

ENGLISH 406: Enlarging the Temple / Intermediate Poetry Writing Workshop

Mark Irwin, PhD Wednesday: 2-4:50

Fall 2024

Using contemporary models of poetry, including those of Jorie Graham, W.S. Merwin, and Arthur Sze, three poets whose work has successfully evolved through numerous forms, students will hopefully engage new poetic strategies and risks in their own work. Critiques will focus on how form and *new forms* reinforce content. Students will set individual goals and new objectives for their own work. Diction, imagination, and emotional amplitude will be stressed, and numerous examples from contemporary painting and music will be applied. Several essays on craft and form will also be discussed. Rewriting will play an integral part of this workshop, and revisions of well-known poems also will be discussed. Additionally, we will examine the work of award-winning, contemporary poets such as Rick Barot, Anne Carson, Natalie Diaz, Angie Estes, Thomas Sayers Ellis, Forrest Gander, Peter Gizzi, Laura Kasischke, Yusef Komunyakaa, Mary Ruefle, and Tracy K. Smith.

“If you find that you no longer believe,
try enlarging the temple.”

--W.S. Merwin

BOOKS:

Diane Seuss. *franksonnets*. Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2021.

FRANCE 2 & 3 Pdf

Mark Irwin, PhD / Taper 415 **Office Hours:** W: 1-2 pm Tuesday: 2-3pm
 University of Southern California mirwin@usc.edu Fall 2024

ENGLISH 406: INTERMEDIATE POETRY WORKSHOP **Wed: 2-4:50 pm**

- WEEK 1 **DICTION/SYNTAX, SOUND & SENSE:** The precise choice of their words & their music.
 Clarity, Obscurity Graham: "San Sepolcro" F2
 Readings: Estes: "I want to talk about you" Syllabus
 Jennifer / Chad Sweeney: "Little Wet Monster" Syllabus
 Frost: Figure a poem makes
- WEEK 2 **IMAGE/LINE** Readings: Graham: "San Sepolcro," "The Salmon," Hillman: "Till It Finishes ..." F3
Seuss: franksonnets pp.45-48 Read Merwin/Carson poems/ on syllabus p. 8
 Merwin: *Selected* F2 Komunyakaa: "Facing It"
WORKSHOP Kasischke : 2 poems "O, Elegant giant"
 Merwin: "Passage" **5 Word EXERCISE Due**
 Merwin: "How We Are Spared" Valentine: "Door in Mountain Begin: **Seuss: franksonnets**
- WEEK 3 **FREE & FORMAL VERSE/ PROSE POEMS**
 Rhythm /Meter Readings: Donnelly: "Clair de Lune" (13)
 Wallace: Measuring the Line Pull & Drag "Williams" F2
Selected Poems: Merwin: F2 Kasischke Chapter 2
 Sze: "Ox-Head Dot" F3 Phillips: "Terra Incognita"
 Gander, "Time and the Hour" **WORKSHOP**
Place Exercise Due / Begin Sonnet/Pantoum/Villanelle
- WEEK 4 **SYNESTHESIA/ TEXTURE/ ILLUMINATION:**
 Lighting the poem from the inside. Ruefle: "Last Supper"
Graham: "Evening Prayer" "Salmon" F3 Merwin:
 "Substance" Sweeney: "Little Wet Monster" Syllabus
WORKSHOP Estes: "Note" Hillman: "Till it Finishes..." F3
"A Romp through Ruefleland" Mark Irwin Essay
- WEEK 5 **METAPHOR/ IMAGINATION Barot pdf**
Rimbaud: "Drunken Boat" Plume 10 pdf
 Ashbery: "North Farm" F2 "Some Trees" **Colman:**
Plume10 Merwin: "The Animals," "Passage" Larkin:
 "High Windows" F3 Amichai: "The Diameter of the Bomb"
 Levis: "Winter Stars" **Syllabus David Mason (13)**
 St. John: "Elegy" F2 Matthew Dickman: "King" F2
 Bishop: "First Death Nova Scotia" Dickinson: Selected

Estes: "I want to talk about you" Syllabus
 Stevens: "Snowman," "Large Red Man Reading"
WORKSHOP 5 IDEA EXERCISE DUE OR
Poem w/Personal scar & or historical/social

