THE LIFE OF BREATH: 
HISTORY, TEXTS, CONTEXTS

St John’s College, Durham University
Tuesday 10th – Thursday 12th July 2018

With generous financial support from
Wellcome Trust and
Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Durham University
OUTLINE PROGRAMME

All sessions in Leech Hall, St John’s College, unless otherwise stated

MONDAY 9 JULY

6.00pm  Welcome Reception (Tristram & Vasey Rooms, St John’s College)

TUESDAY 10 JULY

9.30am  Welcome and Introduction
10.00am THE CLASSICAL PERIOD
12.30pm Lunch
1.30pm  THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD
4.15pm  General Discussion
5.00pm  Close

6.00pm  Breath in Vocal Technique, lecture/recital (Concert Hall, Music Department)

WEDNESDAY 11 JULY

9.30am  THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD
11.40am Break
12.10pm THE 18TH CENTURY
2.00pm  Lunch
2.30pm  Close (Free time to explore Durham)

3.00pm  [OPTIONAL] Open Seminar with Prof. Anthony Long (Ritson Room, Classics Department)

6.00pm  Breath in Cinema, Public Lecture with Dr Davina Quinlivan (Leech Hall)

THURSDAY 12 JULY

10.00am  THE ROMANTIC & VICTORIAN PERIOD
12.30pm  Lunch
1.30pm  THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
3.25pm  Reflections and Connecting Thoughts, Prof. Peter Adey
3.45pm  Discussion
4.15pm  Final remarks
4.30pm  Close

7.00pm  CONFERENCE DINNER (The Senate Room, Durham Castle)
MONDAY 9 JULY

Afternoon  Resident guests arrive (accommodation available from 1pm)

6.00pm  WELCOME RECEPTION (Tristram and Vasey Rooms, St John’s College)
The Life of Breath: History, Texts, Contexts

TUESDAY 10 JULY

9.00am   Arrival & coffee

9.30am   Welcome and Introduction
          Prof. Jane Macnaughton (Durham University) & Mary Robson (Durham University)

10.00am  THE CLASSICAL PERIOD
          Chaired by Prof. George Boys-Stones (Durham University)

10.00am  Pneumatic Episodes from Homer to Galen
          Prof. Anthony Long (University of California, Berkeley)
          Breath (pneuma) and life are co-extensive or even equivalent in much of Greek thought. This paper will trace the life of breath from its earliest contexts in Homer through developments in early Greek philosophy and medicine, and conclude with a glance at Galen’s ideas about breath and the uses of breathing. What are the connections between breath and heart or brain or mind (psyche)? How do breath and blood collaborate? How does life begin? What do breath and breathing contribute to health and sickness? These are some questions to be raised.

10:45am  Our Common Breath: συμπνοία from Early Christianity to Neopythagoreanism, Dr Phillip Horky (Durham University)
          This paper represents a sequel to a paper given in Durham several years ago on breathing as a model for cosmic design in antiquity ('Cosmic Spiritualism among the Pythagoreans, Stoics, Jews, and Early Christians', soon to be published). In this paper, I will trace a brief history of the concept of ‘co-breathing’ or ‘conspiration’ (συμπνοία) by establishing its roots in pre-Christian Stoic cosmology and examining its import for various schools of religion, philosophy and medicine, from the second century CE until the middle of the fourth century CE. My study will focus on two related (or so I will argue) strands: first, how the term gets associated anachronistically with two famous Classical doctor-philosophers, Hippocrates and Pythagoras; and second, how the same term provides the Christian Fathers with a means to synthesize and explain discrete notions of ‘breath’ (πνεῦμα) that they found in the writings of the Old and New Testament. By the early sixth century CE, συμπνοία allows Neoplatonist and Christian commentators to articulate their diverse systems - whilst at the same time speaking a common language that is equally foreign both to Plato and to Paul.

11:10am  The Holy Spirit’s Place in a Late Antique Culture of Breath
          Dr Tom Hunt (Newman University)
          The 360s saw a turning point in the ways that Christians talked about the Holy Spirit. Attending to the different means by which respiration was integrated into the economic and political life of late antique society, this paper argues that these shifts in Holy Spirit theology should be read as part of a wider late antique culture of breath.

