OISE, University of Toronto
Hosts: Ben Gallagher & Ashleigh Allen

Greek Mythology in Contemporary Canadian Poetry: Poetry Workshop

Workshop description:

Our 90-minute creative writing workshop looks at taking up **mythology in contemporary Canadian poetry** through the poetry of Sue Goyette in her recent book-length poem *Penelope* and Cassidy McFadzean's book Drolleries. Both engage with and speak to Classical Greek Mythology, and find ways to repurpose familiar myths to express their contemporary poetic voices.

The purpose of this workshop is to expose participants to contemporary Canadian voices in literature today. Participants are encouraged to explore and bring these poets into their classes for students to engage with. We also seek to expose participants to different ways of reading and writing poetry as a community, and to think about the possibilities for poetry in our lives, classrooms, and communities.

We are grateful to be a part of a community that values engagement with writing and reading.

Workshop outline:

(5 minutes)
Welcome participants & introductions / check-ins

(*5 minutes*)
Share the purpose of this workshop: to engage with classical mythology, and think about ways in which myth and story can be used to express our own voices and perspectives

(*15 minutes*)
Share the books and poems we're reading & read them
- Poems from Cassidy McFadzean's book *Drolleries:* "Gorgon", "Nymph"
- Excerpts from Sue Goyette's recent book-length poem *Penelope*

(*10 minutes*)
Prompts for poems:
- Look at a **classical dictionary** (Lempriere's is a good resource as it includes gods and goddesses, etc) - draw from characters in the dictionary and language choices from the

poems we read. (Offer a handout of pages that describe nymphs, gorgons, et cetera, the idea is that people can draw from the language and myths themsevles)

- Use **Tarot** imagery – Draw a card from the Tarot if you have a deck on hand.
- Place **objects in centre** of space, each person can say something about their object. There can be used as sacred/mythic objects in poems.

- Draw language from the two books as prompts:
    1) In McFadzean's "**Nymph**" we see formed/forest/floor and thin/thistle/kisses - create a list of six words beginning with the same letter, and six words that share the same vowel sound, and include three from each list in lines of your poem; describe a fall (how/ where do you land? (she writes "I fell ass-first"); locate yourself between two things/ spaces (she writes "between certain dirt and a glossy cobweb")
    2) In McFadzean's "**Gorgon**" we read scientific language: calcium, protein, rigor mortis - make a list of scientific terms and include two or three in your poem; offer details to the human body processing/ reacting to a change (heat, cold, pain, arousal, fatigue); describe how others experience your body and vice versa
    3) In the excerpts from Goyette's long poem "**Penelope**" there are often questions following questions - Try stacking two questions next to each other in your poem
        - Goyette's lines are long, sometimes full phrases or multiple phrases in a single line - try varying or extending the line length in your poem
        - The voice in "Penelope" often begins or frames the poems with "waking" - include a reference to a dream or something that happens just after you wake up
        - Include a: house task, social task, familial task, personal hygiene task
        - Include the details around a personal loss (and its opposite)
        - Include an exchange of items and/or services instead of money
        - Include a flower
        - Include an auditory description of something happening in a house starting with "To the tune of…" (She writes "To the tune of apples rolling into corners")
        - Giving voice to the silent: think of a person in your life who's been silent/ silenced, and turn them into a mythic character - can write in their voice, or talk to them, or have them be in conversation with a mythic figure
    4) Consider using either two or three line stanzas (couplets or tercets) to structure your poem visually. Punctuate if you want, but this isn't necessary

(*35 minutes*)
Write poems

(5-10 minutes)
Invite participants to share what they wrote or a section of what they wrote

(5-10 minutes)
Ideas for exit conversation
- Participants invited to discuss:
  - What they noticed as they read and wrote/ what was the experience of writing together like?
  - Benefits / uses of writing poems using mythology? Would you consider using these poems or prompts in your class?
  - We can consider general reflections on the poems and formats as well as how we feel reading, writing, and sharing these poems
- **Discussion:** Two female poets centering female characters in myth who often are silenced/neglected, choosing to subvert the misogyny/patriarchal values of the original for their own poetic purposes

<u>Additional resources</u>:
- *A Classical Dictionary* by John Lempriere: https://archive.org/details/aclassicaldicti00lempgoog/page/n4
- Sue Goyette on *Penelope*: https://www.cbc.ca/books/penelope-1.4651388
- Cassidy Mcfadzen's website with resources: https://cassidymcfadzean.com/drolleries/

<u>Other myth-based/ myth-inspired poem possibilities</u>:
- Atwood, "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing": https://poets.org/poem/helen-troy-does-countertop-dancing
- HD, "Helen": https://poets.org/poem/helen
- Charles Jensen, "Complaint of Achilles' Heel": https://poets.org/poem/complaint-achilles-heel
- Jonathan Teklit, "Black Mythology": https://poets.org/poem/black-mythology