

The New Criterion

Features

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Defeating the poem

by [Denis Donoghue](#)

On teaching poetry.

For many years, I have taught in the Department of English at New York University a course called “Modern British and American Poetry.” “Modern” is deemed to mean, approximately, Whitman and after. “British” is deemed for administrative purposes, but for no other purpose in my hearing, to include W. B. Yeats and any other modern Irish poet who wrote or writes in English. I doubt that anyone would protest if I stretched the word “British” to include the Santa Lucian Derek Walcott and the Australian A. D. Hope.

When I first offered this course, many years ago, I divided it into two approximately chronological parts. The first part ran from Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855) to Eliot’s *Waste Land* (1922). The other poets I read here were Emily Dickinson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Thomas Hardy, Yeats, Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, Edwi ...

Denis Donoghue's latest book is *On Eloquence* (Yale University Press).

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