

Sophister Module Description Template 2025-26

Full Name: 'The Care & Feeding of Long Poems'

Short Name: Long Poems

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Prof Philip Coleman, philip.coleman@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10 ECTS

Semester Taught:

Year: Senior Sophister

Description:

In Dream Song 354, from the final part of his long poem *The Dream Songs* (1969), John Berryman wrote:

'The Care & Feeding of Long Poems' was Henry's title
for his next essay, which will come out when
he wants it to.
A Kennedy-sponsored bill for the protection
of poets from long poems will benefit the culture
and do no harm to that kindly lady, Mrs Johnson.

This module will take a close look at a number of important 'long poems' and poetic sequences from the later decades of the twentieth century to the present. Considering nine representative poets from the United States, Great Britain, and Ireland, we will discuss the formal and thematic decisions made by poets in the creation of their works. How do we define the length of a 'long poem' and what is the relationship between the long poem and the poetic sequence? Are all 'long poems' or poetic sequences 'epics' and, if so, why? What is the relationship between the long poem and the lyric? What is the 'novel in verse'? Following Berryman's Dream Song 354, we will also consider what it means to talk about 'The Care & Feeding of Long Poems'. What does it mean to talk about influence and how important are sources when we begin to engage critically with longer poetic works? How are they to be 'cared' for and 'fed'? Moreover, in what ways can we talk about long poems, or poems of any kind, doing 'harm' or being of 'benefit' to 'the culture'? These are just a few of the questions we will consider in this module where the emphasis in class will be on careful close reading of the six primary texts named below.

Module Content:

1 Introduction: Contexts

Read: Bergman, 'The Long Poem'; McGill and Gronow Smith, 'The Long Poem'; Uri S. Cohen, Michael Goldston, and Vered K. Shemtov, eds. 'The Long Poem'. *Scans and links on Blackboard*.

Beginnings

Read: Berryman, 'Author's Note' and 'Dream Song 1' from *The Dream Songs*; Basil Bunting, from *Briggflatts*; Kennelly, 'Measures' and 'A Host of Ghosts' from *Cromwell*; Sullivan, first piece in 'You, Very Young in New York' from *Three Poems*. *Scans and links on Blackboard*.

- 2** John Berryman, *The Dream Songs* (1964-68)
John Berryman, *The Dream Songs* (1964-68)

- 3** Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day* (1982)
Bernadette Mayer, *Midwinter Day* (1982)

- 4 Brendan Kennelly, *Cromwell* (1983)
Brendan Kennelly, *Cromwell* (1983)
- 5 Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (2014)
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (2014)
- 6 Hannah Sullivan, *Three Poems* (2018)
Hannah Sullivan, *Three Poems* (2018)
- 7 **Reading Week**
- 8 Maurice Scully, *Things That Happen* (2020)
Maurice Scully, *Things That Happen* (2020)
- 9 Jorie Graham, *[TO] THE LAST [BE] HUMAN* (2022)
Jorie Graham, *[TO] THE LAST [BE] HUMAN* (2022)
- 10 Martina Evans, *The Coming Thing* (2023)
Martina Evans, *The Coming Thing* (2023)
- 11 Shane McCrae, *New and Collected Hell* (2025)
Shane McCrae, *New and Collected Hell* (2025)

12 Endings

In this class, everyone will talk about their experience of reading one long poem they have read during the term, with a focus on its ending.

Conclusion

In this class, we will discuss what we have learned over the course of the term and hear about everyone's plans for the final assignment.

Learning Outcomes:

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

- Demonstrate an awareness of the importance the long poem and poetic sequence to the development of anglophone poetry from the later decades of the twentieth century to the present in a number of contexts (including Ireland, Great Britain, and the United States);
- Employ a highly-developed range of interpretive strategies using appropriate critical vocabulary in discussing a number of major long poems/poetic sequences;
- Examine and explain some of the major critical and cultural contexts related to the poetic development of particular authors of long poems / sequences;
- Use high-level transferrable skills of analytical and writing techniques in relation to chosen topics studied in the module.

Learning Aims:

This module aims to provide students with the skills to:

- Critically evaluate a number of long poems and poetic sequences, in order to obtain a clear sense of the form's importance in a number of literary contexts;
- Demonstrate an understanding of a number of formal and thematic concerns common to many authors of long poems;

- Show familiarity with key critical approaches in both the study of the long poem in general and in relation to the particular poets discussed on the module.

Assessment Details:

- *Number of Components:* 2
- *Name/Type of Components:* (1) Journal; (2) Essay
- *Word Count of Components:*
 1. Journal: 10 x 200-word entries = 2,000 words
 2. Essay: 4,000 words
- *Percentage Value of Component(s):*
 1. Journal: 30%
 2. Essay: 70%

Both assessment components will be submitted at the end of the module, date to be confirmed. Further details about the requirements for the journal will be given in the first class.

Preliminary Reading List:

Primary Reading:

Students taking this module are strongly encouraged to obtain personal copies of the following books and start reading them before classes begin:

- John Berryman, *The Dream Songs* (1969)
- Martina Evans, *The Coming Thing* (2023)
- Jorie Graham, *[TO] THE LAST [BE] HUMAN* (2022)
- Brendan Kennelly, *Cromwell* (1983)
- Shane McCrae, *New and Collected Hell* (2025)
- Claudia Rankine, *Citizen* (2014)
- Maurice Scully, *Things That Happen* (2020)
- Hannah Sullivan, *Three Poems* (2018)

In addition to the above primary texts, students interested in taking this module are encouraged to read or dip into a range of 'long' poems and sequences before the module begins. Here are some suggestions, of varying length:

- Basil Bunting, *Briggflatts*
- Austin Clarke, *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust*
- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*
- Patrick Kavanagh, *The Great Hunger*
- James Merrill, *The Changing Light at Sandover*
- Ezra Pound, *The Cantos*
- Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*
- William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*
- Muriel Rukeyser, *The Book of the Dead*
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*
- William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*
- Louis Zukofsky, "A"

Secondary Reading:

In preparation for the close reading of work in class, students interested in taking the module should read a good introduction to studying poetic form. The following are recommended:

- Darryl Jones and Stephen Matterson, *Studying Poetry* (2000)
- John Lennard, *The Poetry Handbook* (1996)
- John Strachan and Richard Terry, *Poetry: An Introduction* (2001)

In terms of long poems specifically, the following are useful:

Uri S. Cohen, Michael Goldston, and Vered K. Shemtov, eds. 'The Long Poem,' special issue of *Dibur* (issue 4, Spring 2017): https://arcade.stanford.edu/dibur_issue/long-poem

Patrick Gill and Miguel Juan Gronow Smith, 'The Long Poem' in Patrick Gill, ed. *An Introduction to Poetic Forms* (2023)

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.