

CRWR 586-40: Nonfiction I  
Winter 2009, Natalie Kusz  
Thursday, 5:30-10 p.m., Health Sciences 110C

Office: Secret Riverpoint Cubicle  
Phone: 359-4955  
Office Hours: TBA

## NONFICTION I: ANCIENT ROOTS THROUGH 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY FORMS

### COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the literary roots of contemporary nonfiction prose methods.
- To become familiar with historical trends in factual literature.
- To engage in minute examination of nonfictive writing methods.
- To develop skill in reading literature with writers', as opposed to critics', eyes.

**TEXTS:** Photocopied reading packet.

### GRADING:

Grades will reflect absolute attention to deadlines, completion of all required coursework, the quality of your oral and written assignments, and the value and professionalism of your input. Because the course is quite short, there is no room for class tardiness or absence.

### METHODOLOGY:

The bulk of our class time will involve discussion and dissection of the reading assignments, and will include oral presentations by students. A major craft paper, worked on throughout the term, will provide evidence of each student's grasp of how older literary conventions form the basis for today's nonfiction prose. We may also, on occasion, have in-class or out-of class writing practice.

### ASSIGNMENTS:

#### 1. **Weekly comparative reading studies:**

For each individual reading (or individual author, if we read several pieces by one writer), you will type a 200-word observation comparing the style and function of that work to the style and function of some division of contemporary literary nonfiction. An ancient religious meditation, for example, might cause you to note both similarities to, and differences from, conventions followed in modern spiritual memoirs such as Kathleen Norris' *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*. Essentially, you will be identifying the roots of today's nonfictive literature – which is, not incidentally, the point of this whole course. **Upload your comparative reading studies to our Blackboard classroom website by noon the day before our class meeting. Read everyone else's posts before you come to class.**

#### 2. **Oral introduction:**

Each of you will be responsible for a 10- to 15-minute orientation to part of one class period's reading. Since this course focuses upon the older literature out of which today's nonfiction has risen, you will introduce a 20<sup>th</sup>- or 21<sup>st</sup>-century text which (you will argue) has roots similar to one of that session's reading assignments. Examine ways the crafting of such works has changed, as well as ways it has remained the same. Your discussion of the craft should address such points as syntax, tone, voice, diction, structural modes, authorial distance and perspective, methods of pacing and tension, and the like. *The subject matter and content of the pieces should not be the focus of your introduction.* We will schedule these

introductions on the first day of class, and there will likely be one or two introducers per week. You may divide your week's material any way you wish, or you may present as a team. NOTE that you may also use this presentation as the basis for your final craft paper.

3. **Final craft paper, 15-20 pages:**

A "craft essay" differs from a "critical essay" in that it treats literature from a perspective of "How does this work?" as opposed to one of "What does this mean?" (This distinction illustrates, essentially, the differences between the ways in which writers and scholars read.) For your craft paper, you may examine a specific point of the nonfiction writer's craft, using examples from multiple authors, or you may study the work of one nonfiction author and the specific technical characteristics of his or her work. Use MLA style. A few sample craft papers are available in the literature racks outside my office.

## SCHEDULE:

**Note: It is assumed that you will read, outside of class, secondary introductions to the authors, time periods, and literary movements we are studying. Bring this information to class and work it into the discussion.**

**Jan. 8:** Introduction, Scheduling, Discussion of literature's origins.

**Jan. 15:** **Rhetorical Strategy**

**REPORTAGE: From RECORD-KEEPING to BEARING WITNESS**

c. 950-750 BC: Book of Ruth

c. 431 BC: Herodotus, *The Father of History*, selections from *The Persian Wars*.

c. 79 AD: Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Book 7, Chapter 9.

19<sup>TH</sup> Century: Linda Brent, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, selections

Modern: Carolyn Forché, "The Colonel" (prose poem)

Modern: Philip Gourevitch, "After the Genocide."

INTRODUCER: \_\_\_\_\_

**Jan. 22:** **Rhetorical Strategy**

**INSTRUCTION and DIDACTICISM**

c. 350 BC: Aristotle, selections from *Poetics*.

1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD: Lucius Annaeus Seneca, sel. from *Moral Epistles: Treating Slaves as Equals*.

c. 397 AD: St. Augustine, selection from *The Confessions*.

1792 AD: Mary Wollstonecraft, selection from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Modern: Three Op-Eds

Molly Ivins, "Get a Knife, Get a Dog, But Get Rid of Guns."

