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CRWR 515.01: Traditional Prosody

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Traditional Prosody - 34835 - CRWR 515 – 01

University of Montana – Spring 2019

Instructor: Stacy Szymaszek

Contact: stacy.szymaszek@mso.umt.edu

Course Time/Day/Room: Thursdays 6pm-9:20pm / Social Science 340

Office Hours: Wednesdays 2pm-4pm & by appointment / ECK 113

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Tradition is a curious word in poetry. While it is indeed (as the dictionary defines it) “the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc..., from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice,” in poetry it can be both liberating and a burden, something to claim and reject. It is dangerous when the poetry elite and self-elected gate-keepers of the canon hock tradition to defend a narrow realm of poetry-making, however, and thankfully, out of this inevitable tension, new traditions grow around the established ones.

In this class we will start by asking what does prosody mean? What does it mean to you? What rules (and/or traditions) do you want to follow or not follow and why? A good place for us to start is thinking about prosody as *the art of sounds moving in time*. How does a stream of sound and the quality of this movement turn into images, thoughts, and feelings that can elicit deep responses from temporal human creatures? Adhering to this definition of prosody enables it to be as relevant in the 21st century as any time, and what is time, a poet always wonders. This course will examine some of the rich traditions that make up the history of prosody and that have informed our idea of formalism, experimentalism, and non-traditionalist poetry today. We will broaden the context of what tradition means today by reading essential works in poetics that have marked significant changes in poetry over the last three centuries. To that end, we will explore meter, scansion, the sonnet, the sestina, the Ghazal, and other forms thereby arriving at working definitions of narrative, lyric, free verse, and language-centered poetry, which now contribute to our contemporary ideas of formalism and tradition.

REQUIRED TEXT:

An Exaltation of Forms: Contemporary Poets Celebrate the Diversity of Their Art, edited by Annie Finch and Katherine Varnes.

Available at the UM Bookstore.

In addition, I will provide supplementary reading packets as PDFs/handouts.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Through listening to, discussing, and emulating poems at the level of sound and form, you will become self-motivated readers and disciplined writers of poetry that is informed by knowledge of tradition (“the rules”) so, if you choose, you can break them with your own innovation and grace. By the end of the class, you will have a strong final manuscript. The most important goal in my classroom is: using the space as an incubator to support your own searching, developing, and *coming into your own sense of what matters in your work*.

Required work to achieve these objectives will include:

- Read and annotate weekly readings
- Engage in all in-class writing, discussion, and other individual and collaborative activities
- Write thoughtful weekly responses to the work we read (1-2 pages)
- Work on your final manuscript (10 poems minimum)
- Revise work through peer review, self-assessment, and my feedback

STRUCTURE:

Basic structure for classes will include these elements (subject to revision if needed):

- Reading texts aloud/listening to audio recordings/recitation from memory
- Writing exercises or focused freewrites
- Sharing exercises (in class) or new poems (out of class assignments)
- Discussion full class

GRADING:

35% in-class participation, 20% weekly assignments/responses (on time), 20% mid-semester portfolio, and 25% final manuscript. I expect full participation and will allow for **only two absences**.

POLICY ON ABSENCES AND LATENESS:

The standard policy is that more than three absences in a fourteen-week term may result in a grade of “no credit.” You must arrive on time for class and stay until dismissal. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. I like to know if you will be absent in advance whenever possible. Please email me if you know you will be absent so you can get the assignment and readings. If there is an emergency please speak to me about it as soon as you can.

CULTURAL OR CEREMONIAL LEAVE:

“Cultural or ceremonial leave allows excused absences for cultural, religious, and ceremonial purposes to meet the student’s customs and traditions or to participate in related activities. To receive an authorized absence for a cultural, religious or ceremonial event the student or their advisor (proxy) must submit a formal written request to the instructor. This must include a brief

description (with inclusive dates) of the cultural event or ceremony and the importance of the student's attendance or participation." For full information on this and other academic policies and procedures see [UM's Policies and Procedures](#).

