

Prof. S. Weisser  
Gallatin K10.0345  
Fall, 2008

## Writing Seminar I: Forms of Love

"To learn to write," said Robert Frost, "is to learn to have ideas." This course will explore the act of writing as a way of thinking, using a particular theme – the human need for and experience of love --- to develop your personal voice and give shape to thought. A variety of short readings in different genres – essays, fiction and poetry -- will serve as the springboard to practice writing the academic essay with clarity. Our aims in this course are to acquire strategies for generating good ideas, as that term is defined in a university setting, learn how to shape raw ideas into a coherent essay, and develop a good ear for editing our writing. Our method involves reading, discussion, in-class writing, peer workshops, multiple drafting, and individual conferences.

What kinds of love are essential to our well-being, and why does love so often go wrong? This course will examine family love, friendship, and romance as forms of love. These varieties of love are very personal and yet also have social rules of their own, sometimes unspoken. Philosophy often tells us what is ideal, while social science attempts to describe objectively, but literature may portray the ways in which experience can break *all* the rules. We will use a selection of literary and non-fiction texts on the subject of love in its many forms to see what they contribute to our understanding of our most important relationships. Discussing what we think and feel about these representations of love will serve as the springboard for developing students' writing on the subject. Students will compose several descriptive and critical essays as well as a literary critical paper.

TEXTS: (on sale at the NYU Bookstore):

Barthes, Roland, *A Lover's Discourse* (Hill and Wang)  
Carson, Anne, *The Beauty of the Husband* (Vintage)  
Kincaid, Jamaica, *My Brother* (Farrar, Strauss, Giroux)  
LaBute, Neil, *The Shape of Things* (Faber)  
Mishima, Yukio, *Patriotism* (New Directions)  
Parker, Suzan-Lori, *Topdog/Underdog* (Dramatist Play Service)  
Smiley, Jane, *The Age of Grief* (Ivy/Ballantine)

**ATTENDANCE:** Excellent attendance is required. Your grade will be lowered for excessive absence (more than 3 classes missed). My policy is that written evidence of a medical visit to a doctor or health facility will erase an absence. Be sure to get in touch with me if you are having a problem that affects your attendance!

*Policy on lateness:* Lateness is disruptive to the class. If you are not present when attendance is taken, it's your responsibility to tell me *after class* that you are present -- otherwise you will be marked absent! Also, please do not leave the room while class is in session unless it's really necessary, as that is distracting.

**CONFERENCES:** Students will meet with the instructor individually on a voluntary basis, as often as they wish, to discuss ideas, style, revisions, grades, and so on.

**GRADES:** The course grade is based foremost on the *average of the grades* of your papers, after all drafts have been handed in, and secondarily on participation in the class, which includes contributions to discussion, editorial skill and effort, and attendance.

You will keep a portfolio of your editorial responses to others' writing, and that will receive a separate grade at the end of the semester.

Your grade will be lowered for late or missing papers.

Any plagiarism will result in an F for that paper.

**GRADES ON PAPERS:** The first paper is an exercise that will not be graded in order to encourage you to try out your writing and to write freely. Beginning with the first formal essay, you will have a chance to revise your work before it is graded. There will be four graded formal essays in all. Each one will be peer reviewed while in process (see separate sheet) before you hand in the draft to be graded. You will then be able to revise as many times as you like in order to raise your grade. Note, however, that improvement must be substantive, not merely mechanical, in order for the grade to be changed. If you are unhappy with your grades, would like an explanation for my comments, or are not sure how to revise, please see me.

**OFFICE HOURS:** Mon. and Wed. 9-9:30, 715 Broadway, Rm. 416.

**E-MAIL:** [sw34@nyu.edu](mailto:sw34@nyu.edu) ; please identify your course in the subject line of your email. You are encouraged to use email for all questions, confusions and problems, including personal issues that affect your attendance or other matters. My policy is to acknowledge ALL emails from students, so that you will know I have received your email.

