

Carleton University English Department

**ENGL 4601/5606 May-June 2015:
The Comparative Modernist and Contemporary Long Poem**

Professor Brenda Carr Vellino

Office: 1815 Dunton Tower

Office Hours:

Office Phone: 613-520-2600 x2321

email: brenda_carr@carleton.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION: The long poem invites us to consider when poetry might read like a novel and what the “big poem” form might offer in terms of engaging weighty questions enabled by these larger structures than the short, compact lyric we typically associate with verse.

Exploring this major innovation in twentieth and twenty-first century literary form—one that is taken up by poets across the globe from Canada to the U.S. to the UK to Russia to St. Lucia to Northern Ireland to Trinidad to Israel-Palestine, the course asks what insights we may glean from reading long poems transnationally and comparatively. As a dynamic hybrid and multi-genre form, the long poem may interweave elements of the epic, the novel, the lyric, theatre, autobiography, biography, history, photographs, newspaper articles, court records and diverse cultural and oral practices. The long poem is, as Virginia Woolf once said of the novel, “a capacious hold-all,” as it extends itself through juxtaposition, serialization, sequencing, and interrogative recontextualization of voices, intertexts, documents, and discourses. We will explore how the long poem’s expanded form and archeological depth may prove ideally suited to exploration of multi-layered concepts of subjectivity, history, language, memory, community, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, diaspora, and nation. Our study of the long poem will offer readers critical opportunities to engage genre studies, gender and queer studies, trans- and post-national studies, postcolonial studies, critical race and ethnicity studies, Indigenous studies, and environmental studies. Further questions we may consider include the following: What are the temporal and spatial effects of structures of extension, expansion, accumulation, association, and juxtaposition? What are the consequences of structures of layering, palimpsest, accumulation, simultaneity, disjuncture, and rupture? How does the contemporary long poem interrogate the epic impulse to sing the “tale of the tribe,” a singular story of communal identity? How does it refashion intersecting quest, epic, mythic, and autobiographical forms in order to dramatize complex identities and geographical, national, familial or community locations and dislocations? When is the mixing of forms, discourses, and voices related to the postcolonial or diasporic mixing of languages, cultures, and ethnic/racial identities?

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

1 long poem annotation and analysis (2-3 pgs); due Class 2:	10%
1 critical response/short seminar on a scholarly article: due in assigned class:	15%
2 short response papers (2 pages; may be in poetic form):	20%
Essay Proposal with annotated Works Cited:	5%
1 Seminar (30 - 40 minutes)	25%
Essay: (4 th year students 8-10 pages; grad. students, 12-15 pages)	25%

COURSE TEXTS (Available at Octopus Books in the Glebe or on reserve in the library)

Modernist Texts:

**Muriel Rukeyser. from *U.S. I*: "The Book of the Dead," (1938) in *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser*. McGraw Hill, 1978. (on Reserve) (American Modernist response to the Gauley Bridge mining disaster)

**Anna Akhmatova. *Requiem* (1942-50), 1963 from Carolyn Forché, ed. *Against Forgetting*. Norton, 1993. (on Reserve) (Russian Modernist, survivor of the Stalin terror years)

H.D. *Trilogy*. 1944-46. New Directions, 1973. (Anglo-American Modernist, feminist mythic response to WWII London).

Contemporary Texts

Mark Doty. *Atlantis*. Harper, 1995 (American AIDS elegy).

Carolyn Forché. *The Angel of History*. HarperCollins, 1995. (American, focused on Holocaust representation)

Derek Walcott. *Omeros*, New Directions, 1990. (Saint Lucian, adaptation of Homeric epic to contemporary Caribbean life)

Seamus Heaney. *The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles Antigone*. Faber, 2004. (Northern Irish Verse Play Adaptation of Antigone to the War on Terror).

Don McKay. *Vis a Vis: Fieldnotes on Poetry and Wilderness*. Gasperau, 2001. (Canadian eco-poetry).

M Nourbese Philip. *Zong!* Wesleyan, 2011. (Trinidadian-Canadian response to the slave trade and its aftermath).

Rachel Zolf. *Neighbour Procedure*. Coach House, 2011. (Jewish-Canadian response to Israel-Palestine)

Marvin Francis. *City Treaty: A Long Poem*. Turnstone, 2002. (Indigenous Canadian response to unresolved land claims and other settler colonial issues).

**These two long poems will be from books on reserve in the CARL library.