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CRWR 511.01: Poetry Workshop

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CRWR 511: Graduate Poetry Workshop
LA 210 Wed. 6 – 8:50 p.m.

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Texts

Earth Took of Earth: 100 Great Poems in the English Language, ed. Jorie Graham (Ecco 1996)
Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry 1800-1950, ed. Melissa Kwasny (Wesleyan U Press 2004)

Class Description

She it is Queen Under the Hill / Whose bosts are a disturbance of words within words / That is a field folded.
- Robert Duncan

Where do great poems come from? What differentiates a great poem from ordinary speech, which Stéphane Mallarmé calls “no more than a commercial approach to reality”? The muse of the Greeks, the Holy Imagination of the romantics, the unconscious of the surrealists, the duendé of Lorca’s Andalusian deep song, the imaginal in certain visionary traditions—what has captivated writers and readers of poetry since its origins in riddle and prayer is the sense that *another voice* has taken over, a voice, as André Breton describes it, “which converses with us most specifically about something other than what we believe we are thinking.” The focus of this workshop will be, rightly, on your own work. Along the way, we will be looking at poems that seem to access the strange, disruptive, mysterious energies spoken of above, as well as essays that speak to how to access them.

Course Requirements

1. Close reading of assigned texts: Each week, we will be spending the first 20-30 minutes of each workshop discussing one to four poems from the anthology and, when relevant, an essay from *Toward the Open Field* in an effort toward enlarging our field of available practices and poetics, paying particular attention to how a poem opens to the unexpected.

2. Poems submitted to workshop: Because this is why we are here, each of you will be required to submit a *minimum* of 10 poems of your own. I will not be assigning exercises; however, if you need prompts or exercises, speak to me individually and I will provide them. I will assign each of you a number and proceed in order. If we do not get to your poem, you will still receive written comments from me, and can be assured that your poem of the next week will be critiqued in class. At the end of the semester, I will require a substantial revision of two poems turned in with the originals.

3. Comments on poems submitted to workshop: In order to frame our critiques in the most productive manner possible, I am asking each of you, including the author of the poem, to supply written comments *on the reverse side of the page the poem is on* for every poem you receive each week. Below is only a suggested method, which you might try in formulating your response:

1 - Read all poems once, before making any notes on the pages. This will give you some editorial distance, so that you can best evaluate your first impression.

2 - Return to each poem, and make any copyediting or other editorial comments on the page.

3 - Now, on the other side of the page, write:

–two statements of strengths you see in the work.

–two questions or concerns or challenges about the work.

(You may have more than two. Choose the two most relevant. You can always say more in discussion, if it feels appropriate.)

4. Final project: Compile an anthology of your favorite 7-10 poems and write a short (3-5 page) introduction to them. Use Graham's introduction to *Earth Took of Earth* as a model, or that of any introduction to an anthology that you find instructive. Think about the introduction as answering the questions: why these poets, why these poems, why this community? What do they (and you) have in common? How do they differ? In effect, you are going to be articulating a stance or aesthetic.