“We are all haunted houses.”—H.D., “Advent”

Who is your audience? Who is your addressee? Are you haunted? If so, by what or by whom? Ghosts, invocations to the dead, conversations with the invisible sounds morbid, but every time we start a poem we are addressing an absence through the very act of writing.

These simple questions have various answers depending on your aesthetic notions. The course will focus upon poets who, for one reason or another, turned to “non-rational” means to conjure poetry: H.D. used seances and psychoanalysis; Eliot used mysticism; Merrill used the Ouija board; Philips used a dead legal document to give new meaning to her dead.

The focus will be on the modernists” (H.D and Eliot, namely), who during World War II especially take a “vatic” stance in their writing. Who are they writing to? My sense is that many poets in this turning-point in the twentieth-century were writing to the dead and for the dead. Or to, or for, the “invisible.” One can be playful with dead precursors as well as parents and friends in Merrill.

I will make suggested additional readings

A presentation, a 10-12 page creative essay based on the presentation, and at least five new poems that establish an unseen audience of some sort. This shades into personal elegy, but you are welcome to confront the dead and the past as cultural hauntings as does Philips.

Emails will be provided of your class mates; and a sign-up sheet to speak on a text will be passed on the first day. No missed classes as we miss one for Thanksgiving….unless it is a religious holiday that requires your absence; conscientious participation and come with books prepared to discuss—and play! Tentatively, fill your name into [      ] for presentation……It doesn’t matter if you are familiar with the text or not.

Required Texts:

Cixous, Helene. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing.*

Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land.* (Norton, Recommended)

----- Four Quartets.


-----.* Helen In Egypt* (Book One)

-----.* Trilogy*

Merrill, James. *Book of Ephraim.* (NEW EDITION 2018 FSG; editors Yenser and Hammer.)

Philips, N. *Zong.*
Recommended readings to be assigned throughout

Schedule of Readings

August 22
Introduction: roots and precursors; an anti-Bloomian view?

*The Waste Land*

Cixous, “Book of Roots”

Select a fragment, a ghost, a figure, or even a cadence, considering some of its historical significance, and using a line or two from Eliot, address your first poem to one of the many apparitions in *The Waste Land*

August 29

Workshop poem #1; for this first assignment and for other poem prods send to all in class by Tuesday 5 p.m., the early evening before the class so we can all read everyone. Bring comments on printed pages to give to your classmates.

September 5

*Four Quartets* (read Helen Gardner; Evelyn Underhill’s *Mysticism*

Presentation 1

September 12

*Four Quartets* continued

[Who would make up your “composite ghost”? What does music have to do with this poem? How is writing itself considered? How have Eliot’s ghosts changed since *The Waste Land*?]

September 19

H.D., *Tribute to Freud*

Presentation 2

For poem due next week, select or find a poem in the memoir; i.e. put into lines a passage that strikes you as finding a particular cadence and then respond to it with your poem; it could be a dialogue between imagined analyst and analysand]

September 26

Workshop poem #2
October 3

H.D., Trilogy. [read Devin Percipitations]
Presentation 3

October 10

Trilogy contd.
[select a figure alluded to in the poem, a “Lady” or a Saint—and address them]
Poem # 3 assigned

October 17

Workshop poem #3

October 24

Helen in Egypt [reading from E.M. Butler on Faustus]
Book One and Two
Listen to recording

Presentation 4

Poem #4 assigned: find a figure in any of the texts read so far, and find at least two contradictory ways of seeing it, or its voice

October 31

Workshop poem #4

November 7

Merrill, Book of Ephraim (FSG) Read introduction [see Langdon Hammer]

Presentation 5

November 14

Book of Ephraim cont’d

Presentation 6

Poem 5 assigned: inspired by either Merrill or Philip; in the latter case, look for a text that is not called “literature” to reanimate

November 21 Thanksgiving Break Begins—NO CLASS

November 28

Philips, Zong.

Presentation 7

Poem #5 Due
December 5  Gathering possibility  DUE DATE: for---

Portfolio of 5 poems inspired by texts; a critical response paper (10-12) pages to one or more works as they address central motifs that emerged in the dialogue between your poems and the work read; or one addressing an aesthetic conundrum you discovered, etc. etc.
Are you of the School of Dreams or of Roots?

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards (see https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct (at http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity (see http://equity.usc.edu) or to the Department of Public Safety (see http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us). This is important for the safety whole USC community.

Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men provides 24/7 confidential support (see http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm), and the sexual assault resource center webpage describes reporting options and other resources (see sarc@usc.edu).

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students (see http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali). The Office of Disability Services and Programs provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations(see http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/homeindex.html). If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology (see http://emergency.usc.edu/).