

What is a poetics of scale? This talk draws on Mina Gorji's practice as a poet and literary critic to explore the affordances of lyric to move between multiple scales of perception, experience, and time. Between sound and history, insect and constellation, crystal and volcano, the temporality of a verse line and deep time, how can poetry disrupt and expand the ways in which we understand belonging? At what scale of time, for example, is a person, a wasp, a word or plant -- native/ atopic/ extant/ extinct? To examine such questions, Mina Gorji will read from a variety of poems to think about how the experience of lyric listening activates different registers of scale.

**Mina Gorji** is Associate Professor in English at the University of Cambridge and fellow of Pembroke College. She has published widely on lyric poetry of the Romantic period, and is co-director of the Centre for John Clare Studies. She is currently completing a book on Listening in and to Romantic Lyric poetry, funded by a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship. She has two collections of poetry with Carcanet: *Art of Escape* (2020), which recently, in translation, won the International Award for Womens' Writing in Italy (*Premio di Scrittura femminile*) and *Scale* (2022) a *White Review* Book of the Year, and was described in *Poetry Review* as 'a gorgeous book of miniatures' and in the *Irish Times* as 'a book of deep sonic attention'.

### Lecture Series Scale

Scales are used to quantify properties such as length and temperature, or also to measure popularity and affect. But as Alice discovers in *Wonderland*, a change of scale can also have dramatic qualitative consequences. It disrupts customary ways of perceiving, acting, and being — to the point of feeling as 'queer' to her as a caterpillar's metamorphoses. Helped by the arguably inextricable intertwinement of different meanings and aspects of scale, Alice's experiences continue to provide apt metaphors for the disorienting importance and effects of scale and scaling at a time of hyperglobalization and the so-called anthropocene.

Scale is indeed a highly ambiguous notion, even when one only considers the meanings deriving from the Latin or Italian *scala*, ladder. It simultaneously denotes the whole ladder, one of its steps, and the relation between two steps: The scale of a cartographic map is the ratio between a distance on the map and a distance on the ground, but any particular length also defines a scale, and the range of scales from the subatomic to the planetary scale is part of the spatial scale. Paradoxically recursive, scale combines and helps mediate quantity and quality, as well as subjective perception, objective material properties, and contingent construction.

If different disciplines, discourses, and dispositives each have their privileged scales to which they tend to reduce others, what may be gained by thinking them together, acknowledging both the relative autonomy of particular scales — each with their own affordances, limitations, rules, even laws and ontologies — and their interdependence — each affecting and being affected by other scales? What is the critical purchase of developing multiscalar architectures or patchworks of scale-specific, mutually inconsistent and irreducible descriptions, theories, and models? How might the tensions be made productive where they overlap or come into contact? The ICI's Lecture Series 'Scale' will address such questions by reflecting upon the critical role of scale within and across a wide range of different fields.

# Mina Gorji – Poetics of Scale