OFFICE HOURS/CONTACTING ME:

I encourage you to meet with me if you wish to discuss your work, an idea, or simply need additional support. You may also request an appointment outside of office hours. When you email me, I will do my best to get back to you within 24 hours. Please put PROSODY in the subject line of your emails.

CLASS DECORUM:

My preference is that you shut down and store all electronic devices during class unless our work calls for them, however I will only make a point of asking you to put a device away if you appear distracted or are distracting others. Beverages are okay, but please refrain from eating in class. During discussions, we will work toward a lively, engaged style of conversation that allows for balanced, respectful sharing of questions, opinions, feedback, and debate.

I encourage you to exchange University of Montana email addresses with your peers as you will be getting to know each other through your own work and responses. Since we are creating a conscientious and supportive environment, I trust that you will be mindful and respectful of each other and your shared work and will not discuss the work with persons outside of our workshop unless you have permission from the author.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me after class or during my office hours. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator, so I can do my best to support you.

NAME/ PRONOUN STATEMENT:

I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate/preferred name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference.

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY:

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty—in as much as they keep the individual student as well as the collective community from learning—will result in an automatic F and may entail a variety of other sanctions up to and including expulsion from the University. [Follow the link for a definition of plagiarism](#). If you are unsure about your rights and responsibilities,

please take the time to consult the student conduct code on the University of Montana's website.

COURSE CALENDAR (SUBJECT TO REVISION):

January 10: Overview and "Poem Greatness"

Overview of syllabus and discussion of literary traditions.
Bring a "great poem" to class. Discussion of its period and context.
Homework: memorize the poem you chose to recite in next class.

January 17: Movements and Foundational Form

Discussion of Lyric poem, Narrative poem, and the Heroic Ode.
Discussion of Poetry Movements.
Homework: 1) write about your conscious and unconscious influences—and link them to at least two movements in poetry—talk about what constitutes your "natural" voice, impulse, aesthetic... . 2) Find a poem from one of your movements and write an imitation.

January 24: 20th Century Poetics

Discussion of binaries, experiments, and formalism.
Homework: Read *An Exaltation of Forms*, first section on METER

January 31: Meter and Scansion

Recitation of your "great poem" and discussion of meter, scansion, feet, syllabic stress, form... .
Homework: read *An Exaltation of Forms*, second section on STANZAS

February 7: Stanzas

Discussion of the heroic couplet et al.
Homework: read *An Exaltation of Forms*, third section on RECEIVED FORMS
+ prepare presentation on sonnet or Ghazal from origination to the present.

February 14: Sonnet and Ghazal

Discussion of technique of the sonnet and sonnet form and Ghazal.
Individual presentations on one of these forms from origination to the present.
Homework: write a love or anti-love sonnet (Petrarchan or Elizabethan) or a Ghazal.

February 28: Villanelle

Survey of the form (handout) with recitation.

Development of your own villanelle.

Homework: read *An Exaltation of Forms*, fourth section on PRINCIPLES FOR FORMAL EXPERIMENTATION

March 7: Organic Form

Discussion of free-verse, ideas of labor in craft, shifts and changes in 20th century landscape of poetry and poetics.

Individual presentations on one of the principles of formal experimentation.

March 14: Poetry Camps and Anthologies

"The Donalds" – Discussion of how *The New American Poetry* (Donald Allen) and *New Poets of England and America* (Donald Hall) represented divergent trends in poetry and poetics. Handout will be circulated before class. Analysis of 10 poems from each anthology and a discussion of their introductions and Allen's inclusion of poetic statements.

March 21: Manifesto and Poetic Statement

Discussion of these forms.

Reading handout circulated ahead.

Write a manifesto and your own poetic statement.

March 28: SPRING BREAK

April 4: Politics and Translation

Writing the political poem. Translating the poem.

Presentations on either or both.

April 11: Guest Poet TBA

April 18: Experimentalism and its Discontents

Where are we with the avant-garde today? What is the currency of traditional prosody?

April 25: Presentations

Present on your favorite poetic form and discuss its role in poetry today.

May 2: Final Exam week / Reflection

Class reading, gathering.