

## English 53002 – Creative Writing Honors Colloquium Fall 2014

Bret Nye – bnye@nd.edu

Class Times – Monday and Wednesday 5:05-6:20

Class Location – 143 DeBartolo Hall

When to meet up with Me Outside of Class – Tuesday 2:00-4:30, or any time if you email me about it

Where to meet up with Me Outside of Class – TBD

### What This Class Is

This course is meant to supplement your thesis work in critical, thought-provoking ways. We will be reading a variety of texts written by authors from all avenues of life that deal with the very act of writing itself. This means stories/essays/poems/etc. that have sought to answer the age-old question writers and artists have been asking themselves since art existed: why write/create, and having created/written, what of it?

There are a number of genres/forms which writers and artists have utilized to ask these questions, and we'll look at quite a few of them over the course of the semester. We'll even experiment with these genres ourselves. We are focusing ourselves at the task of fitting language to our ideas and trying to understand why human beings are so drawn to art and writing and the agonizing, beautiful, time-consuming process of creating it. Though impossible, we will hopefully come to believe that this is no minor endeavor (I'm not saying my class will get you there, but hopefully you will get there some day). This work is also meant to provide you with plenty of examples and developed personal notions on this sort of critical/artistic work with which to complete the critical portion of your thesis project.

Here is a list of the types of things we want to accomplish over the course of the semester:

- work towards the critical component of our thesis project
- achieve a sense of the formal approach we're taking in our thesis
- understand what our work engages in the political/social/cultural senses
- engage a number of texts that have attempted to define why it is that we write, and how it is that we should write (manifestos, craft talks, lectures, lyrical/theoretical essays, etc.)
- do some work within these genres ourselves, and conceptualize our own reasoning for the utility of these genres in explaining why it is that we write.

### How the Class Will Work

This course is both reading and writing intensive: this means that you will have a few essays/stories/poems/etc. to read for each class period and a number of in- and out-of-class

writing assignments to complete. We will look at a number of varied pieces of writing that serve as authors' attempts to answer these sorts of questions:

- why write?
- what should writing accomplish? what can it mean? *how* can it mean?
- what is the state of contemporary literature, and is this a good or bad thing? How does this current state of literature engage or reflect upon past states of literature?
- what social/cultural/political implications does my work promote?

We will then try our hand at these various types of writing about writing ourselves and workshop them together in class. I hope to have you present some of them as well, whether through performance or by simply reading your work aloud to the room.

Everyone will sign up next week (Monday, 9/1) for a day to present on the readings: this will entail putting together a quick, informal presentation on the text(s) assigned for that class period, which should include your thorough reading, critique, and opinions of those texts and can include a bit of background information if you wish. You should also prepare a list of discussion questions for the class on your presentation day.

You should make comprehensive notes for each reading we do for class. Have these notes/thoughts with you for class discussion, for they will help you be prepared to add to the conversation and will inevitably allow you to get more out of each class. I will assess your having read the texts for each class period according to your engagement with the class conversation and your willingness to engage in it. If I suspect that people haven't been reading for class, whether out of the semester getting busy or for any reason, I will consider assigning 500 words for each class meeting on the texts assigned for that meeting.

## Assignments and Course Requirements

Along with reading, responding to, and presenting on the texts I'll bring to the class, you'll be doing a number of short writing assignments along the way to give you some practice with the genres of writing about writing.

At the end of the semester, I'll ask you to choose 3 of your writings and revise them, and collect them with the rest of your work and turn it all in, portfolio-style. This will serve as a compendium of the ground you've covered during the course and should stand as your most definitive work regarding what you think writing should do and what you think it means to call yourself a writer.

You also need to meet with your advisor and with me a few times over the course of the semester to discuss the work of your thesis project. First, make sure that you meet with your advisor by September 19<sup>th</sup> to make plans for your thesis and to schedule future meetings. You'll meet with them more in the spring, but you should be in consistent contact with them this fall, too. As for me, we will meet at least twice regarding your thesis: once just after midterms (the week of October 27) and once at the end of the semester, most likely during our exam period or thenabouts. In class we will talk about my expectations for these meetings. I am also possibly available to meet to discuss the progress of your thesis at many other times and would generally

like to be a resource for you as you begin this long-term writing project. This availability is of course tied to the whims of my schedule and varying level of busyness. Just shoot me an email.

## Required Texts

I will provide all of the reading materials and assignments and links to readings for the course on our Sakai site, so as long as you can access the site then you'll have access to everything necessary for the class.

## What to Bring to Class

I will be providing you with all reading materials and writing assignments online through our course's Sakai site. Therefore, you should bring your laptop or device with you to each class period so that you can access them. If you prefer to print out readings and make written notes you may certainly do so; be sure to bring those with you if you do print them out.

We will almost certainly be doing some in-class writing as well, so you'll use your laptops for that. If you've been printing essays/stories/poems out and prefer this method of note-taking/reading, then just be sure that you've always got some pen and paper with you in class so that you can still part in our in-class writing activities.

## Policies

### Grading

This course is graded according to the "S/U" rubric, "Satisfactory" being a passing grade and "Unsatisfactory" a failing grade. In order to achieve an "S," you must attend each class session (outside of the 3 unexcused absences you're allowed (see below)), complete all of the inside and outside of class writing assignments, and be an attentive and engaged member of discussions or workshops during class. Not fulfilling these requirements gets you a "U."

