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge**Tutor** Roger Garfitt**Course code** 1617NRX053**Director of Programmes** Emma Jennings**For further information on this course, please contact** Public Programme Co-ordinator, Clare Kerr  
[clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746237**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

A freelance writer ever since he won the Gregory Award in 1974, Roger Garfitt has been Poetry Critic of *London Magazine*, Editor of *Poetry Review*, Writing Fellow at UEA and Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Swansea University. 'Rites of Passage', his long poem in honour of the poet Tony Conran, has just appeared in *Building Jerusalem: Elegies for Parish Churches* (Bloomsbury). He will be reading at the launch event in Cambridge University Library on Wednesday 19th October (5.30 – 7 pm). *In All My Holy Mountain*, his celebration in poetry & jazz of the life and work of Mary Webb, has just been recorded with the John Williams Octet. The composer, Nikki Iles, is on piano and the CD will be released shortly. His *Selected Poems* is published by Carcanet. His memoir, *The Horseman's Word*, shortlisted for the PEN/Ackerley Prize, is a Vintage paperback.

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## Course programme

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### Monday 31 October

Please plan to arrive between 14.00 and 15:30. You can meet other course members at Tea, which will be served in the Terrace bar at 16:00. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	<i>Opening to the World</i> : opening seminar on the work of Caitríona O'Reilly. For all seminars, see the detailed reading list below.  Please bring two of your own poems for photocopying for the Evening Readaround.
19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	Evening Readaround: a chance for the students to showcase their own work and get to know each other. We will set up a book table and you are welcome to bring copies of your own books and pamphlets to sell.
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Tuesday 1 November

08:00	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Individual Tutorials and Work on the First Writing Assignment: you are welcome to bring a folder of existing work to discuss with the tutor.
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Individual Tutorials and Work on the First Writing Assignment.
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00 – 16:30	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	<i>The Fine Detail of the World</i> : second seminar on the work of Caitríona O'Reilly. Please bring your work on the First Writing Assignment ready for photocopying.
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30 – 20:00	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Group Workshop on the First Writing Assignment.
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### **Wednesday 2 November**

08:00	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Individual Tutorials and Work on the Second Writing Assignment.
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Individual Tutorials and Work on the Second Writing Assignment.
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00 – 16:30	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	<i>To the Edge of the Known</i> : seminar on the work of Caoilinn Hughes.
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30 – 20:00	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	<i>An Aviary of Small Birds</i> : seminar on the work of Karen McCarthy Woolf.
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### **Thursday 3 November**

08:00	Breakfast. Please have your work on the Second Writing Assignment ready for photocopying.
09:00 – 10:30	Group Workshop on the Second Writing Assignment.
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Group Workshop on the Second Writing Assignment. This is also a chance to discuss any problem poems you may have brought with you and explore any difficulties thrown up in the course of the assignments.
13:00	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

To examine the ways Caitríona O'Reilly and Caoilinn Hughes have found of opening poetry out to the detail of the physical world and giving it an imaginative charge.

To show the skill with which Karen McCarthy Woolf shows her world suffused by a loss that is also a continuing presence.

### Content:

A study of Caitríona O'Reilly's three collections and the first collections from Caoilinn Hughes and Karen McCarthy Woolf.

### Presentation of the course:

Close reading and discussion of the set texts in the seminars. A detailed reading list for each seminar will follow but it is worth getting a general sense of the books in the meantime.

Two writing assignments, to be undertaken in close consultation with the tutor in individual tutorials, and offered for friendly and supportive discussion in the group workshops.

### Outcomes:

**As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:**

Have an enhanced sense of the variety of ways in which poetry can access the detail of the world.

Have an insight into particular ways of handling loss and the sense of relationship that persists in spite of loss.

Have an experience of trying for themselves new techniques for giving an imaginative charge to the world's detail.

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## Reading and resources list

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Author	Title	Publisher and date
Caitríona O'Reilly	The Nowhere Birds	Bloodaxe, 2001
Caitríona O'Reilly	The Sea Cabinet	Bloodaxe, 2006
Caitríona O'Reilly	Geis	Bloodaxe, 2015
Caoilinn Hughes	Gathering Evidence	Carcenet, 2014
Karen McCarthy Woolf	An Aviary of Small Birds	Carcenet 2014

## Website addresses

<https://www.bloodaxebooks.com/> <https://www.carcenet.co.uk/>  
<https://www.poetrybooks.co.uk>

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

## Detailed Reading List:

The two seminars on Caitríona O'Reilly will both examine a dynamic that seems characteristic of her work, an inward grappling with what she calls "the work" and the imaginative release that comes from opening out to the world.

