

SYLLABUS: *The Essay as Form*

Department: English, Creative Writing
Course Code & Section #: CRTW 527
CRN: 16906
Semester & Year: Fall 2013
Meeting Days/Times: Tuesdays, 6:30-9:10pm

Location/Room #: 201 Pray Harrold
Instructor: Katie McGowan
Email: kmcgowa8@emich.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 5-6pm, and by appointment
Office Location: 607D

Course Description: An advanced workshop seminar in creative writing focusing on the lyric essay. This course will introduce students to a genre that blends lyric poetry with the traditional essay; each student will write at least one extended lyric essay and present it to the class for discussion.

Detailed Description: This course will involve a critical exploration of the written essay in its myriad forms. Students will investigate the history of the essay, experiment with the form, play with media and performance as essayistic devices, and workshop their own essays with peers. From Perec's musings on the quotidian to Drakulić's essays on the abject, students will be exposed to a wide range of essays to be inspired by, and to write against.

Special focus will be placed on the political complexity of first person writing, the role of radical subjectivity in the contemporary essay, the flirtation between nonfiction/documentary and the essay, and the many forms (or, non-forms) that embody the ever-changing concept of the essay. The course will combine seminar and workshop, and emphasize critical reading and creative writing equally.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students are expected to be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the essay as a form of writing, film, sound collage, etc.
- Articulate the nuanced relationship between the essay film and the documentary; the classical essay and the lyric essay
- Critique the essays of others in a productive and thoughtful way
- Develop and revise new writing and media work within the workshop context
- Situate their own essayistic writing within this broad genre

Required Texts

A Guide to Poetics Journal: Writing in the Expanded Field, eds. Hejinian and Watten (Wesleyan University Press, 978-0-8195-7121-2)

How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed, Slavenka Drakulić (Vintage, 978-0060975401)

My 1980s and Other Essays, Wayne Koestenbaum (FSG, 9780374533779)

Thoughts of Sorts, Georges Perec (*Verba Mundi*, 978-1567923629)

Additional required reading and links at <http://ecompanion.emich.edu/> under "Doc Sharing"

Optional works (excerpts of which we will be reading):

Cleavage: Essays on Sex, Stars, and Aesthetics, Wayne Koestenbaum

Home: Social Essays, LeRoi Jones

Mythologies, Roland Barthes

Notes to Literature, Volume 1, Theodor W. Adorno

Somebody Blew Up America & Other Poems, Amiri Baraka

Swimming to Cambodia, Spalding Gray

Under Milk Wood: A Play for Voices, Dylan Thomas

Unexplained Presence, Tisa Bryant

Supplemental Film Recommendations:

The Gleaners and I (France, dir. Agnes Varda, 2000, 82') *All Varda!
High School (USA, dir. Frederick Wiseman, 1968, 75')
La Jetée (France, dir. Chris Marker, 1962, 28')
Little Dieter Needs to Fly (USA, dir. Werner Herzog, 1997, 80')
Man with a Movie Camera (Soviet Union, dir. Dziga Vertov, 1929, 68')
Standard Operating Procedure (USA, dir. Errol Morris, 2008, 116')

ASSESEMENT

Requirements:

Précis	10% (due 10/5)
Critical reading journals	10% (reviewed occasionally)
Midterm Project	20% (due 10/29)
Class Participation	20%
Presentation	10% (throughout semester)
Final Project	30% (due 12/10)

Précis: Discuss one or more texts read to date, 2-4 pages.

Critical Reading Journals & Class Participation: You are responsible for reading and responding to assigned materials in advance of each class in your reading journal. These entries need not be a specific length, but should demonstrate thoughtful engagement with each of the texts. Please include questions and bullet points for discussion. A large part of the “participation” component is being willing to communicate your thoughts and reflections on the work we’re studying. This is very important to creating a dynamic culture in our classroom.

When critiquing classmates’ work, responses must be typed, with hard copies for the student and me on the day of the crit. Lack of preparation will compromise your standing in the class.

Midterm project: 10-15 pages of essayistic writing. This may be one long-form essay, several short essays, etc. (+ one page reflection on the work).

Presentation: Each student is required to facilitate the discussion of one text—literary or critical—during the semester. You will choose from the slots outlined on the syllabus. The form of the presentation is flexible, but must engage the text(s) formally and conceptually.

Final project: 15-20 page essay(s) or another creative project employing the forms covered this term (+ artist statement and critical analysis of the project).

Grading:

94-100: A	74-76: C
90-93: A-	70-73: C-
87-89: B+	67-69: D+
84-86: B	64-66: D
80-83: B-	60-63: D-
77-79: C+	< 59: E

The basis for grading critical and scholarly writing includes evaluation of student’s engagement with and ability to interpret and make use of assigned readings, basic writing ability, analytic competence, style, and quality of research (when applicable). The criteria for grading written creative work includes creativity, creative exploration, responsiveness to assignments, basic writing ability, and analytic competence when relevant.

