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CRWR 411.01: Advanced Poetry Workshop

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Recommended Citation

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CRWR 411, Advanced Poetry Workshop, 3 credits, Spring 2022

Course Information

- Day/time: Monday, 3:30-6:20pm
No class 1/17, 2/21, and 3/21
- Location: LA 106

Contact Information

- Instructor: Keetje Kuipers
- Office: LA 127
- Office hours: Wednesdays, 10am – 2pm
- Email: keetje.kuipers@umontana.edu

Course Description

This class serves as the final incubatory artistic community for your poems, preparing you for a more solitary writing practice beyond the university. With this in mind, you will write and revise many new poems as you work to hone your voice. We will explore the excitements of contemporary American poetry via in-class writing exercises, oral and written investigations of five outstanding contemporary poetry collections, and Zoom visits with at least one of the poets whose work we'll be studying this semester. Through our reading on the craft of writing, we will delve into different elements of poetry—including the musical, metaphorical, structural, and rhetorical—and individual conferences will focus your attention on how these tools can be made to do the heavy lifting in your own poems. Revision will also be critical to your writing process in this class, and your willingness and ability to deconstruct and remake your own poems will be a core element of our work together. Finally, our semester will culminate in a collaboration with visual art students on a piece of screenprinted work created using language from your own poems. All of this reaches towards our primary goal: to develop your individual poetic voice and style, and to prepare you for an independent writing life.

Course Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will have:

- developed specific writing skills and practices, particularly those that equip them to independently generate new work
- learned to read contemporary American poetry with confidence, pleasure, increased familiarity, and an understanding of its depth and breadth
- increased their facility with the skills of literary analysis and interpretation, especially with regard to the particular concerns, forms, and techniques of

contemporary poetic discourse

- created their own rigorous practice of revision through the repeated exercise of peer critique

Required Texts/Readings

The Poet's Companion, by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux

When My Brother Was an Aztec, by Natalie Diaz

Here All Night, Jill McDonough

Crush, by Richard Siken

White Blood, Kiki Petrosino

Frank, Diane Seuss

Course Requirements

Class Format and Procedures

Class time will be used for discussion of texts, small group workshops, larger whole class workshops, one-on-one conferences, and writing exercises. Students must also regularly check Moodle for assignment materials, updates, and deadlines.

Weekly Responsibilities

Students are expected to complete critical responses to the assigned texts (at least 1 full page, double-spaced, 12-point font) and come to class prepared to discuss them. Any responses under 1 full page will be returned. Reader responses should not be casual appraisals of the texts or mere ramblings, but thoughtful and sophisticated critical arguments that utilize the concepts we've discussed. Also note that responses will be incorporated into our class discussions, so be prepared to discuss the content of your responses in class (and to read aloud for us the poem that your response refers to). For these responses, in addition to responding to the text as a whole, I will assign you a particular poem in the book to respond to and you will present your response to the class.

Students will also submit freshly written poems from assigned writing exercises. All poems and exercises should be new writing, produced this term for this course.

Writer's Notebook

Please purchase a dedicated writing notebook for this class. Write in it regularly and daily. I will not collect or read your notebooks—these are for you and I consider them private places where you can collect material for your poems. You will use them to jot down ideas, complete exercises, and begin poem drafts. Think of your notebook as your personal safe deposit box for creative gold.

Poems

Your poem-writing assignments will correspond with the specific ideas/craft points we cover in class and will range widely in topic and scope. Each assignment will be accompanied by specific guidelines; some aspects of the assignments will be stipulated and others will have more latitude, as the ultimate goal is to not only expand your writerly skills, but also to help you locate and hone your individual voice.

Annotation

The best way to absorb what you read is to be in dialogue with the text. This can be accomplished through annotation of your reading: Whether reading a poem or a craft essay, you should be notating those parts of the text that speak to you. As you read poetry in particular, try to think about it in light of two things: First, the particular elements of poetry we're focusing on in the course at the time, and second, what it offers you as a model (to imitate or avoid) in your own writing. Discover a passion and follow it up.

Workshop Submissions

Students will participate in two types of workshop scenarios: The first will be regularly occurring small group workshops of poems written in response to specific weekly writing exercises. These workshops will be conducted "cold," meaning that students will present new poems to their group and receive comments in real time without advanced preparation for critiques. These groups will rotate so that you get the chance to have personal feedback from everyone in the class.

