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| The Long Poem |
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| In its most basic sense, the ‘long poem’ refers to any extended poetic work, from the long lyric to the epic. Within the context of modernism, the long poem emerged as a significant genre, channeling the authority and scope of the epic yet rejecting many traditional epic devices. Most notably, many modernist long poems abandoned narrative, replacing it with other organizational principles, ranging from symbolism to collage. The practice became particularly significant within the context of Anglo-American modernism, largely due to the influence of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, although the long poem can also be considered a transnational genre, with examples in French, such as Saint-John Perse’s *Anabase* (1924), and Spanish, like Federico García Lorca’s sequence *Poeta en Nueva York* (1940).  One of the most famous and influential examples of the genre is Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, published in 1922. Adapting mythological themes, literary allusions, and a symbolic framework, Eliot’s work combined the traditional historical rhetoric of earlier long poetics, from Chaucer to the Arthurian legends, with the language and concerns of World War I England. |
| In its most basic sense, the ‘long poem’ refers to any extended poetic work, from the long lyric to the epic. Within the context of modernism, the long poem emerged as a significant genre, channeling the authority and scope of the epic yet rejecting many traditional epic devices. Most notably, many modernist long poems abandoned narrative, replacing it with other organizational principles, ranging from symbolism to collage. The practice became particularly significant within the context of Anglo-American modernism, largely due to the influence of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, although the long poem can also be considered a transnational genre, with examples in French, such as Saint-John Perse’s *Anabase* (1924), and Spanish, like Federico García Lorca’s sequence *Poeta en Nueva York* (1940).  One of the most famous and influential examples of the genre is Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, published in 1922. Adapting mythological themes, literary allusions, and a symbolic framework, Eliot’s work combined the traditional historical rhetoric of earlier long poetics, from Chaucer to the Arthurian legends, with the language and concerns of World War I England. Eliot relied heavily on fragments and quotations to create the poem’s extended structure; this technique was further developed by Ezra Pound in *The Cantos* (1917–1972), which has been cited as the first example of literary collage in English-language poetics. Pound’s own ambition, to write a poem ‘containing history’, resulted in a work that ranged from ancient China to modern Italy in its references, allusions, themes, and techniques. Like *The Waste Land*, Pound’s work is organized according to juxtaposition and repetition, placing references side-by-side to develop new insights. Since Pound’s personal ambitions were often political and economic, *The Cantos* exemplify the didactic and pedagogical possibilities of the traditional epic in a non-narrative, modern form. Other poets would employ similar techniques, including Louis Zukofsky for his long poem *A* (1928-1974)and, moving into the midcentury, Charles Olson in *The Maximus Poems* (1953–1969).  The modernist long poem is not limited to the strategies of Pound and Eliot, however. Wallace Stevens wrote several important extended lyrics, such as ‘Auroras of Autumn’ and his ars poetica ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’. In a more traditional rhetorical and national mode, Hart Crane’s *The Bridge* (1930) attempted to develop an alternative American history through a visionary and ecstatic address, far removed from the scholasticism and impersonality of *The Cantos*. Narrative epics were not entirely abandoned in the period; Stephen Vincent Benét’s *John Brown’s Body* (1928) retells the American Civil War using many classical epic devices.  The late modernist period saw a new proliferation of the long poem, both by emerging and established writers. Eliot and H.D. responded to World War II with long poems, Eliot through the Christianity of *Four Quartets* (1943), H.D. through the sequence *Trilogy* (1944–1946). The latter work combines Egyptian mythology, Christian and Jewish scriptures, esoteric knowledge, and hermeticism into a sustained analysis of destruction and rebirth, using the space of the long poem to establish these diverse connections. H.D.’s later *Helen in Egypt* (1961) further challenged the long poem’s traditional male perspective, placing Helen of Troy’s voice at the centre of the work. William Carlos Williams’s late *Paterson* (1946–1963)blends narrative and collage poetics into an analysis of place, the eponymous Paterson, New Jersey. Elsewhere, the long poem became a tool for further challenging the ethnic and racial limitations of modernist practice: the African-American poet Melvin Tolson’s important *Harlem Gallery* (1965) adapted the citational and collage techniques of Pound to the cultural heritage of Black America. These later extensions of the modernist long poem anticipated contemporary and postmodern experiments with the form, which include the use of seriality, mathematically generated sequences, and journalistic writing practices. |
| Further reading:  (Baker)  (Bernstein)  (Dickie)  (McHale)  (Walker) |