11:30am  Break

11:50am  Panel discussion

12:10am  Questions from the floor

12.30pm  Lunch
1.30pm  THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD Chaired by Prof. Elizabeth Archibald (Durham University)

1.30pm  A Breath of Fresh Air: Approaches to Environmental Health in Late Medieval Urban Communities
Prof. Carole Rawcliffe (University of East Anglia)
In 1450, Thomas Cornwaleys brought a prosecution in the King’s Bench, England’s premier common law court, which dealt with cases of treason, murder and other major felonies, against six London butchers. They were accused of endangering his and his servants’ lives with the lethal stench (fetor) of offal and other vile matter dumped in his garden in Aldgate and were committed to prison just as plague broke out in the city. Such cases, which might involve the crown and parliament, were common and reflect the importance placed upon fresh, clean air in late medieval cities, especially in times of pestilence. This paper will explore the medical rationale behind these beliefs, the sanitary measures that were introduced at both a national and local level in pursuit of a hygienic urban environment, and the extent to which ordinary citizens recognized the vital role played by the air that they breathed in preserving or endangering communal health.

2.15pm  The Transformative Power of Breath: Contemplation, Music and Alternative Therapy, from Richard Rolle to Arnold Jacobs and Stanislav Grof
Prof. Denis Renevey (University of Lausanne)
This paper aims to provide a parallel for the physiological and psychological effects caused by breathing techniques in three specific domains. I investigate first the field of late medieval contemplation, more particularly the repetition of one-word prayers that require special breathing techniques. I contend that breathing, as much as the power of words plays an important role in inducing changes of consciousness. It is interesting to note that the fourteenth-century mystic Richard Rolle often describes them as spiritual song.
Second, the paper investigates breathing exercises as recommended by brass teachers, more specifically the well-known tuba teacher, Arnold Jacobs, and Michel Ricquier, a French pedagogue. Their exercises favour abdominal breathing, which is tranquillizing, whereas costal and clavicle breathing generates anxiety. Abdominal breathing thus impacts importantly on the psychological make-up of those who practice it, and has therefore a strong link to the sound quality produced by its performer.
Breathing techniques are at the core of holotropic therapy and are thought to provide those who practice it access to biographical, perinatal and psychospiritual roots that are transformative. The use of music is often combined to them to induce holotropic states of consciousness. After a brief discussion of these techniques, I will use this information to contend that, although we miss information from medieval contemplatives as to their own breathing techniques, they are nevertheless accountable, in part, for their contemplative and visionary experiences. The evidence gathered here suggests that breathing is central to individual investigations into the deep recesses of the self via spiritual, artistic and healing practices, which often blend into one another.

2.40pm  Breathing, Swooning, Sighing in Middle English Romance Narratives
Prof. Corinne Saunders (Durham University)
Breath plays an essential role in the imaginative fiction of the medieval period. Romance writers draw on medical and theological theories of the time to portray the ways that the movements of the vital spirits – closely connected with breath – create powerful physical responses, which at their most extreme cause breathlessness, sighs and swooning. Such phenomena play a key part in the depiction of experiences of emotion, particularly love and grief. This paper will explore a range of English romance narratives, from popular romances to the writings of Chaucer and Gower, to probe ideas of breath and breathlessness, with a particular focus on the representation and meaning of sighs and swoons, their connections with ideas of morality, gender and agency, and their wider cultural contexts. This deeply physical understanding of emotion resonates in striking ways with contemporary notions of embodiment and the intimate connections between mind, body and affect.
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| 6.00pm| **Public Lecture-Recital: BREATH IN VOCAL TECHNIQUE (Music Department)**  
Classical singing teacher Miranda Wright and some of her regular vocal students will illustrate the place of trained breathing in vocal technique. Breathing technique and problems of breath focus and control will be illustrated through music ranging from intimate songs written for performance in domestic or chamber-music type settings, to music in a more operatic style, written to fill larger spaces like theatres and presenting somewhat different breathing problems. |
**WEDNESDAY 11 JULY**