COURSE POLICIES

First and foremost, I want all of you to know that I am available for you. Good communication between a student and instructor often makes the difference between a successful and unsuccessful class experience. I expect you to take on the responsibility of contacting me with any questions or concerns about this class. You can reach me via e-mail at any time (I check it often!), during office hours, and also by appointment. I aim to reply to all emails within 24 hours.

This course requires a lot of reading, writing, and dialogue. I am here to help.

Written Assignments: All work must be submitted in hard-copy format at the beginning of class. With the exception of creative work with unusual spacing/layout, all prose should adhere to MLA format.

Decorum: Cell phones, iPods, and other mobile devices must be silenced and put away. Absolutely no texting when class is in session. I am committed to fostering a rigorous and respectful learning environment. Critiques will remain civil and constructive. Disrespect to colleagues, staff, instructors, etc. will not be tolerated.

Late Work: The graduate seminar relies on timely preparation and submission of work. You are responsible for submitting assignments on time. The deadlines for the term are established herein, so late work is not acceptable. This policy is firm for the sake of fairness.

Materials and Supplies: Please come prepared with writing utensils, a notebook dedicated to this class, and a folder for handouts. You must bring all required readings to class on the appropriate day and be prepared to discuss them.

Attendance Policy: Attendance is absolutely crucial for the success of the class. Given that the class will be structured as a seminar / workshop, we will all need to make a commitment to one another to be present, responsive, and attentive. Regular participation will be required, as we will all be relying on one another's engagement in good faith and trust. As a gesture of good faith and respect, absences must be reported in advance. Attendance is a program policy, and more than two absences will seriously affect your grade. If you must miss one class session, or if you must arrive late or leave early, you are required to inform me in advance of the class of which you will miss all or part. Students who arrive to class are asked to enter quickly and quietly. Please be respectful of your classmates. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to get lecture notes from a classmate and screen any missed films or video clips for yourself. Any handouts distributed in class will be posted online.

BATHHOUSE EVENTS: BathHouse Events were set up with you in mind, please see dates and times on the schedule and make any necessary accommodations to attend (work, child care, etc.) As graduate students, you are expected to be an engaged audience. See artist info below.

BathHouse Reading: Tuesday November 5, 4-6 PM, EMU Campus Center, Student Center Auditorium.

BathHouse Talks/Presentations: Wednesday November 6, 3-5 PM, EMU Campus Center, Student Center Auditorium

Unexplained Presence, Tisa Bryant. Fiction. Essays. African-American Studies. By remixing stories from novels and films to zoom in on the black presences within them, Tisa Bryant's UNEXPLAINED PRESENCE ruminates on the sublime power of history to shape culture in the subconscious of both the artist and the reader/viewer. Moving from interrogations of Francois Ozon's "8 Femmes" and Virginia Woolf's "Orlando" to the machinations of the "Regency House Party" reality TV show, UNEXPLAINED PRESENCE weaves threads of myth, fact and fiction into previously unexplored narratives lurking in our collective imagination. "This is truly a bold book, one that combines scenes of rich technicolor with the light of truth, at once invoking and dissolving cultural myths and faux histories" -Brenda Coultas.

The Black Automaton, Douglas Kearney: Poetry. African American Studies. Winner of the National Poetry Series, selected by Catherine Wagner. From ambivalent animals thriving after Katrina to party chants echoing in a burning city, THE BLACK AUTOMATON troubles rubble, cobbling a kind of life. In this collection bodies at risk seek renewal through violence and fertility, history and myth, flesh and radios. "First, you have to see Douglas Kearney's visual poems, which cheekily diagram cultural memes as if they were parts of speech (as they are). THE BLACK AUTOMATON has its share of sharp, tender lyrics, too...these exploit the political possibilities of puns and the way meanings hinge on inexact resemblance. Kearney's poems tweak and skewer pop culture and literary sources from Paul Laurence Dunbar to T. S. Eliot to traditional ballads and blues...Kearney's work turns poetic and cultural conventions disquietingly inside out."—Catherine Wagner <http://douglaskearney.com/news-free-downloads/>

COURSE SCHEDULE

*This is a provisional schedule. The weekly itinerary is subject to change. Regular updates will be posted online.

Week 1 | Sept. 10

Introduction to the course

Screening: *Sans Soleil* (dir. Chris Marker, France)-103 minutes.

Critical responses to the film— reading journal entry #1

Week 2 | Sept. 17 | What Makes an Essay?

