

October 12, 2017

Philip McGowan (Queen's University, Belfast)

Can I Pray?: On John Berryman's Last Collections

---

**BIO**

Philip McGowan is President (2016-2020) of the European Association for American Studies and is the only non-US board member of the F. Scott Fitzgerald Society. He is Senior Lecturer in American Literature at Queen's University Belfast, is the author of *American Carnival: Seeing and Reading American Culture* and *Anne Sexton and Middle Generation Poetry: The Geography of Grief* and has research and teaching interests in twentieth-century American poetry, contemporary American fiction, as well as in film. He also has wider interests in revolutionary America, the American nineteenth century, westerns, and American narratives of addiction and alcohol control. In the field of poetry, his current teaching and research focuses on Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, the Middle Generation poets, and Mark Doty.

**ABSTRACT**

"Can I Pray?": On John Berryman's Last Collections - this paper focuses on *Love & Fame* (1970) and *Delusions, Etc* (1972) to understand some of the issues with which the U.S. poet John Berryman was tussling before his suicide on 7 January 1972. Central among these is Berryman's understanding of what constitutes prayer and, in teasing out this issue, I'll try to address a number of related questions: to what or to whom does one pray? From what or from whom does permission come to pray? Did Berryman feel able to participate in whatever prayer is? How are poetry and prayer related for Berryman?