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| 9.30am | Being Breathed: from *King Lear* to Clinical Medicine  
Dr Katharine Craik (Oxford Brookes University) &  
Dr Stephen Chapman (University of Oxford)  
A cross-disciplinary team comprising a Shakespearean and an NHS respiratory physician, we hope to speak candidly to the project’s aim of exploring the therapeutic possibilities opened up by works of art from the distant past for breathless patients now. Focusing on *King Lear*, we consider Shakespeare’s suggestion – which follows Genesis 2:7 – that we do not breathe as singular, isolated agents; but are instead ‘breathed’ by those who most intimately know, observe and describe us. As one of western culture’s richest and most unsparing accounts of ethical relationality, *King Lear* helps to unravel breath’s existential significance – and reveals the urgency of this significance for healthcare today. |
| 10.15am | Untimely Breathings in *The Rape of Lucrece*  
Dr Naya Tsentourou (University of Exeter)  
This paper examines how the emotional landscape of Shakespeare’s narrative poem relates to the air that Tarquin, Lucrece, and Collatine inhale and exhale in order to argue that the asphyxiating atmosphere in Lucrece’s bedroom creates an immersive and uncomfortable experience for the reader. The paper seeks to advance interpretations that focus on breath and female agency (Gina Bloom) and on Lucrece’s voice (Lynn Enterline). In its proposal of a pneumatic economy of emotion the paper suggests that not only can bodies be read as texts but the text itself can be read as a living, breathing body. |
| 10.40am | What is “the breath of our nostrils”? John Donne on “the anointed of the Lord,” Gunpowder Day, 1622  
Dr Patrick Gray (Durham University)  
In a sermon on Gunpowder Day, 1622, John Donne chose to speak on a verse from the Lamentations of Jeremiah: “The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits” (4:20). Whether the phrase, “the anointed of the Lord,” refers to a good king, Josiah, or a bad king, Zedekiah, is a notorious textual crux. The allusion to Genesis 2:7, “the breath of our nostrils,” introduces further obscurity. Does it refer to breath, the soul, or the Holy Spirit? Departing from St. Augustine, as well as Calvin, Donne takes advantage of the ambiguity of the passage to craft a defence of King James’ pursuit of the so-called Spanish Match, as well as his recent Directions to Preachers. |
| 11.00am | Panel discussion |
| 11.20am | Questions from the floor |
| 11.40am | Break |
12.10pm  **THE 18TH CENTURY** Chaired by Prof. Clark Lawlor (Northumbria University)

12.10pm  ‘Every word seemed spoke from the impulse of the moment’: Epistololarity, Sensibility and Breath in Frances Burney’s *Evelina*
Dr Gillian Skinner (Durham University)
In this paper, I use Burney’s popular and acclaimed novel *Evelina* (1778) as a test-case for ideas of relevance to eighteenth-century sentimental fiction in general. In examining how the epistolarity of *Evelina* combines with its related interest in and use of the vocabularies of sensibility, I investigate the literary uses of breath, in both its physiological and metaphorical manifestations, in Burney’s novel and in the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility more widely.

12.35pm  Symptoms of Respiration and the Healing Power of Poetry: Jerome Gaub, Willem Bilderdijk and Eighteenth-century Psychosomatics of Breathing
Dr Rina Knoeff (University of Groningen)
The eighteenth century was obsessed with the physiology and pathology of respiration, internal and external vapours and the necessity of clean air and strong winds for health and wellbeing. This paper examines the influential pathology of respiration of Leiden medical Professor Jerome Gaub (1705-1780), and his claims that ‘respiration is indeed subject to the government of the mind’ and that its ‘vitiations are exceedingly useful to be understood’. The second part of the paper analyses how Gaub’s ‘psycho-somatics’ was taken up by Dutch poet Willem Bilderdijk who, in his popular work *De ziekte der geleerden* (on the illness of the learned (1807)), proposed poetry as a way to relieve a ‘cramped chest’.

