

Poetry and its relevance

January 2011

[Angelica Michelis](#) and [Antony Rowland](#) will be in conversation with the Salon audience, chaired by [Dave Bowden](#), including some short readings by guest poets.



The appointment of Carol Ann Duffy – well known from her place on the curriculum - as Laureate, and the controversies over the election of the Oxford Professor of Poetry, have kept the sullen art in the headlines. Christopher Reid picked up the 2009 Costa Book of the Year for his collection *A Scattering*, while *Bright Star* saw John Keats join Dylan Thomas, Allan Ginsberg and Sylvia Plath as recent stars of the big screen. Poetry performances are increasingly popular at music festivals and at gigs, and pop stars such as Mike Scott (of Waterboys fame) and Rufus Wainwright have even recorded musical interpretations of WB Yeats and Shakespeare's sonnets.

Yet increasingly it feels as if poetry's renaissance is built on a constant rebranding to make poetry relevant to our daily lives. Last year Andrew Motion accused Britain's schools of patronising students by failing to challenge them with poetry which wasn't 'a poem about football for a football loving boy, a rap for a fan of Eminem'. Yet he himself famously wrote a 'Birthday Rap' for Prince William. Similarly, while many others praise the therapeutic qualities of poetry in helping us cope with the stresses of the hectic, 24-7 modern world, some recoil when poems such as Duffy's 'Education for Leisure' have an apparently more disturbing message.

Where can we draw a line between opening up difficult and complex works of literature to an unfamiliar audience, and simply being patronising? Is seeking relevance a response to the challenge to 'make it new' for another generation, or does it risk losing some of the original value and meaning? In a climate where so much of academia and education is encouraged to demonstrate its 'impact', can or should poetry justify itself? What is poetry for and how should it be taught?

Some background readings

[Mancunian Meander](#) poetry collection by Mike Garry, reviewed by Simon Belt June 2010

[God is a Manc](#) poetry collection by Mike Garry, reviewed by Simon Belt June 2010

[A Sheesha in Radcliffe](#) poetry collection by Mansoor Shah, reviewed by Dave Porter August 2010

[The Land of Green Ginger](#) poetry collection by Antony Rowland, reviewed by Angelica Michelis September 2010

[The Ancient Greeks & us: the irrelevance of relevance](#) by Angus Kennedy 11 October 2010

[Poetry and the flight from meaning](#) by Michele Ledda, Independent Battle of Ideas Blogs 01 November 2010

[The Simpsons or Shakespeare?](#) by Ciaran Guilfoyle, Freedom in a Puritan Age, December 2010

Listen again (not miked so variable quality)...

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Speakers' discussion - click on the  Play button: {mp3}poetry-speakers-discussion{/mp3}

Audience discussion - click on the  Play button: {mp3}poetry-audience-discussion{/mp3}

Speakers' summation - click on the  Play button: {mp3}poetry-speakers-summation{/mp3}