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CRWR 595.02: ST - Lives of Writers

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SPECIAL TOPICS: Lives of the Writers – CRWR 595 02

University of Montana – Spring 2019

Instructor: Stacy Szymaszek

Contact: stacy.szymaszek@mso.umt.edu

Course Time/Day/Room: Tuesdays 3:30pm-6:20pm / ECK 244

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This class, open to all genres, will explore writer's lives through their archives, letters/correspondence, collectives, communities, mentorships, and publishing circles. This exploration, focused on continental North America, will ignite our ideas around the relationship between our material lives (biography), the work we create (authorship), why we create it (poetics), and how to send it out into the world (survival). It will trace many different experiences of writing lives both inside and outside of the University structure, allowing us to better conceive of how our traditions and communities have shaped our interests and paths as writers and professionals. The title of this class pays homage to Vasari's classic *The Lives of the Artists* written by 16th century Italian painter, Vasari, whose famous biographical sketches of Renaissance artists is considered the best source of knowledge on the topic, despite the fact that Vasari didn't do any research for accuracy and loved gossip. Fittingly, a resonant influence for me coming up with this course was a quote I read in my late 20's I can't find anywhere, either said by Gary Snyder to Robert Creeley or vice versa, about in the 1950's a poet would travel thousands of miles to meet up with another poet. I had occasion to interview Robert Creeley before he died and I asked him to speak about it, but I can't find this interview online anymore! He said something to the effect that to find other another person questioning the mainstream poetic was so rare and the sense of isolation so vast that indeed one would drive across the country to have coffee with a kindred poet. This is essentially what this class is about – how artists are pushed from the margins and what they have historical built there, and what we can build on.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

A Simple Revolution - Judy Grahn

The H.D. Book - Robert Duncan

Intervenir/Intervene - Dolores Dorantes and Rodrigo Flores Sanchez

Theory, a Sunday - Louky Bersianik and Nicole Brossard et al

The Delicacy and Strength of Lace: Letters Between Leslie Marmon Silko and James Wright

Du Bois's Telegram: Literary Resistance and State Containment – Juliana Spahr

Available at Fact and Fiction.

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

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Through studying and discussing the lives and practices of some well-known writers and the communities they were integral to, we'll look for inspiration for how to conduct ourselves as writers in vastly different landscape of 2019 and beyond.

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 ½ - 2 pages)
- Work on your midterm paper which will become your final (5 pages)
- Work on your final paper (10 pages) that documents your engagement with a writer of your choice (we'll talk about this in detail)
- 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
- Writing exercises or focused freewrites
- Sharing exercises (in class)
- Discussion in groups
- 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 15: Introductions

Overview of syllabus and discussion of class themes as well as identifying specific concerns of the group. Cultural work and my experience at The Poetry Project. Your autobiographies/lives as writers! (Discuss 1st in groups and then share with class).

Homework: Read chapters 1-6 (Book 1) of *The H.D. Book* and write response.

Start thinking about which writer you would like to engage with for your final paper.

January 22: San Francisco Renaissance: The Alchemy of Mentorship Part 1

What is the SFR? The alchemy of mentorship – Robert Duncan and H.D./their bios/discussion of *H.D. Book* reading.

Homework: Read chapters 1-3 in Book 2 of *The H.D. Book* and write response.

January 29: San Francisco Renaissance: The Alchemy of Mentorship Part 2

Discussion of reading and placement of the work in a small field of highly personal criticism that went against the grain of the time.

Homework: Read selections from Pasolini's essays in *In Danger* (handout) and write response.

February 5: The Writer's Civic Duty – What is it? Getting Into Political Trouble Part 1

General discussion of the idea that a writer has a duty to society by having a public and anti-institutional spirit/disrupting the status quo - via Pasolini (via Dante).

Homework: Read *A Simple Revolution* by Judy Grahn PAGES TBA and an interview with her that I'll provide write response.

February 12: Civic Duty Part 2

Discussion of cultural shifts brought about by the women's and gay rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the formation of new institutions (the Women's Press Collective, Oakland Feminist Women's Health Center, A Woman's Place Bookstore).

Homework: Read Spahr's *Du Bois's Telegram* chapters 1 and 2. (Late add will order through Fact and Fiction).

February 19: "Literary Resistance and State Containment" Part 1

Discussion of the reading: Can writing be revolutionary? What is the relationship between literature and politics? Homework: Read Spahr's *Du Bois's Telegram* chapters 3 and 4.

February 26: "Literary Resistance and State Containment" Part 2

Movement literatures and the national tradition. Discussion of the reading.

Homework: prepare your midterms, hand in March 5 in class (5 pages).

March 5: The 100 Year Project / MIDTERMS DUE

In groups of 3, come up with a 100 year project i.e. create something literary beyond your own lifetime from which others can benefit (examples The Poetry Project, Naropa's Summer Writing Program...).

March 12: Presentation of 100 Year Projects

Groups will present their project to whole class.

Homework: Read *Intervenir/Intervene* pages TBA and write response.

March 19: "Language Justice"

The projects of Dolores Dorantes and Jen Hofer.

Homework for April 2: Read *The Delicacy and Strength of Lace* pages TBA and bring in some examples of your favorite literary correspondence.

March 26: SPRING BREAK

April 2: Literary Correspondence

Discuss Silko and Wright and share literary letters selected by you.

Homework: Write a letter to another living writer. You can send or not send but expect to share.

April 9: Missoula! Goedicke and the Archive

Share your letter. Patricia Goedicke taught poetry in this department for over 25 yrs. (died 2006) and was an avid letter writer. We'll try to look at some of her letters held in the Mansfield Library. What's the current scene here? What does it have, what does it need, what do you want to do? Homework: Read *Theory, A Sunday* pages TBA

April 16: Collectives

Discussion of collaborative writing/writing groups/collectives

In class exercise: pick a partner and write a collaborative text.

Homework: Work on your final paper.

April 23: Workshop Final Papers

Chance for you to get peer feedback, discuss any questions you are working through.

April 29: Final Exam week / Reflection

Turn in final papers, present to class.