### Attendance

This course is most definitely discussion-based, meaning that most of the learning and intellectual work you'll be doing will happen during class through either class-wide discussions or one-on-one conversations/workshops you'll have with other students about your writing. Therefore, attendance is an extremely important component of the course and of your commitment to getting something out of it. You will be allowed **3 unexcused absences** over the course of the semester; after this, you will receive a "U" for the course.

There are such things as excused absences, the determination of which will be at my discretion according to the official rules on such things as figured by the Office of Undergraduate Studies. Either way, if you miss a class you should absolutely make up any work or reading and contact me so that you stay on track with the course.

## **Academic Integrity**

Obviously, it's very important that all of the writing you submit for this course is your own. The expectation is that you will appropriately identify that portion of your work which is collaborative with others, or which is borrowed from others, or which is your own work from other contexts. Don't take David Shields' approach in *Reality Hunger* (which we'll be reading from soon enough) as okay, especially in terms of the academy. Check out the university honor code online here if you're unfamiliar with it: [honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code](http://honorcode.nd.edu/the-honor-code).

## **Students with a Disability**

If you have a disability, please come to me and let me know about this in the first weeks of the semester. Any and all necessary accommodations will be made, absolutely. According to the university's code, you must document your disability with Disability Services if you need accommodation. Please visit [disabilityservices.nd.edu](http://disabilityservices.nd.edu) to do this.

## Course Schedule

W 8/27 – Syllabus, Opening Talk

M 9/1 – Discussion of thesis project/requirements; “The Death of the Author” (Barthes), “Good Readers and Good Writers” (Nabokov), “Rereading Barthes and Nabokov” (Smith); Writing Assignment = Thesis Description

W 9/3 – Discuss schedule, schedule presentations; “The Death of the Author” (Barthes) and “Good Readers and Good Writers” (Nabokov); possible writing exercise

M 9/8 – Manifesto: David Shields, excerpts from *Reality Hunger*; Various manifestos, collected from Mary Ann Caws’ *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*; writing exercise

W 9/10 – Manifesto Workshop

M 9/15 – Theory Essay: John Gardner, “Moral Fiction” from *On Moral Fiction*; Mary Gordon, “Moral Fiction”; Annie Dillard, “Does the World Have Meaning?” from *Living by Fiction*

**PRESENTATION:**

W 9/17 – Theory Essay: David Foster Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram”; Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man” from *The Location of Culture*

**PRESENTATION: Regina**

M 9/22 – Lyric Theory Essay: Helene Cixous, “Laugh of the Medusa”; Kim Hyesoon, *Princess Abandoned*

**PRESENTATION: Ariel**

W 9/24 – Hybrid Theory Essay: Krista Thompson, “The Sound of Light”; Jonathan Lethem, “Postmodernism as Liberty Valance”

**PRESENTATION: Leila**

M 9/29 – Creative Nonfiction/Memoir: Dave Eggers, excerpts from *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*; Leslie Jamison, “Grand Unified Theory of Female Pain”

**PRESENTATION: Sara**

W 10/1 – Creative Nonfiction/Lyric Essay Workshop

M 10/6 – Craft: Alain Robbe-Grillet, “On Several Obsolete Notions” from *For a New Novel*; Michael Martone, “Ruining a Story” from *Unconventions*; Anne Lamott, “The Last Class” from *Bird by Bird*

**PRESENTATION: Emma**

W 10/8 – Craft: Jack Kerouac, “Essentials of Spontaneous Prose” and “Belief and Technique for Modern Prose”; Jorge Luis Borges, “A Profession of Literary Faith”; Raymond Federman, “Federman on Federman” from *Critifiction*

**PRESENTATION: Jacqueline**

M 10/13 – Lecture: Federico Garcia Lorca, “Theory and Play of the Duende”

**PRESENTATION: Alex**

W 10/15 – Lecture Presentations

M 10/20 – NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)

W 10/22 – NO CLASS (FALL BREAK)

M 10/27 – Fiction: Kurt Vonnegut, Chapter 1 of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Preface of *Breakfast of Champions*; writing exercise

**W 10/29 – No Class Today (writing time)**

**Th 10/30 – Thesis Workshop Submission Due at 10 a.m. on Sakai**

**Th 10/29 – F 10/31: First Meeting with Me on Thesis Project**

**M 11/3 – No Class (Bret Sick)**

W 11/5 – Thesis Workshop Day

M 11/10 – Fiction: Tim O’Brien, “How to Tell a True War Story”; Franz Kafka, “A Hunger Artist”

**PRESENTATION: Lucas**

W 11/12 – Fiction: Lorrie Moore, “People Like That Are the Only People Here”; David Foster Wallace, “Octet”

**PRESENTATION: Tess**

M 11/17 – Letters/Poetry: Rimbaud, Letters of the Seer; Emily Dickinson, Letters to Thomas Higginson

W 11/19 – Story Workshop

M 11/24 – Poetry: Allen Ginsberg, “Howl”; writing exercise

W 11/26 – NO CLASS (THANKSGIVING BREAK)

M 12/1 – NO CLASS (WRITING DAY)

W 12/3 – Theatre: Antonin Artaud, Preface to *The Theatre and Its Double*; Suzan-Lori Parks, three short essays collected in *The America Play and Other Works*

**PRESENTATION: Zach**

**W 12/3 – Second Thesis Submission Due (5-10 brand new pages of thesis)**

M 12/8 – Critical Component/ Thesis Essay Day

W 12/10 – Second Thesis Workshop Day

**W 12/10 – F 12/19 – Optional Second Meeting with Me**