

Sophister Module Description Template 2023-24

Full Name: *US Poetry from Whitman to Modernism*

Short Name: *US Poetry*

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Stephen Matterson smttrson@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: Michaelmas

Year JS/SS: JS

Module Content:

Poets to be studied will include Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore and William Carlos Williams. We will also reflect on the three major literary movements that shaped poetry in this period; Transcendentalism, the Harlem Renaissance and Modernism, and explore the relationship between poetry and public history, from the American Civil War to World War 2.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module a student should be able to

1. Identify and describe the characteristics of the poets studied and analyse their connections with other major authors.
2. Employ a highly developed range of interpretive strategies using appropriate critical vocabulary and theory.
3. Examine 19th and early 20th century US and international cultural movements as contexts for the work of the poets on the course.
4. Articulate the development of American poetry from the 19th century with attention to the major literary figures.
5. Generate research questions through the applied techniques of literature review, bibliographic enquiry, database and archive search.
6. Evaluate poetry in sophisticated written and oral presentation.

Learning Aims:

'I celebrate myself and sing myself' is the opening line of what many consider to be the founding statement of truly American poetry. Walt Whitman is the starting point for this option exploring the development of US poetry from the mid-19th up to the mid-20th century, with a particular focus on the Modernist period.

Whitman and Dickinson didn't come from nowhere, and we'll look at the Transcendentalist contexts of their work, and of their both exhilarating and sometimes troubling and ambivalent legacy for later poets. How do Whitman and Dickinson form the roots of Modernism—how did key poets from the Harlem Renaissance evaluate their sense of an American poetic? What's distinct about US Modernism?

This is a seminar-based course. Classes will typically involve an introduction to the poet/group followed by sessions of close readings of individual poems in which students are required to participate actively and in an informed way.

Assessment Details

1 Research exercise (1,500 words 20%), + 1 essay (4,500 words 80%)

Preliminary Reading List

We'll mainly use selections from all of the poets, especially using the Norton editions of their work. For preliminary reading, students should consult an authoritative anthology—such as *The Oxford Book of American Poetry* and read the selections of the poets with whom we'll engage.