

The Gallatin School
 New York University
 Fall 2008
 MW, 3:30-4:45

Prof. June Foley
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 Office hrs: TR, 3-5

K10:9343--Writing Seminar I: Writers on Writing

Description: George Orwell named four reasons for writing: "egoism," "aesthetic enthusiasm," "historical impulse" and "political purpose." Franz Kafka stressed the emotional power of words in describing writing as "an ax for the frozen sea within us." Mario Vargas Llosa claimed the secret reason for the literary vocation is the questioning of real life. Gustave Flaubert stressed the limitations of language, as "a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, when all the while we long to move the stars to pity." In this course, students write critical essays that are inspired by writing *about* writing. Our texts, exemplary works in various genres, include essays by Orwell and Joan Didion; selections from the diaries of Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka; Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* and Lhosa's *Letters to a Young Novelist*; Lillian Ross's *New Yorker* "profile" of Ernest Hemingway; short stories about the writing life by E.L. Doctorow, Alice Munro and Lorrie Moore; and James Joyce's novel *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Student writing will culminate in a literary-critical essay.

Texts: Required texts are available at the NYU Bookstore: Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, Lhosa's *Letters to a Young Novelist*, Ross's *Portrait of Hemingway*, and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Strongly recommended: Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*.

Requirements: Students write and revise three short (3-5-page) essays and one 7-9-page literary critical essay. Students also write brief (1-2-page) responses to every reading, handing them in at the end of the class. All work must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and numbered pages. For workshops, students bring copies for all students (and me), or e-mail me the work by 1 PM.

Grades: Thoughtful, informed participation—analyzing the texts and constructively critiquing classmates' writing—is crucial, and determines 20% of the grade (missing more than two classes without a serious reason lowers the final grade; three late arrivals = one absence). The collective responses determine 15% of the grade. The first essay is ungraded; each of the other two short essays determines 20% of the grade, and the literary critical essay determines 25%. (Only revisions are graded). Late work is progressively downgraded.

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TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Wed., 9/3

In class: Intro to class and one another; read Orwell's "Why I Write" aloud

Reading assignment: Re-read Orwell's essay

Writing assignment: Response to Orwell's essay (What surprised, excited, puzzled, disturbed you most? What did you learn? Consider everything—ideas, organization, voice, language, syntax, even punctuation.)

Week 2: Mon., 9/8

In class: Discuss Orwell

Reading assignment: Read Joan Didion's "Why I Write"

Writing assignment: Response to Didion's style (Do as above; if you wish, compare/contrast with Orwell.)

Wed., 9/10

In class: Discuss Didion; freewriting re Essay 1, "Why I Write, How I Write, What I Learned from Orwell &/or Didion, and What I Want/Need to Learn"—any or all of the above (3-5 pages—ungraded)

Reading assignment: Responses to Orwell and Didion, freewriting

Writing assignment: Draft, Essay 1

Week 3: Mon., 9/15

DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 1

In class: Workshop Essay 1

Reading assignment: Essay 1

Writing assignment: Revise Essay 1

Wed., 9/17

TRIP TO BOBST LIBRARY: INTRO TO RESEARCH

Week 4: Mon., 9/22

DUE: ESSAY 1

In class: Intro to Woolf and *A Writer's Diary*

Reading assignment: Woolf's diary, selections

Writing assignment: Response to Woolf

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In class: Discuss Woolf's diary

Reading assignment: Kafka's diary, selections

Writing assignment: Response to Kafka and (If you wish, compare/contrast with Woolf)

Week 5: Mon., 9/29

In class: Discuss Kafka; intro to Rilke

Reading assignment: Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*

Writing assignment: Response to Rilke

Wed., 10/1

In class: Discuss Rilke

Reading assignment: Mario Vargas Lhosa's *Letters to a Young Novelist*

Writing assignment: Response to Lhosa (If you wish, compare/contrast with Rilke.)

Week 6: Mon., 10/6

In class: Discuss Lhosa

Reading assignment: Lillian Ross's *Portrait of Hemingway*

Writing assignment: How does Ross's "portrait" differ from the (implied) self-portrait of one or more of the other writers?

Wed., 10/8

In class: Discuss Lhosa

Reading assignment: Lillian Ross's *Portrait of Hemingway*

Writing assignment: How does Ross's "portrait" differ from the (implied) self-portraits of one or more of the other writers?

Week 7: Mon., 10/13: COLUMBUS DAY—HOLIDAY**Wed., 10/15**

In class: Discussion of Ross; freewriting re Essay 2, on two of the various forms of nonfiction we've read—essay, diary, letters, "profile" (3-5 pages)

Reading assignment: Responses and freewriting

Writing assignment: Draft, Essay 2

Week 8: Mon., 10/20**DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 2**

In class: Workshop Essay 2

Reading assignment: Essay 2

Writing assignment: Revise Essay 2

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In class: Workshop Essay 2

Reading assignment: Essay 2

Writing assignment: Revise Essay 2

Week 9: Mon., 10/27**DUE: ESSAY 2**

In class: Intro to James Joyce and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Reading assignment: Joyce (first third)

Writing assignment: Response to Joyce

Wed., 10/29

In class: Discuss Joyce

Reading assignment: Joyce (second third)

Writing assignment: Response to Joyce

Week 10: Mon., 11/3

In class: Discuss Joyce

Reading assignment: Joyce (last third)

Writing assignment: Ideas, Essay 3

Wed., 11/5**DUE: DRAFT, ESSAY 3**

In class: Workshop Ideas, Essay 3

Reading assignment: Your writing re Joyce

Writing assignment: DRAFT, Essay 3

Week 11: Mon, 11/10

In class: Workshop Essay 3

Reading assignment: Essay 3

Writing assignment: Revise Essay 3

Wed., 11/12

In class: Workshop Essay 3

Reading assignment: Essay 3

Writing assignment: Revise Essay 3

Week 12: Mon, 11/17:**DUE: ESSAY 3**

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In class: Intro to Moore, Doctorow, Munro; reading of Moore's story
 Reading assignment: E.L. Doctorow, "The Writer in the Family"
 Writing assignment: Response to Moore and Doctorow

Week 12: Mon., 11/17

In class: Discuss Doctorow
 Reading assignment: Alice Munro, "Family Furnishings"
 Writing assignment: Response to Munro

Wed., 11/19

In class: Discuss Munro
 Reading assignment: Alice Munro's "Meneseteung"
 Writing assignment: Response to Munro

Week 13: Mon., 11/24

In class: Discuss Munro
 Reading assignment: Responses, freewrite, re Essay 4 (3-5 pages, putting into conversation at least one of the final short stories with at least one other work.)
 Writing assignment: Topics for Essay 4

Wed., 11/26: THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**Week 14: Mon., 12/1**

DUE: Topics for Essay 4; GUEST SPEAKER (TBA)
 Reading assignment: Your responses & topic
 Writing assignment: Draft, Essay 4

Wed., 12/3

In class: Workshop Draft, Essay 4
 Reading assignment: Essay 4
 Writing assignment: Revise Essay 4

Week 15: Mon., 12/8

In class: Workshop Draft, Essay 4
 Reading assignment: Essay 4
 Writing assignment: Revise Essay 4

**Wed., 12/10: LAST CLASS—ATTENDANCE MANDATORY
 DUE: ESSAY 4; COURSE EVALUATION; CELEBRATION!**