

On Teaching Difficult Poetry

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“They [don’t] order, said I, this matter better in France –”

L. Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*

Abstract

This essay explores the educational value of teaching difficult poetry in secondary and higher education. Engaging with contemporary debates on actualisation, performative reading, and the critique of heritagisation, it argues that these approaches are most effective when grounded in Gadamer’s hermeneutics and Bakhtin’s dialogical theory. By examining poetic difficulty from linguistic, cognitive, and historical perspectives, it proposes a flexible, text- and learner-centred pedagogy that combines aesthetic engagement with interpretive rigour, thereby preserving both the density of poetic meaning and the critical function of literary education.

Keywords: difficult poetry; classics; hermeneutics; actualisation; teaching.