

Introduction to Scottish Poetry: Place, People, and Language

It is probably safe to assume that most final-year students will have had very little exposure to Scottish literature, and still less to Scottish poetry, during their studies so far. And where they have encountered Scottish writers and their work, they may have seen them primarily as voices from the periphery contributing to the main stream of English literature. In this course, the perspective will be turned round, and Scottish poems will be looked at in Scottish terms, while, of course, not neglecting their relation to wider contexts.

A course of ten lectures is not the place to attempt a historical survey of Scottish poetry. Rather, we will look closely at a number of representative poems from the early Middle Ages to the present day, approaching them particularly through the prisms of:

- *place* – praising the rich wildlife of a mountain; seeking meaning beyond the tragedy of an abandoned village, confronting human damage to the environment...
- *people* – both in the singular sense of tribe or nation and in the plural sense of individual human beings: saints, heroes, ordinary folk...; and
- *language* – the medium of poetry, but also, at times, its subject, in a country where literature has never been monolingual but where language difference has also been an object of discrimination, and a poet's choice of language may be an act of cultural affirmation.

Texts for discussion and bibliographic suggestions will be provided during the course. For poems written in Scots (language or dialect: you decide!), glossaries will be provided. Poems in other languages than English and Scots (Gaelic, Old Norse, French...) will be read in English translation.

Assessment:

Presence and activity: 10%

Final examination: 90%