- WEEK 6 **METAPHOR/ CONTENT / SYMBOL & MYTH**
 Yeats, Eliot, Merwin, Levine: "They Feed, They Lion"
 St. John: "Iris" Merwin: "Place" Carl Philips "Almost"
 Readings: Xerox **WORKSHOP** Tracy K. Smith
 Metaphor: Poem as Concept: Ruefle: Selected
 Albert Goldbarth "Stonehenge" **F2** James Tate: Selected
RANGE IN POETRY Metaphor as Continual Action
Rimbaud: "The Drunken Boat" 40pp Plume Excerpt
Byrdlong: "(un)dead" p.11 Syllabus
- WEEK 7 **POETRY & ORIGINALITY**
"The Emergency of Poetry" Mark Irwin Essay Pdf
 Merwin: Selected; Ashbery: Selected; Ruefle Selected
Intimation Exercise Form Exercise Due
 Carson: Selected F3 **Milosz: "Esse" F3**
Ten-Minute Presentation: Original Poem
 Contemporary Poet **Sonnet/Pantoum/Villanelle Due**
- WEEK 8 **LANGUAGE & POETRY/ Diction Again**
 James Schuyler: "Korean Mums" **Sayers Ellis: "Or,"**
 Lydia Davis: "A Mown Lawn"
 Jorie Graham: *The End of Beauty* Revell: "Lucy"
Discussion: Prose or Lyric / Improvisation
Brandon Som: "Téléphono Roto" Code Switches
- WEEK 9 **tone & GESTURE IN POETRY**
Seuss: franksonnets
 Tate: "Distance from Loved Ones" Louise Gluck: Selected
 Tate: "Land of Little Sticks" Selected Zerox Ruefle
 Kasischke: "Hospital Parking Lot"
 Peter Gizzi: Poems
- WEEK 10 **NARATIVE/ WHAT TO LEAVE OUT**
PERSPECTIVE/ / Point of View/Personification
DISCURSIVENESS IN POETRY: Hass: "Meditation"
 Wylner: "The Girl with Bees in Her Hair" F3
Sze: "Salt Song" (Personification Larry Levis:"Winter Stars"
 Hass: "Meditation at Lagunitas" Continue **Seuss: franksonnets**
Counterpoint Exercise / 3 Stories Exercise
Arthur Sze: "First Snow" Syllabus p.10

- WEEK 11 **MYSTERY IN POETRY / CLARITY**
 Selected Readings: Graham: *End of Beauty, Materialism*
 Ashbery: Selected Wojahn: “Mystery Train” Merwin
 Ruefle: *Selected* **“A Romp through Ruefleland”**
 Donald Revell” “My Mojave” Syllabus p. 12
- WEEK 12 **MOBILE VS. STATIC IMAGERY**
Exercise: Electronic/Mobile Image Poem/ White
Out/Distortion Prose poem Due / Submit with Chapbook
 Work that reflects a High Tech Culture
Electronic Age & Impact on Poetry
 Jorie Graham: “Swarm” F2 Seuss: *franksonnets*
Nov 7, 4pm Required Poetry Reading:
Brandon Som & Donald Revell ***
- WEEK 13 **VISION IN POETRY**
 Sze: “First Snow” WRIGHT: Southern Cross, Dickinson:
 “I felt a funeral” Mary Ruefle “Bunny...” **F2**
 Ashbery, Graham, Merwin: Selected Poems
 LARKIN: High Windows **F3** RIMBAUD: Drunken Boat
 Blake, Stevens **WORKSHOP** **Merwin F2**
 Notley: “Beginning with a Stain” **F3**
- WEEK 14 **REVISION: LEAPS & CARPENTRY**
Common Ways a Poem Might Fail
 Narrative, Context, Language, Diction, Obscurity, Clarity
Group Discussion
- WEEK 15 **WORKSHOP REVIEW PORTFOLIO DUE**
- WEEK 16 **SUMMARY**

EXPECTATIONS:

1. Everyone will be expected to produce at least 5 finished poems with attendant revisions.
2. Everyone will be expected to complete at least 3 of the 5 assigned exercises. (2 of these may count toward the 5 finished poems)
3. Anyone missing more than **2 classes (unexcused)** will no longer be enrolled. Remember that we meet only once a week.
4. Everyone will be expected to make written comments on the poems work-shopped & to be well prepared for the discussions. (See Guidelines)
5. Everyone will give a 10 minute presentation of a contemporary poem.
6. Everyone will hand in a portfolio of completed poems, exercises & notebook with Xerox handouts.

Grading Breakdown

You will be graded on the technical and overall artistic quality of your poems, and also on your success at revising them. **50%**

You will also be graded on the quality of your writing exercises, which may compose part of your final 5 finished poems, all of which will be present in your final portfolio, which will be graded for its completeness. **35%**

Class participation will also be considered and you will be graded on the critical comments made on other poems. This is a creative class so the grading criteria are different from regular classes. Each participant will be asked to present one contemporary poem of choice, and then to argue for its passion, originality, and evocative use of language.

