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ENCR 311A.01: Creative Writing- Poetry

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SCHEDULE OF CLASSES
311A CREATIVE WRITING: POETRY
University of Montana
Joanna Klink
Wednesday 3:10-6 pm
FA 211

I think in human language we turn the sounds of our mouths into a language of things in order to imitate the way we experience. I think there is a primal intuition in our expression: The mountain speaks to me: so we try to speak back. What Piaget says makes sense to me. We speak back to something that speaks to us.

So in speaking, there is a cooperation going on between world and person. Our engagement in language is active only as long as we are finding the universe. When we cease to find the universe, we cease to have the occasion of language. The great proportion of modern poets who have suffered shipwreck in language are really no longer engaged in finding the universe. Language has in a way grown sufficient to them. But we have to have a searching psyche, a searching mind, or simply a longing or a need for language to continue in the universe. Language for me is an engagement in which we are finding the universe. So, seeing is very closely related to language [...]. We imitate seeing in language. But reading of course far precedes language. For instance, we can read the tracks of the dinosaurs and we can understand them. That is their language. So, we read the universe as long as we are interested in it.

Robert Duncan

What distinguishes poetry from automatic speech is that it rouses us and shakes us into wakefulness in the middle of a word. Then it turns out that the word is much longer than we thought, and we remember that to speak means to be forever on the road.

Osip Mandelstam

anything shut in with you can sing

Gertrude Stein

REQUIRED TEXTS

Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens
Earth Took of Earth (Ecco anthology, ed. Jorie Graham)

OFFICE HOURS

Friday 12-3 pm and by appointment
joklink@qwest.net
phone x2333 or 542-1825

DESCRIPTION

This is an intermediate poetry workshop involving critical analysis of student work, as well as reading and discussion of poems by established poets. Each week we will examine some topic in

the history of poetics (descriptive language, syntax, diction, etc.) and consider students' poems in its light. There will be an emphasis on revision; some memorization will be required.

PROCEDURES

BRING to class each week at least one poem (typed, with your name at the top).

Sometimes there will be instructions for the poem; sometimes not.

You can always hand in more poems than are assigned.

FISH out of the shelf each week the xeroxed worksheet of poems.

(It will usually be available by late Friday afternoon.)

READ through all the poems on the worksheet and prepare the ones marked X.

READ and prepare any other assignments.

BE, in class, present.

Sept 5	Introductions
Sept 12	Diction Clichés
Sept 19	The Senses Sense-perception & the Argument with Generality
Sept 26	Descriptive Language Haiku Synaesthesia
Oct 3	Figurative Language Metaphors Images
Oct 10	Tone Modulation of Tone
Oct 17	Tone Nonsense Poems
Oct 24	Syntax Predicament Helplessness
Oct 31	Syntax Strangeness Surprise
Nov 7	Short History of English Prosody Metrical vs. Free Verse
Nov 14	Sonnets Sestinas Villanelles

Nov 21	No class (day before Thanksgiving)
Nov 28	The Line Free Verse & Line-breaks
Dec 5	Portfolios due
Dec 7th-15th	Conferences
Dec 12	Last class Students read from their work

The Illiterate, by William Meredith

Touching your goodness, I am like a man
 Who turns a letter over in his hand
 And you might think this was because the hand
 Was unfamiliar but, truth is, the man
 Has never had a letter from anyone;
 And now he is both afraid of what it means
 And ashamed because he has no other means
 To find out what it says than to ask someone.

His uncle could have left the farm to him,
 Or his parents died before he sent them word,
 Or the dark girl changed and want him for beloved.
 Afraid and letter-proud, he keeps it with him.
 What would you call his feeling for the words
 That keep him rich, and orphaned, and beloved?

A FEW WORKSHOP GUIDELINES

When you prepare a poem in advance, try to answer the following questions:

What happened? Provide a précis/literal reconstruction of the plot of the poem, and be as precise as you can. If there are confusions (e.g. if the speaker is remembering something and the shift into the past isn't evident), take note of them.

Who is speaking?

Who is the "you"/addressee of the poem? Identify all other characters or voices that appear in the course of the poem.

What is the central conflict enacted in the poem?

In the workshop itself

Address what the last person said.

Don't offer an interpretation of the poem until you have determined what constitutes the basic plot-line.

Point to images or phrases which you find moving and try to articulate why they work (e.g. accurate sense-perception; accurate description; accurate diction; ample tonal range; authenticity of dramatic predicament/voice).

Likewise, identify passages that are less successful and explain why they aren't effective. Pay attention to clichéd language; imprecise sense-data; redundancies; obscurities; language which is overly abstract; summaries of states of mind or emotion.

If you offer suggestions for revision, be as specific as possible. Why would a different title be more effective? Which lines would you cut and why? What lines might be reordered and why? What parts of the poem might be expanded upon and why?