In the poems chosen for the first seminar, we meet the inward grappling in *The Servant Question* (*Geis*, p.39), and *Perdita* (*The Nowhere Birds*, 11), then an oscillation between the two impulses in *After a Death and Flames and Leaves* (*The Nowhere Birds*, 54 and 55), and *Calculus and Heliotrope* (*The Sea Cabinet*, 55 and 56), then a determined outward movement in *Geis* (*Geis*, 23ff), and the sustained flows of *Hide*, *Thinking of Simone Weil*, *The Nowhere Birds* and *Augury* (*The Nowhere Birds*, 60, 61, 62 and 63). The increasing imaginative maturity across the three books is shown in the development from *Watermark* (*The Nowhere Birds*, 36) to *Potlatch* (*Geis*, 60).

For the second seminar, for the inward grappling read *Gravitations*, *Persona*, *The Maze*, *Netsuke*, and *Shortcut to Northwind* (*The Sea Cabinet*, 13, 14, 15, 24 and 26).

For the outward movement read *A Qing Dish*, *X-Ray*, *Pollen*, and *A Quartet for the Falcon* (*The Sea Cabinet*, 23, 16, 59 and 50ff) and *Snow and The Antikythera Mechanism* (*Geis*, 32 and 42).

The seminar on Caolinn Hughes will focus on two areas of particular interest in her work: the way she draws on early cosmology, early meteorology and early nuclear science to extend poetry's range of reference and offer different readings of the patterns to be found in the physical world and in ourselves as part of it; and her wry reflections on her relationship with a male scientist as a way of renegotiating, or at least beginning to renegotiate, the gender balance.

Read *Avalanche* (p.11), *Gathering Evidence* (13), *King of the Castle* (18), *Rational Dress* (25), *On the Content of Brackets* (27), *Vagabond Monologue* (24), *We Are Experiencing Delay* (36), *Two Roundeleets* (37), *Lucky* (39), *Atmospheric Physicist to Poetic Atmosphericist* (47), *Estuary* (48), *Altitude* (52), *God Always Geometrises* (54), *Harmony of the Spheres* (55) and *Is It A Kind Of Bell Toll?*

Part of the considerable power of *An Aviary of Small Birds* comes from the way the poems take you by surprise, the associative play between them so quick and unexpected. For that reason I am not going to provide a reading list but ask you to read the book as a whole, though we will, of course, focus on specific poems in the seminar.

## Further Reading:

For the background to *A Quartet for the Falcon*, it is worth looking at T.H. White's classic, *The Goshawk*, now available in a new edition (2015) with a foreword by Helen Macdonald. Macdonald's own *H is for Hawk*, which won the Samuel Johnson Prize and the Costa Book of the Year in 2014, is also worth reading in relation to *An Aviary of Small Birds*, as another strategy for navigating loss. As is *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*, Max Porter's groundbreaking novel, winner of this year's Dylan Thomas Prize and a surprise bestseller.

In 'A Part Song', a much-admired sequence in *Say Something Back*, just out from Picador and the Poetry Book Society Choice, Denise Riley brings a brisk, no-nonsense humour to the situation she suddenly finds herself in as a mother faced with the loss of a grown-up son. In *Her Birth* (Carcenet, 2013) Rebecca Goss charts with great delicacy the brief life of a daughter born with an incurable heart condition and the birth of a second child. Fiona Benson's *Bright Travellers* (Cape, 2014) touches on many other themes and includes a 'Love-Letter to Vincent' (Van Gogh) but passes through the loss of a miscarriage before ending in the pain of milk fever and the joy of breastfeeding as she finds herself joining  
a long line of women  
sitting and kneeling,  
out of their skins  
with love and exhaustion.

Take a look at these books if you get the chance. Those of you who are members of the PBS will have received *Say Something Back* in any case. We should find time towards the end of the final Group Workshop to share our responses to them and discuss the different strategies they adopt.

*Information correct as of:* 09 September 2016