15%

POETRY CRITIQUE GUIDELINES

In addition to class discussions and assignments, written critiques of student poems should be completed prior to workshops. Criticisms should ask:

1. Did the form of the poem reinforce the poem's content?
2. Was the poem beautiful, or purposefully not beautiful? Specifically how?
3. Did the poem use language in an original, fresh sense that heightened content?
4. Was the poem memorable? Why? How?
5. Was the point of view (or the perspective) of the subject matter compelling?
6. Were you moved by the poem?
7. Did the poem seem true, sincere? What does that mean?
8. How would you improve the poem?
9. Did the poem achieve a form of "separation" in voice, madness, or music?
10. Did the poem create tension or instill a great sense of peace through the relationship of the words to one another?
11. What is art?

Appendix:

4 remember Monica Vitti saying, I can't watch the sea for a long time or what's happening on land doesn't interest me anymore

"I'm really trying to make people's minds move, you know, which is not something they're naturally inclined to do," she told me. "We have a kind of inertia, sitting and listening. But it's really important to get somehow into the mind and make it move somewhere it has never moved before. That happens partly because the material is mysterious or unknown but mostly because of the way you push the material around from word to word in a sentence. And it's that that I'm more interested in doing, generally, than mystifying by having unexpected content or bizarre forms. It's more like: Given whatever material we're going to talk about, and we all know what it is, how can we move within it in a way we've never moved before, mentally? That seems like the most exciting thing to do with your head. I think it's a weakness to fall back into merely mystifying the audience, which anybody can do. You know, throw in a bit of Hegel. Who knows what that means? But to actually take a piece of Hegel and move it around in a way that shows you something about Hegel is a satisfying challenge."

AC

Town of Finding Out About the Love of God

I had made a mistake.

Before this day.

Now my suitcase is ready.

Two hardboiled eggs.

For the journey are stored.

In places where.

My eyes were.

Like a current.

Carrying a twig.

The sobbing made me.

Audible to you.

(Anne Carson 102)

Passage

In autumn in this same life

I was leaving a capital

where an old animal

captured in its youth

one that in the wild

would never have reached such an age

was watching the sun set

over nameless

unapproachable trees

and it is spring

--W.S. Merwin

Chad Sweeney

Little Wet Monster

for our unborn son

The cornfield winds its halo darkly
Come home my little wet monster

Time in the copper mine, time in the copper
Come darkling soon come woe my monster

Distance shines in the ice like a flower
Come early little bornling

Before the furlight's gone from going
Come rowing soon, come wet my monster

Before the bloodtrees bramble over
Come low my rainweed monster

Come antler through the gates my thingling
Your grapes contain the houses

Unmask the stones my darkling grief
Come whole my homeward early

You alone devour the night
Gather in your teeth, my zero

You devour the night's holy sound
Come home my little wet monster

First Snow

A rabbit has stopped on the gravel driveway:

imbibing the silence,
you stare at spruce needles:

there's no sound of a leaf blower,
no sign of a black bear;

a few weeks ago, a buck scraped his rack
against an aspen trunk;
a carpenter scribed a plank along a curved stone wall.

You only spot the rabbit's ears and tail:

when it moves, you locate it against speckled gravel,
but when it stops, it blends in again;

the world of being is like this gravel:

you think you own a car, a house,
this blue-zigzagged shirt, but you just borrow these things.

Yesterday, you constructed an aqueduct of dreams
and stood at Gibraltar,

but you possess nothing.

Snow melts into a pool of clear water;
and, in this stillness,

starlight behind daylight wherever you gaze.

Arthur Sze, from *Sight Lines*, Copper Canyon, 2019
National Book Award Winner

(un)dead

Does anyone else, while they're watching
the video of the cop shooting the black
man/boy/person on the internet

pause the video right before it ends?
I do—It doesn't matter if it's the one
with Tamir or Oscar.

Sometimes, right before it gets to the end
I'll stop it, then hit rewind—It's always bizarre
witnessing the body rise and the cop

retreat, climb back into their car
before fleeing in reverse. Likewise, it is
strangely beautiful to see the snow

(un)red as the bullet exits the (un)dead
body and return into the barrel's black,
the boy/man/person now standing,

walking. Does anyone else laugh
or manage a mischievous smile
imagining the look on death's face?

Bryan Byrdlong

Terra Incognita

I plugged my poem into a manhole cover
That flamed into the first guitar,
Jarred the asphalt and tar to ash,
And made from where there once was
Ground a sound instead to stand on.

--Rowan Ricardo Phillips

My Mojave

Sha-
Dow,
As of
A meteor
At mid-
Day: it goes
From there.

A perfect circle falls
Onto white imperfections.
(Consider the black road,
How it seems white the entire
Length of a sunshine day.)

Or I could say
Shadows and mirage
Compensate the world,
Completing its changes
With no change.

In the morning after a storm,
We used brooms. Out front,
There was broken glass to collect.
In the backyard, the sand
Was covered with transparent wings.
The insects could not use them in the wind
And so abandoned them. Why
Hadn't the wings scattered? Why
Did they lie so stilly where they'd dropped?
It can only be the wind passed through them.

