

CRWR 586: Form and Theory of Nonfiction—Ancient Roots

Fall 2014

Wednesdays 5:30-10pm

Professor Rachel Toor

Room:

Office Hours: 3:30-5:30 Tuesdays and Wednesdays and by appointment

E-Mail: racheltoor@gmail.com

Required readings (all pre-20th century essays will be available online and/or in PDF on Canvas):

Philip Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay* (introduction—under Files)

David Shields, *Reality Hunger*

Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and The Story*

Autobiography of Ben Franklin

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

A Room of One's Own by Virginia Woolf

Places to look for additional essays:

<http://www.readbookonline.net/essays>

http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/CLASSIC_ESSAYS.htm

<http://essays.quotidiana.org>

PURPOSE: In this course we'll examine a range of nonfiction writing with the intention of learning to read like writers. Students will look at elements of craft (narrative versus exposition, sentence structure, characterization, use of the telling detail, organization and narrative arc, setting scenes, handling time and tension) in order to find tricks and moves that they can use in their own work. Students will learn to set aside their personal responses to a piece of work in order to focus on what the writer is trying to do and how she achieves that. We will learn about the history of the genre and by the end of the course, each student should be able to define what he or she thinks counts as creative nonfiction.

REQUIREMENTS:

Weekly craft essays

Each week you will write an essay that looks at some element of craft in the assigned reading. In your craft essays, you may not include your personal reaction to the piece or what it reminded you of or how it relates to your own life. If you do this, it will result in a No Credit grade for the assignment. You may choose to do the assignment over if you get a grade of NC. It is important that you learn to identify choices the authors are making and the tools they are using to carry out their ideas. I would suggest that you refrain from using the first-person. **Craft essays must be posted on Canvas by Tuesday at noon. I expect you to read each other's essays.** This way, when we come to class, we will already be engaged in a serious discussion. Essays must be at least **500 words** (I will check).

Each week students will present on a **pre-20th century woman writer of nonfiction**. This will require doing research into her biography, becoming familiar with her style, and providing an introduction to her writing. The readings I have chosen for the course represent the old-fashioned canonical tradition. I want students to do research to unearth voices that have not been included in the traditional canon. Make sure you read enough to find someone whose work you really like. This class will be unusual in that you will be responsible for reading more outside of class than simply the work that is assigned. This should be an exercise in discovery. I would like each group to assign no more than 15-20 pages of each woman writer's work for the class to discuss.

On the first day of class, students will sign up for presentations.

Weekly writing prompts (the sandbox)

Each week I will give you a prompt related to the kind of work we are reading. You are expected to treat this as an in-class writing assignment, but to do it on your own time. Plan to spend at least 30 minutes writing. I am not expecting polished essays. Realize, however, that you will be posting these on Canvas for your classmates (and me) to read. Impress us. Many essays that started out in the sandbox have been published.

Final assignment:

Students will be required to write an 8-10 page analytical essay looking at craft choices by two writers: one pre-20th century and the other contemporary. These must be posted by 8AM December 1. Students are expected to read each other's work.

ATTENDANCE AND GRADING: This is a discussion class, which means your presence is essential. However, sometimes bad things happen to good people. If you are going to miss class, you are required to let me know in advance. You must post a craft essay on all the books and post a sandbox essay each week. For each craft essay that receives a grade of NC, your final grade will be lowered by 1 point. **For each craft essay or sandbox assignment you do not complete, your final grade will be lowered by 1 point.** You are required to post your essays by the specified time so that everyone has a chance to read them. **For each essay that is late, you will be docked 0.5 points on your final grade.** This is a graduate course. I expect you to attend every class session. If you miss more than two, you will fail the course.

PARTICIPATION:

Class participation is essential. Because some people are more comfortable speaking in class and are quicker to respond, I ask that you wait 2-3 people after contributing before you speak again.

Schedule

September 24

Introduction—What is creative nonfiction?

Assigning groups

October 1

Philip Lopate, Introduction to *The Art of the Personal Essay*

Seneca, "On Scipio's Villa" http://essays.quotidiana.org/seneca/scipios_villa/
Montaigne, "Of a Monstrous Child" http://essays.quotidiana.org/montaigne/monstrous_child/
Swift, "A Modest Proposal" <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/modest.html>

October 8

Gornick, *The Situation and the Story*

Bacon, "On Riches" <http://www.westegg.com/bacon/riches.html>

Lamb, "Old China" <http://www.angelfire.com/nv/mf/elia2/china.htm>

Twain, "Advice to Youth"

<http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/adviceyouth.htm>

October 15

Autobiography of Ben Franklin

October 22

David Shields, *Reality Hunger*

October 29

Goldsmith, "On National Prejudices"

<http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/goldsmithessay7.htm>

Hazlitt, "On the Pleasures of Hating"

<http://www.blupete.com/Literature/Essays/Hazlitt/Hating.htm>

Jefferson et. al, "The Declaration of Independence"

<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>

Lincoln, "Gettysburg Address" and "Second Inaugural Address"

<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>;

<http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres32.html>

November 5

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

November 12

Steele, "Twenty-four Hours in London"

<http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/LondonRambleEssay.htm>

Thoreau, "Where I Lived and What I Lived For"

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/walden/hdt02.html>

Muir, "A Wind-Storm in the Forests"

<http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/muirwindstormessay.htm>

November 19

Student-directed reading

November 26
NO CLASS--THANKSGIVING

December 3
Virginia Woolf: *A Room of One's Own* (1929)

December 10
Final

In the past students have presented on the following pre-20th century women nonfiction writers: Isabella Bird, Nellie Bly, Caroline Kirkland, Harriet Jacobs, Eliza Haywood, Susan Fenimore Cooper, Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Rowlandson, "Old Elizabeth," Agnes Repplier, Mary Chesnut, Mary Russell Mitford, Helen Hunt Jackson, Voltarine de Cleyre, Wada Ei, Bess Walette