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## Writing Seminar I: Forms of Love

### SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

*NOTE: Dates are provisional and subject to change to allow for flexibility. Please check Blackboard (BB) regularly for updates on assignments. Where marked, your reading assignments must be downloaded from BB; all others are handouts in class or texts on sale.*

WEEK 1: September 3

Introduction to the course.

\***Reading/Writing Exercise:** Descriptions (see handout for details)

\***Reading Assignment DUE Sept 10:** Aristotle on Friendship (on BB)

WEEK 2: September 8, 10

Analysis of Descriptions. **Writing Exercise due Sept. 10**

Rhetorical strategies of the academic paper.

Discuss Aristotle

\***Reading Assignment DUE Sept 15:** E. Bronte (handout), M. Dimen (BB) on Friendship

WEEK 3: September 15, 17

Discuss Bronte and Dimen; preparation for Essay #1

\***Reading Assignment** for Week 5 on Family Love: Savage (handout), Parker, Kincaid

\***Writing Assignment: Essay #1 on Friendship** (see handout in class). First draft due Sept 22

WEEK 4: September 22, 24

Workshop Essay #1

WEEK 5: September 29, October 1

Discuss Savage, Parker, Kincaid; **Essay #1 second draft due**

WEEK 6: (October 8<sup>th</sup>); October 6, 8

Discuss readings

\***Writing Assignment: Essay #2 on Family Love.** First draft due October 15

\***Reading Assignment** for Week 8 on Romantic Love: Barthes

WEEK 7: **No class on Columbus Day (October 13)**; October 15  
Workshop Essay #2

WEEK 8: October 20, 22  
Continue Workshop Essay #2; discuss Barthes  
\***Reading Assignment** for Week 9: Cancian, Hatfield (both on BB), LaBute

WEEK 9: October 27, 29  
Happy Halloween!  
Discuss readings; **Essay #2 second draft due**  
\***Writing Assignment: Essay #3 on Romantic Love.** First draft due Nov 3

WEEK 10: November 3, 5  
Workshop Essay #3  
\***Reading Assignment** for Week 11, on Marriage: Earley, Koontz (both on BB)

WEEK 11: November 10, 12  
Research techniques discussion; Discuss Earley and Koontz  
**Essay #3 second draft due** Nov 12  
Sign up for conferences on Nov 19  
\***Reading Assignment** due Nov 17: Mishima

WEEK 12: November 17, 19  
Discuss Mishima; Nov 19 (Day before Thanksgiving): optional conferences in class  
\***Reading Assignment** due Nov 24: Smiley, Carson

WEEK 13: November 24, 26  
Discuss Smiley and Carson  
\***Writing Assignment:** Essay #4 on **Marriage** due Week 14

WEEK 14: December 1, 3  
Workshop Essay #4; **Essay #4 second draft due** Week 15, last day of class

WEEK 15: December 8, 10  
Conferences and catch-up

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### READING LIST

#### Friendship:

Aristotle on Friendship (from Nichomachean Ethics) – (BB)  
Emily Bronte, “Love and Friendship” – (Handout)  
Muriel Dimen, "In the Zone of Ambivalence: A Journal of Competition", from Feminist Nightmares, ed. Susan Ostrov Weisser – (BB)

#### Family Love:

Dan Savage, “Role Reversal” – (Handout)  
Suzan-Lori Parker, Top Dog/Underdog  
Jamaica Kincaid, My Brother

#### Romantic Love:

Roland Barthes, A Lover’s Discourse  
Francesca Cancian, "The Feminization of Love" – (BB)  
Elaine Hatfield, "What Do Women and Men Want from Love and Sex?" – (BB)  
Neil LaBute, The Shape of Things

#### Marriage

Tony Earley, “The Courting Garden” – (BB)  
Stephanie Coontz, "The Heterosexual Revolution" – (BB)  
Anne Carson, The Beauty of the Husband  
Yukio Mishima, Yukio, Patriotism  
Jane Smiley, The Age of Grief