The second type of workshop will occur periodically throughout the semester, and will be conducted as a whole class workshop with ample time to prepare written critical comments in advance. These workshop poems can be any poem you've written over the course of our semester together: a completed exercise I gave you, a poem you wrote on your own, or a revision of a poem which you received feedback on from your small group. All poems for workshop must be submitted over Moodle on the stipulated day. Everyone will print the poems on their own, comment directly on them, and bring them to class the following Monday. Last-minute technical problems are not an acceptable excuse for not having your work in hand. Additionally, your poems for our whole class workshop must be accompanied by a self-evaluation (1-2 pages, a single copy just for me) that details your thoughts on the work you're submitting: questions about the form, successful changes you made, elements you enjoyed, things you're still struggling with, and so on.

Workshop Critiques

Our small group workshops do not require advance preparation. These "cold" readings allow us to react to the poems instinctively and off-the-cuff, rather than trying to impress each other with pre-meditated commentary. Instead, your group will compile a short list of comments for each of the poems you're considering, and will report back to the class on the work that you shared with each other.

For the whole class workshop, you will submit written peer critiques of each other's work on the day of workshop. Try to avoid simply saying "I liked this part" or "I didn't like that part" — instead, focus your critiques on specific points of craft and use examples from the text to illustrate what you think is working and what needs improvement. These critiques should not be typed—instead, please write directly on the poems themselves, including not only substantial line-edits but also a lengthy paragraph response on the back of the poem summing up your thoughts on potential revision. Keep in mind that in all workshop scenarios, when critiquing the work of your peers, strive to be rigorous and specific, but also respectful and professional.

Conferences

Each student will have two one-on-one conferences with me over the course of our semester. This is an opportunity to discuss the trajectory of your work and your goals as a poet. Please come to our conferences with specific questions and points of curiosity about your reading and writing. In addition, you are welcome to meet with me outside of class during my office hours (or at another time convenient for both of our schedules) so that I can recommend additional poets that I think you specifically might enjoy or to look at new poems you're working on. While you are welcome to "drop in" during my office hours, I always suggest scheduling an appointment in advance in order to avoid a wait.

Revision

Revision is an essential skill and something we will discuss throughout the term. Please note that revision does not mean correcting grammatical errors, changing a few adjectives, or moving a paragraph; it is a complete re-writing which follows a re-seeing (hence "re-vision") of the work as a whole. Required revisions which do not dramatically transform the creative work—taking the poetry to a higher level, and reaching new writing goals through the use of refined craft techniques—will be given a failing grade. As you revise your work on your computer over the course of the semester, I recommend saving each new draft under a different title (ie. "TreePoem1," "TreePoem2," etc.) so that you can go back to your work and see the changes you made during the extended revision process.

Final Portfolio

Based on what you learn from workshops, readings, peer critiques, and craft talks, students will present a group of comprehensively revised poems at the end of the semester. This portfolio must be accompanied by a critical introduction to your work, including a self-evaluation that explains your revision process for each poem.

Screenprinting Collaboration

In the second half of our semester, we will partner with the students in Professor James Bailey's screenprinting class in order to create a collaborative work of visual art featuring words from your poems. This will be a chance for you to practice ekphrasis and to gain experience with cross-media collaboration.

Attendance and Participation

All students are expected to participate enthusiastically, consistently, and sensitively in workshops and the course as a whole. Absences must be discussed with me prior to class. Unexpected absences will result in one-half letter-grade reduction per class. More than 2 unexpected absences may result in you being asked to drop the class.

Grading Assessment

Late work will receive no credit unless an extension has been arranged in advance. If an assignment is not turned in through the proper forum (for instance, emailed to me rather than turned in through Moodle), it will not be accepted. Grading is based on active participation in the workshops and class discussion (25%), weekly critical and creative responses (25%), workshop poems and critiques (25%), and the final portfolio (25%). Creative work will be graded based on fulfillment of the instructions, rigor of the finished product, and the sense of adventure and exploration applied to the work. I will also ask myself whether your work has demonstrated improvement or growth over the course of the semester. Please note that to receive a high grade in this course, you must do more than simply satisfy the standard requirements as presented in this syllabus. You must also demonstrate excellence in all areas of our work together, including intellectual and imaginative seriousness, complex engagement with the elements of craft, power of voice, strong command of language, a serious commitment to revision, and a mastery of writing fundamentals (no typographical errors).

Other Information

Electronic Devices

Please make sure to turn off your cell phones and other electronic devices (including laptops) prior to the start of class. There will be zero tolerance for ringing phones and texting in class. If an emergency requires you to leave your phone on, please speak to me at the beginning of class. Texting is forbidden, and if you do it, I will ask you to leave our class permanently.

Special Accommodations

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you have a disability that adversely affects your academic performance, and you have not already registered with Disability Services, please contact Disability Services in Lommasson Center 154 or 406.243.2243. I will work with you and Disability Services to provide an appropriate modification.

Covid Procedures

A plethora of information can be found here:

<https://www.umt.edu/provost/initiatives/instructional-resources/default.php>