Graduate Poetry Workshop
CRWR 511
The University of Montana
Joanna Klink
Tuesdays 3:35-6+pm
LA 210

Poetry is the language of intensity. Because we are going to die, an expression of intensity is justified.

C.D. Wright

This is an advanced workshop devoted to critical analysis and revision of poems. We will discuss student work in light of practical issues (craft), and in light of central concerns in poetics, with particular emphasis on the relationship between description and voice.

Required Texts
Inger Christensen, Alphabet
Killarney Clary, Who Whispered Near Me
Thomas James, Letters to a Stranger
Donald Justice, Collected Poems
Kathleen Peirce, The Ardors

+ Your packets
+ Weekly worksheets

Office Hours
Wednesdays 1:30-2:30 pm
some Friday afternoons
& always moreso by appointment
LA 231
joanna.klink@mso.umt.edu

Poems
One poem is due each week on Monday, by 4 pm, in my mailbox in the English Department office. Most of the time this poem will be based on a prompt. You can always hand in more poems than are assigned. If you miss the deadline, hold on to your work until the following week. Please don't xerox poems and bring them to class, or email poems to the class.

Put your name next to each poem title.

Do not hand in double-sided copies.
Worksheets
Each week in class I’ll hand out a new worksheet of student poems, with a list at the top of who’s up for workshop.

Read through all the poems on the worksheet and prepare the ones marked for discussion. Read and prepare any other assignments.
Be, in class, present.

Packets
In the second half of the semester I’m going to ask each of you to prepare a collection of 12-15 pages of poems: poems you love, written by poets you love, from any era. Once you’ve selected the poems you’ll xerox copies of the packet for everyone in class. These will serve as prompts (inspiration).

Discussion
The quality of our classes depends on your care in reading as well as your willingness to write down comments in advance, to take each other seriously, to approach radically different styles with an open mind, to contribute thoughtfully to discussions, and to sustain a generous manner with one another throughout. I promise to bring the same kind of attention to the class.

Outcomes
My hope is that, by the end of the semester, you will be able to read and edit your own work as if it had been written by somebody else.

Grading
Your grade will reflect your weekly participation: participation in class is essential. Your final portfolio should include all weekly assignments, revised. For every two classes you miss, your grade will be lowered by one letter grade.

Collaboration on assignments is not allowed.
You are responsible for all work whether or not you are in class.

Perhaps poems will continue to illuminate their solitudes, but best of all would be if poems occasioned a greater endeavor, that of sitting around and trying to figure something out together. It is the scholar who, “coughing in ink,” annoys us by pointing out that “study” derives from the Latin *studia*, or eagerness. This eagerness demands nothing other than a table, a book, and a lamp to gather around. Life itself can be counted on to furnish the solitude and longing in excess. What I wish for my students, as yet strangers to their own deepest eagerness, is what I wish more and more for myself, the lamp, the table, the curious company, and most of all, the conversation that opens our own ignorant ear.

DeSales Harrison, *Boston Review*
Schedule of Classes

Tuesday, January 26  Workshop
Tuesday, February 2  Workshop
Tuesday, February 9  Workshop
Tuesday, February 16 Workshop
Tuesday, February 23 Workshop
Friday, February 26  Stefania Heim reads
                      Dell Brown 7 pm
Tuesday, March 1    Workshop
Tuesday, March 8    Workshop
Friday, March 11    Writers at work conference
Tuesday, March 15   Workshop
Tuesday, March 22   Workshop
Friday, March 25    Mary Szybist reads
                      Dell Brown 7 pm
Tuesday, March 29   Workshop
Tuesday, April 5    NO CLASS
                      Spring Break
Tuesday, April 12   Workshop
Friday, April 15    Sarah Gridley and Josh Corey read
                      Dell Brown 7 pm
Tuesday, April 19   Workshop
Tuesday, April 26   Workshop + Portfolios due
Friday, April 29    John D’Agata reads
                      Dell Brown 7 pm
Tuesday, May 3      Last class
                      Students read from their work
I believe in a hardheaded art, an unremitting, unrepentant practice of one’s own faith in the word in one’s own obstinate terms. I believe the word was made good from the start; it remains so to this second. I believe words are golden as goodness is golden. Even the humble word brush gives off a scratch of light. There is not much poetry from which I feel barred, whether it is arcane or open in the extreme. I attempt to run the gamut because I am pulled by the extremes. I believe the word used wrongly distorts the world. I hold hard to distinctions of right and wrong. Also I think that antithetical poetries can and should coexist without crippling each other…While I am not always equal to it, I appreciate the fray…I am not always sure of where it is I am going.

C.D. Wright, “Op-Ed”

There are some things people avoid saying in interviews because they sound pompous or sentimental or too mystical. I have never separated the writing of poetry from prayer. I have grown up believing it is a vocation, a religious vocation. What I described in Another Life—about being on the hill and feeling the sort of dissolution that happened—is a frequent experience in a younger writer. I felt this sweetness of melancholy, of a sense of mortality, or rather of immortality, a sense of gratitude both for what you feel is a gift and for the beauty of the earth, the beauty of life around us. When that’s forceful in a young writer, it can make you cry. It’s just clear tears; it’s not grimacing or being contorted, it’s just a flow that happens. The body feels it is melting into what it has seen. This continues in the poet. It may be repressed in some way, but I think we continue in all our lives to have that sense of melting, of the “I” not being important. That is the ecstasy. It doesn’t happen as much when you get older. There’s that wonderful passage in Traherne where he talks about seeing the children as moving jewels until they learn the dirty devices of the world. It’s not that mystic. Ultimately, it’s what Yeats says: “Such a sweetness flows into the breast that we laugh at everything and everything we look upon is blessed.” That’s always there. It’s a benediction, a transference. It’s gratitude, really. The more of that a poet keeps, the more genuine his nature. I’ve always felt that sense of gratitude. I’ve never felt equal to it in terms of my writing, but I’ve never felt that I was ever less than that.

Derek Walcott, Paris Review interview