Jo-Ann Pilardi, "Immigration Problem is About Us, Not Them."

Anna Quindlen, "In a Peaceful Frame of Mind."

NO SCHEDULED INTRODUCTIONS TODAY. WE'LL BE WATCHING A FILM OF EURIPIDES' *THE TROJAN WOMEN* (415 B.C.), AS A COMPANION TO DIDACTICISM AND TO ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS*. IF YOU WISH TO READ (OR TO SKIM) THE PLAY BEFOREHAND, SEE: [http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/troj\\_women.html](http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/troj_women.html)

**Jan. 29:** **Rhetorical Strategy**

**CONTRARINESS: (RE-)DEFINITION & CONTEXTUALIZATION**

1580 AD: Montaigne, "That the Profit of One Man is the Damage of Another."

c. 1600 AD: Shakespeare, Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"

1826 AD: William Hazlitt, "On the Pleasure of Hating."

1890 AD: Jacob Riis, excerpt from *How the Other Half Lives*.

Modern: Michael Pollan, "Why Mow? The Case Against Lawns."

INTRODUCER: \_\_\_\_\_

Feb. 5:

**Rhetorical Strategy**

**MINUTE OBSERVATION, INCLUDING THE OBJECTIVE CORRELATIVE**

Selection from *The Literary Encyclopedia*: "The Objective Correlative."

c. 600-594 BC: Sappho, "The Moon."

c. 6<sup>th</sup> century BC: Aesop, "The Swallow and the Other Birds."

c. 360 BC: Plato, "The Allegory of the Cave," from *The Republic*.

c. 1641 AD: Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation VI.

1701 AD: Jonathan Swift, "A Meditation on a Broomstick."

Modern (1923): Wm. Carlos Williams' "so much depends."

Modern: Richard Selzer, "The Knife"

INTRODUCER: \_\_\_\_\_

Feb. 12:

**Pivotal Modernizing Essayists**

**BACON and MONTAIGNE**

Sir Francis Bacon, from *Essays*, c. 1501:

"Of Revenge"

"Of Adversity"

"Of Marriage and Single Life"

"Of Followers and Friends"

"Of Gardens"

Montaigne, from *Essays*, c. 1580:

"That the Soul Expend Its Passions Upon False Objects,  
Where the True Are Wanting"

"Of Liars"

"Of Quick or Slow Speech"

"Of a Monstrous Child"

Modern: Joan Didion, "On Going Home"

Modern: Phillip Lopate, "Reflections on Subletting"

INTRODUCERS: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Feb. 19:

**Structure**

**NARRATIVE**

c. 1045 BC: Bible, Book of Judges, Chapter 4.

c. 1336 AD: Francesco Petrarca, "The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux."

c. 1670 AD: Basho, "The Records of a Travel-Worn Satchel."

Modern: E.B. White, "Once More to the Lake."

Modern: Sally Tisdale, "We Do Abortions Here."

INTRODUCER: \_\_\_\_\_

**Feb. 26:**

**Structure**

**THEMATIC**

360 BC: Plato, *The Republic*, excerpts from Book V.

c. 8<sup>th</sup> century AD: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Book I, Part I.

c. 1180 AD: Usama ibn Munquidh, selection from *Book of Instruction by Example: An Arab Opinion of the Crusaders*.

1854 AD: Thoreau, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For," excerpt from *Walden*.

Modern: Jamaica Kincaid, "Sowers and Reapers."

INTRODUCERS: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**March 5:**

**Structure**

**SPIRAL OR LOOPING**

1<sup>st</sup> century AD: *Bhagavad-Gita*, Teachings 1 to 3.

1886 AD: Jerome K. Jerome, *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*, Dedication, Preface, and "On Memory."

c. 1892 AD: Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days*, excerpted.

Modern: Annie Dillard, "Total Eclipse."

Modern: Andre Aciman, "In a Double Exile."

INTRODUCERS: 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

**March 12:** Small-group workshops on **annotated outlines** of craft essays. Bring enough copies of outline for your small group.

**March 16 (Monday):** CRAFT ESSAY DUE ON BLACKBOARD SITE BY NOON.

**NOTE: OUR HEINOUS-WEATHER DATE WILL BE FRIDAY, MARCH 13, FROM 6-10 P.M. SAVE THIS ON YOUR CALENDARS, JUST IN CASE.**