English 698 Poetry: Form & Theory
Professor Susan McCabe
Poetry as Séance: modernism, ghosts and ruins
Wednesday 5-7:15
Taper Hall 105

"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 Oiuja 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.

H.D.. *Tribute to Freud.* (New Directions) With "Advent" in back. 1974 edition.
-----.   *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

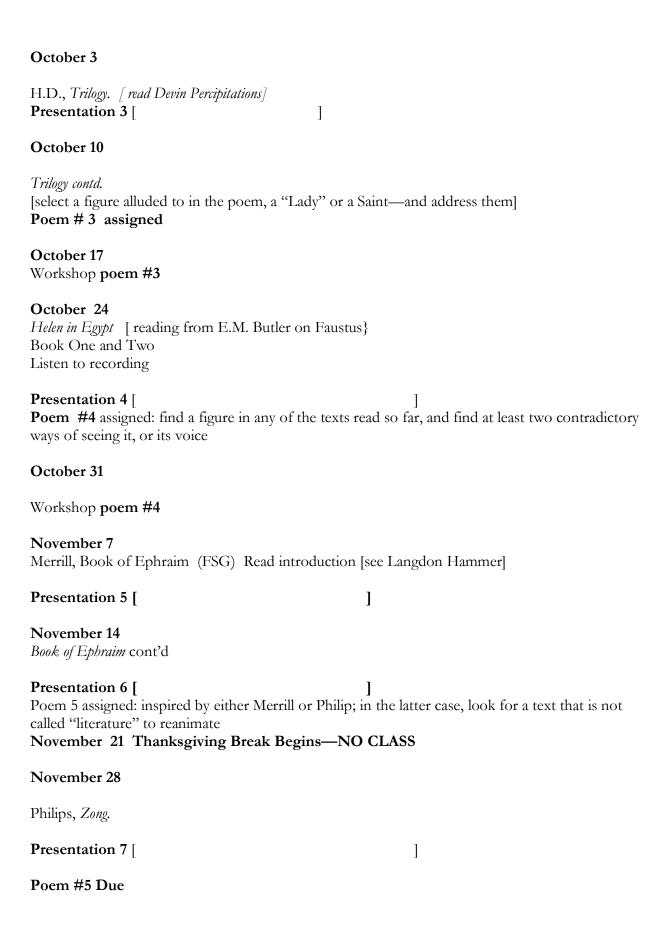H.D., *Tribute to Freud*
Presentation 2 [   ]

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).
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Support Systems
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