1.00pm  Tobacco in 18th Century Life and Literature
Dr Andrew Russell (Durham University)
I am interested in the arrival of tobacco on European shores and the implications of its ‘divine breath’ for literature and life in the 18th century. There are two 18th century genres in particular where tobacco’s influence may be discernible – the popular object- or ‘it-narratives’ of the time that speak (literally) to an interest in questions of ‘sentient matter’ and ‘material agency’, and the ‘the poetry of attention’ (Koehler 2012). Using cross-cultural comparisons of the cosmologies associated with intoxicating levels of tobacco use, I argue that tobacco played a hitherto unacknowledged role in the diverse strands of thought we now label ‘Enlightenment’.

1.20pm  Panel discussion

1.40pm  Questions from the floor

2.00pm  Lunch

2.30pm  [OPTIONAL]  **The Genealogy of Matter in Plotinus, Ennead II.4** (Classics Department)
Open seminar with Prof. Anthony Long (University of California, Berkeley)

3.00pm  Public lecture: BREATH IN CINEMA with Dr Davina Quinlivan (Kingston University)
This paper will address the significance of air and breath to modes of spectatorship in contemporary culture. Drawing on a range of philosophical and cultural analyses, from the thought of Luce Irigaray to Steven Connor, I consider the visuality of breath, wind, silence, especially their aural qualities, in films such as Joanna Hogg’s *Exhibition* (2014) and Aleksander Sokurov’s *Russian Ark* (2002). This work is part of an on-going investigation into breath and cinema which began with my first book *The Place of Breath in Cinema*. 
THURSDAY 12 JULY

9.30am  Arrival & coffee

10.00am  THE ROMANTIC & VICTORIAN PERIODS Chaired by Dr Peter Garratt (Durham University)

10.00am  London Fogs: Air as Food
Dr Christine Corton (Independent Scholar and Wolfson College, Cambridge)
London has always had natural fogs, but from the 1840s to the 1960s it combined with the large particulates from the burning of coal in industry and domestic hearths to form a deadly cocktail of polluted air, thick and yellow. Fogs were often so dense that they were described as ‘pea-soupers’ (named after cheap yellow split-pea soup, food of the poor) or ‘London particulars’ (a name for a brand of madeira wine, viscous and brown, sold only in the capital). How much did this sense that fog was a form of nourishment delay the progress of legislation to clean up London’s air?

10.45am  Romantic Consumption: the Paradox of Fashionable Breath
Prof. Clark Lawlor (Northumbria University)
‘I look pale. I should like to die of a consumption’. ‘Why?’ asked his [Byron’s] guest. ‘Because the ladies would all say, Look at that poor Byron, how interesting he looks in dying’. The tragic disease of consumption/tuberculosis is, perhaps notoriously, a key disease of literary and artistic international Romanticism, as well as having a profound influence in wider society. This paper analyses the role that breath played in this phenomenon: how could breath and breathlessness possibly contribute to the valorisation of such a horrible illness?

11.10am  Endless Breath? The Organ and Immortality
Prof. Francis O’Gorman (University of Edinburgh)
As we all know, reading poetry aloud (or indeed prose) requires us to accommodate the limited capacity of the lungs. There is, in a sense, always a contest with the grave in any such reading, and a long sentence tests us against the constraints of our own mortality. So the fantasy of that which could not run out of breath has long been alluring. There is something of that in Milton’s description of the Sun in Book III of Paradise Lost (‘What wonder then if fields and region here Breathe forth Elixir pure,’ where the wonder is in part the unchanging, ceaseless breath of the unfallen world. This purity will never change; the breath never run out. But in the nineteenth century the idea of lungs that could not run out of air acquired a strange form of material reality that a small number of writers were not ignorant of. The pipe organ, existing from the ancient Greeks, has often been described as figuratively having lungs. But with the adoption of water, then gas, then electric-powered turbines for organ blowers in the middle of the nineteenth century, the organ, theoretically, could provide that which nothing else could: breath that could go on forever. Thinking of Adelaide Anne Procter, Thomas Hardy, and then of Bach, this paper considers how the organ imaginatively proposed a glimpse, or rather a gust, of immortality.