Jealous lover,
Your desire
Passes the same way.

And jealous earth,
There is a shadow you cannot keep
To yourself alone.
At midday,
My soul wants only to go
The black road which is the white road.
I'm not needed
Like wings in a storm,
And God is the storm.

Donald Revell

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Chino

The olla knocked with steam. The masa cooked.

She said her eyes are china. The vowel switched
on an aura, a shine that sheens the threshold.

The vowel was spell: an *i* that might we,
an *i* that echoes how we're seen and see.

Eyedentity. Ay Dios, she exclaimed
surrounded by photos — niños and nietos —

where I'm the only chino. How might I
see through my family's eyes — an owl's eyes

in ojos and one in its lid turned sideways 目 —
I wondered with her at the table where we

placed one olive — ojo negro — in each hoja,
that worn folio for field corn's field notes.

What does that dark eye in the ear's husk see?

LARRY LEVIS

Winter Stars

My father once broke a man's hand
 Over the exhaust pipe of a John Deere tractor. The man,
 Ruben Vasquez, wanted to kill his own father
 With a sharpened fruit knife, and he held
 The curved tip of it, lightly, between his first
 Two fingers, so it could slash
 Horizontally, & with surprising grace,
 Across a throat. It was like a glinting beak in a hand,
 And, for a moment, the light held still
 On those vines. When it was over,
 My father simply went in & ate lunch, & then, as always,
 Lay alone in the dark, listening to music.
 He never mentioned it.

I never understood how anyone could risk his life,
 Then listen to Vivaldi.

Sometimes, I go out into this yard at night,
 And stare through the wet branches of an oak
 In winter, & realize I am looking at the stars
 Again. A thin haze of them, shining
 And persisting.

It used to make me feel lighter, looking up at them.
 In California, that light was closer.
 In a California no one will ever see again,
 My father is beginning to die. Something
 Inside him is slowly taking back
 Every word it ever gave him.
 Now, if we try to talk, I watch my father
 Search for a lost syllable as if it might
 Solve everything, & though he can't remember, now,
 The word for it, he is ashamed...
 If you can think of the mind as a place continually
 Visited, a whole city placed behind
 The eyes, & shining, I can imagine, now, its end—
 As when the lights go off, one by one,

In a hotel at night, until at last
All of the travelers will be asleep, or until
Even the thin glow from the lobby is a kind
Of sleep; & while the woman behind the desk
Is applying more lacquer to her nails,
You can almost believe that elevator,
As it ascends, must open upon starlight.

I stand out on the street, & do not go in.
That was our agreement, at my birth.

And for years I believed
That what went unsaid between us became empty,
And pure, like starlight, & that it persisted.

I got it all wrong.
I wound up believing in words the way a scientist
Believes in carbon, after death.

Tonight, I'm talking to you, father, although
It is quiet here in the Midwest, where a small wind,
The size of a wrist, wakes the cold again—
Which may be all that's left of you & me.

When I left home at seventeen, I left for good.

That pale haze of stars goes on & on,
Like laughter that has found a final, silent shape
On a black sky. It means everything
It cannot say. Look, it's empty out there, & cold.
Cold enough to reconcile
Even a father, even a son. ■

I WANT TO TALK ABOUT YOU

when starlings swell over Otmoor, east of Oxford, as the afternoon
light starts to fade. Fifty flocks of fifteen to twenty starlings, ruffraff

who have spent the day foraging in fields and gardens suddenly rise
like a blanket tossed into the sky, a revelling that molts sorrows to roost

rows, roost rows to sorrows as they soar through aerial corridors and swerve
into the shape of a cowl that lengthens to a woolen scarf wrapping

and wrapping, nothing at the center but throat: thousands of single black notes
surge into a memory called melody, the lovers damned but driven on

by violent winds in the cold season when starlings' wings bear them
along in broad and crowded ranks, extended cadenzas to pieces that

never get played, brochure for the flared tip that begins with the tongue
and lips of the embouchure wrapping the saxophone's slurred

howl, scrawled signature of the sky. Thousands fly but never collide
in their pre-roost ritual, Dante's long list of God's works excited

raked left and right over leafless branches of trees until they
drop like the bodies of suicides, draped on thorns of the wild

thickets their cast-off souls become, unable to rise the way a wave
nearing shore will crest, something on the tip of its tongue

thrown back before it breaks and splays, starlings laid down
like the wave's rain of sand or words falling

out of a sentence: art slings, we called them, grass lint, snarl gist, gnarls
sit. Art slings them this way, last grins, art slings swell, rove

over, red rove, red rove, send artlings right over, artlings
rove, moor to swell, write Otmoor all over

Angie Estes / after John Coltrane

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate-](#) and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.