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Theune Creates "Voltage Poetry" Anthology

Jan. 31, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Poetry scholars and critics say the Web is the medium of choice for discussion of contemporary poetry. So when Illinois Wesleyan University associate professor of English Michael Theune wanted to invite great poets to identify great turns in poetry, an online anthology was the logical forum.

A “turn” is a shift in a poem’s rhetorical or dramatic trajectory, Theune said. Supported by an Illinois Wesleyan Artistic and Scholarly Development Grant, Theune and his co-editor, California-based poet Kim Addonizio, created *Voltage Poetry* by asking dozens of working poets to select a poem with a great turn and write a reflection on that poem and its turn. They note that a poetic turn, as the name *Voltage Poetry* suggests, is a measure of energy.



Photo by Christopher Bray

Theune’s students know his mantra by heart: “Poems do not *flow*, they *turn*.” Yet few who produce and partake of poetry – critics, scholars, teachers and poets themselves – have sought to answer the questions: “what constitutes a great turn in poetry and where can we find great turns?”

About 80 poets have submitted poems and reflections on those works. Poets who are staples of high school English curriculum -- John Donne, Emily Dickinson and William Butler Yeats – wrote some of the poems featured in *Voltage Poetry* . Other selections draw attention to contemporary poets such as Joe Bolton and Shane McCrae, said Theune.

participating in the project “seem to understand its significance right away, and they understand that the important conversation that Voltage Poetry hosts simply is not a conversation that is taking place anywhere else,” said Theune.

Addonizio and Theune hope that a print anthology develops from *Voltage Poetry* , and Theune also plans to design and publish lesson plans that utilize the online anthology and other blogs.

The anthology builds on Theune’s research regarding turns as vital parts of poems. “By categorizing them into a taxonomy of some key kinds of turns, which I call structures, turns can be studied, taught, and very productively used to analyze and write poems,” Theune explained. His book *Structure and Surprise: Engaging Poetic Turns* (Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 2007) was the first book to focus on the poetic turn and is used in classes at several colleges and writing institutes. Theune also hosts the blog structureandsurprise.wordpress.com that offers supplemental materials to the book and pedagogical aids.

Amy Fairgrieve, a 2012 graduate of Illinois Wesleyan, is the *Voltage Poetry* editorial assistant. Current students Emily Susina '13, Al Maiocco '14 and Erica Kucharski '15 serve as student assistants.

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