11.30am  Break

11.50am  Panel discussion

12.10pm  Questions from the floor

12:30pm  Lunch
1.30pm  **THE TWENTIETH CENTURY** Chaired by Prof. Pat Waugh (Durham University)

1.30pm  **Mysterious Gear: Modernist Mountaineering, Oxygen Rigs, and the Politics of Breath**  
**Dr Abbie Garrington (Durham University)**
In 1954’s *Mountains*, one of the *Ariel Poems* published as Christmas cards by Faber, and the third of his series of *Bucolics*, W. H. Auden takes this moment, one year on from the close of the Everest era with the ascent of that mountain by Hillary/Tenzing, to describe climbers as ‘those unsmiling parties, / Clumping off at dawn in the gear of their mystery / For points up.’ By this time, such mysterious gear was likely to include an oxygen rig, which had proved crucial to that ‘Commonwealth’ ascent to the ‘roof of the world.’ Yet attitudes to the support of the human breath ‘on the hill’ in the early years of the twentieth century were fractured and, at times, controversial. Oxygen-less attempts were associated with fairness, and a British sense of the sporting (albeit that the question of whether mountaineering should be classed as a ‘sport’ brought its own controversies). Pushing the human body to its un-assisted limits on the world’s highest peaks became entangled with notions of masculinity, in a post-Great War era that saw younger generations seek challenges their veteran elders had found through conflict. Using the rapidly developing oxygen rig brought a mechanism into the picture of body-versus-mountain and, in addition to the technical difficulties new systems posed when being deployed for the first time, such contraptions fed into wider fears of the period about automata and the man/machine hybrid. Auden’s gear might be one of ‘mystery,’ indicating the strange, apparently spiritual rituals of the ‘brotherhood of the rope,’ but it was also to bring a jarring sense of modernity into atavistic struggles between the human body and inert rock. Mountain literature pre-1953 indicates the ways that the deployment of oxygen brought wider issues now associated with modernist culture on to the mountainside, while debates raged about just who got to breathe the rare air of the Himalayas, and who – having deployed air-in-a-bottle – might not have been said to have climbed them at all.

1.55pm:  **Anxiety – Ecstasy: Inspiration in Jack Kerouac’s and Allen Ginsberg’s Poetics**  
**Dr Stefanie Heine (University of Zurich)**
From the 50s onwards, Kerouac and Ginsberg outlined an embodied writing structured by breath-measure. In the course of sketching a ‘new’ literature, they adapt ancient notions of inspiration in radically different ways: Whereas Ginsberg theorizes inspiration as a transference of bodily rhythms affecting future readers, and ultimately imagines the potential for a respirational poetic resistance in the openness and vulnerability it implies, inspiration undergoes erasure in Kerouac’s poetics. Anxiously defending his idea of a hyper-masculine writing, he celebrates spontaneous “blowing” from an autonomous self and eschews forces entering from outside, be it literary predecessors or air.

2.20pm  **Breath as Psychoanalytic Sign**  
**Dr Arthur Rose (Durham University)**
This paper traces the significance of breath in psychoanalysis, both as an action the analyst observes, and as a physical correlative to introjection and expulsion. By following breath from Breuer and Freud’s early work on hysterical breath-holding through Freud’s analysis of the Wolf Man’s exhalations, to criticisms of Freud by Otto Rank and Otto Fenichel, and subsequent work on a more embodied psychoanalysis by Wilhelm Reich and Didier Anzieu, it will suggest that breath has a more complex relation to the politics of psychoanalysis than is usually thought.

2.25pm  Break

2.45pm  Panel discussion
3.05pm Questions from the floor

3.25pm Reflections and Connecting Thoughts
Prof. Peter Adey (Royal Holloway, University of London)

3.45pm Discussion

4.15pm Final Remarks
Prof. Jane Macnaughton (Durham University)

4.30pm Close

7.00pm CONFERENCE DINNER (The Senate Room, Durham Castle)