

Love it

From Marmite to marriage and housekeeping to sleeping, the Newcastle Centre for Literary Arts is spreading the word of great poets, as **Tamzin Lewis** discovers.

What do the eminent poets Sean O'Brien and David Harsent have in common? Well, according to Sean they are: "grim and grimmer."

This probably isn't the best way to sell an event at Newcastle University featuring the two writers, but Sean can't be accused of telling untruths.

Sean's new collection of poetry *November* has just been published, his first since *The Drowned Book*, which won the Forward and TS Eliot prizes.

Named after the penultimate and possibly most dispiriting month of the year, the collection is fairly elegiac.

Sean, 58, who lives in Newcastle, says: "There are poems about my mother and father and literary friends who are no longer with us."

In poems like *Novembrists* he considers his childhood in Hull and his parents' relationship, while other poems contemplate the reality of memory.

"I am preoccupied with how the imagination works and how we take possession of the times in which we have lived," Sean says. "I am interested in the sources of the images I have of my early life. How do we construct the world that we think we inhabit? As the world you are born into vanishes, in my case it was the post-war world of the 1950s, you want to map it a bit."

November includes the Dantesque



Diary

May 12: Irreverent poet August Kleinzahler is described by Sean as an "inheritor to the Beat poets. He is the author of some of the best poems of the last ten years."

Born in New Jersey, he took classes with Northumbrian poet Basil Bunting at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. He has written ten poetry books including *Sleeping It Off in Rapid City*.

Culture Lab, Newcastle University, 7pm

May 20: Author of the classic *Housekeeping*, Marilynne Robinson is making a rare visit to Newcastle to talk about her work. She is described as having few novels (three) but many fans and is one of America's greatest contemporary

novelists. Her second novel *Gilead* won a Pulitzer Prize and her latest book *Home* won the Orange Prize for Fiction in 2009.

Curtis Auditorium, Newcastle University, 7pm.

May 25: Influential American poet CK Williams is delivering the Poetry Society annual lecture entitled *On Being Old*. It's likely to be a provocative lecture interspersed with new poems by Williams exploring his changing relationship with great poets such as Pushkin and Auden. Sean predicts that, "it will be very funny but terrifying at the same time!"

Curtis Auditorium, Newcastle University, 7pm. Free.

* For more information about the Newcastle Centre for the Literary Arts visit www.ncl.ac.uk/ncla

epic *On the Toon*, about a night out in Newcastle, which was commissioned by the Lit & Phil Library.

Sean says: "I am a gloomy bugger but there is the occasional funny poem too including one about Marmite. And yes I do love Marmite."

Sean, who is professor of creative writing at Newcastle University's School of

English Literature is reading alongside David Harsent, who has published ten collections of poetry.

In David's latest book *Night*, the dream-like and the nightmarish are never far apart.

Sean says: "David's book is absolutely fascinating. It is a domestic gothic with nightmarish glimpses of things early in the morning or late in the evening."

* Sean O'Brien and David Harsent are at the Culture Lab, Newcastle University on May 5 at 7pm. *Novembrists* is published by Picador and *Night* by Faber & Faber.

