

Prof. S. Weisser  
Gallatin K10.0345-001  
Fall, 2009

### 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 own and others' writing. Our method involves reading for ideas, discussion, in-class writing, peer workshops, multiple drafting, and individual conferences.

The theme of the course is various forms of love, four in particular. All you need is love, love makes the world go around, and love is a battlefield, so the songs tell us. What kinds of love are essential to our well-being, and why does love so often go wrong? Together we 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 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 with a research component.

#### TEXTS TO BUY: (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)  
Parks, 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 essays, 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. It's your responsibility to keep track of your editorial work.

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 for grading. 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, let me encourage you to discuss this with 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. Please do 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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### READING LIST

#### Friendship:

Corinthians 13:4 --(Handout)  
Aristotle on Friendship (from Nichomachean Ethics) – (BB)  
Emily Bronte, "Love and Friendship" – (Handout)  
"What are Friends For? A Longer Life", New York Times – (Handout)  
Muriel Dimen, "In the Zone of Ambivalence: A Journal of Competition", from Feminist Nightmares, ed. Susan Ostrov Weisser – (BB)  
Tobias Wolff, "Hunters in the Snow"

#### Family Love:

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

#### Romantic Love:

Roland Barthes, A Lover's Discourse  
"How to Love Like a Real Woman", Cosmopolitan Magazine – (BB)  
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

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### 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 8, 10

Introduction to the course; discuss description assignment

**\*Exercise:** Descriptions (see handout for details)

**\*Reading Assignment** for Week 2: Corinthians (handout); On **Friendship**: Aristotle (on BB)

WEEK 2: September 15, 17

Rhetorical strategies of the academic paper.

Discuss readings

**\*Writing Exercise:** Descriptions, DUE Sept 15

**\*Reading Assignment** for Week 3: E. Bronte (handout); *New York Times* article (handout); M. Dimen (BB); T. Wolff

WEEK 3: September 22, 24

Discuss readings

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

**\*Writing Assignment: Essay #1 on Friendship** (see handout in class). First draft due Sept 29

WEEK 4: September 29, October 1

Workshop Essay #1

WEEK 5: October 6, 8

Discuss readings; **Essay #1 second draft due**

\***Writing Assignment: Essay #2 on Family Love.** First draft due October 13

\***Reading Assignment** for Week 7 on **Romantic Love:** Barthes, "How to Love Like a Real Woman," Cancian (BB)

WEEK 6: October 13, 15

Workshop Essay #2

WEEK 7: October 20, 22

Discuss readings

\***Reading Assignment** for Week 8: Hatfield (BB), LaBute

**Essay #2 second draft due**

WEEK 8: October 27, 29

Happy Halloween!

Discuss readings

\***Writing Assignment: Essay #3 on Romantic Love.** First draft due Nov 3

\***Reading Assignment** for Week 10, on **Marriage:** Earley, Koontz (both on BB)

WEEK 9: November 3, 5

Workshop Essay#3

WEEK 10: November 10, 12

Research techniques discussion; Discuss readings

**Essay #3 second draft due**

\***Reading Assignment** for Week 11: Mishima

WEEK 11: November 17, 19

Library class; discuss reading

**Sign up for conferences on Nov 24**

WEEK 12: November 24; THANKSGIVING

Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>: optional conferences in class

\***Reading Assignment** due Nov 24: Smiley, Carson

WEEK 13: December 1, 3

Discuss readings

**\*Writing Assignment:** Essay #4 on **Marriage** due Week 14

WEEK 14: December 8, 10

Workshop Essay #4

WEEK 15: December 15

**Essay #4 second draft due** Week 15, last day of class

Conferences and catch-up