"The Essay as Form"-Theodor W. Adorno (PDF)

"Of Vain Subtleties" and "Of Smells"-Michel de Montaigne (PDF)

"Goodbye to All That" and "On Keeping a Notebook"-Joan Didion (PDF)

Contribute to critical reading journal (each week)

Week 3 | Sept. 24 | The Lyric Essay

Thoughts of Sorts, Georges Perec

"*The Writer on Holiday*," "*The Face of Garbo*," "*Wine and Milk*," "*Steak and Chips*"- Roland Barthes

Two students present selections from text

Recommended event: *Matvei Yankelevich reads at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (MOCAD).*

Thursday, September 26, 7pm. Admission: Free.

Week 4 | Oct. 1 | Performing the Essay: Spoken Language & Performance

Davis Oscar Harvey, "Red, Red, Red: An Essay/Film in Eleven Parts" (PDF)

LeRoi Jones, "The Revolutionary Theatre" (PDF)

Screening: *Red Red Red* (dir. Davis Oscar Harvey, USA, 2011)-24 minutes

Skype lecture/conversation with filmmaker

Screening and discussion: excerpts from *Swimming to Cambodia* (Spalding Gray)

Week 5 | Oct. 8 | Workshop

Sherman Alexie, "Superman and Me" (PDF)

Précis due

Workshop midterm project ideas

Week 6 | Oct. 15

No class meeting. This session will be made up by attending at least one outside literary event over the course of the semester. Additional office hours available

Week 7 | Oct. 22 | History & Memory

Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (PDF)

Slavenka Drakulić, *How We Survived Communism & Even Laughed*

Two students present selections from *text*

Screening: *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* (dir. Rea Tajiri, USA, 1991)- 32 minutes
Night and Fog (dir. Alain Resnais, France, 1955)-32 min

Week 8 | Oct. 29 | The Radio Essay

In-class listening: Studs Terkel, "The Idea of North"-Glenn Gould, etc.

Two students present on selections from *A Guide to Poetics Journal*

Selections from Unexplained Presence, Tisa Bryant.

Midterm projects due

Week 9 | Nov. 5 | Documentary Meets Fiction

BathHouse Reading: 4-6 PM, EMU Campus Center. Meet at reading.

Class to follow reading.

My 1980s and Other Essays, Wayne Koestenbaum

Alexandra Juhasz and Jesse Lerner, "Introduction: Phony Definitions and Troubling Taxonomies of the Fake Documentary" (PDF)

Two students present selections from text

-BathHouse Talks/Presentations: Wednesday November 6, 3-5 PM, EMU Campus Center

Week 10 | Nov. 12

Workshop draft essays

One presentation on a selection from *A Guide to Poetics Journal*

Week 11 | Nov. 19

Workshop draft essays

Week 12 | Nov. 26

Workshop draft essays

One presentation on a selection from *A Guide to Poetics Journal*

Screening: *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975* (dir. Göran Olsson, USA, 2011)-100 minutes

Week 13 | Dec. 3

A Guide to Poetics Journal

Reading TBD **Selections to be made collectively*

Week 14 | Dec. 10

Final essays due

Course Shell: All PDF readings are available for download at our course shell on ecompanion.

Go to <http://ecompanion.emich.edu/>. Login, click on our class, then look under the heading "Doc Sharing". When you click on "Doc Sharing" you will see the complete list of texts. Download and print texts as required. You are responsible for checking the course shell weekly for updates/announcements/notes.

If you are new to the EMU-Online system (which is different than the my.emich system), you should retrieve your randomly generated password, log in, and change your password. If you have done this in a prior term, please log in using the credentials you established at that time.

RETRIEVING YOUR PASSWORD

PLEASE NOTE: Your EMU-Online user credentials are NOT the same credentials you use to log into the my.emich system.

1. Direct your browser to <http://ecompanion.emich.edu/>
2. Click 'Password Retrieval Tool' found on the left side of the page.
3. Enter your first name or last name and either your E# (user ID) or Emich email address.
4. Click 'Search'
5. An email will be sent to your my.emich email address with your login credentials.

LOGGING INTO EMU-ONLINE

Once again, you must retrieve your EMU-Online login credentials before logging into the EMU-Online system.

1. Direct your browser to <http://emuonline.edu>
2. Enter your EMU student ID (for example, E00000000), located on the left column of the screen.
3. Enter your password, located on the left side of the screen. If you do not know your password, please follow the steps listed under 'Retrieving your password' (above).

CHANGING YOUR PASSWORD

Once you login to EMU Online you have the option of changing your password.

1. Click on the Home PSH tab, located at the top of your personal homepage
2. Click on the User Profile link, located on the left side of the screen
3. Change your password in the password textbox and confirmation textbox
4. Scroll to the bottom of the screen and click the update button to save the changes

Please note: The system can take up to 30 minutes to update itself with the new information you submit. Please do not exit and try to re-enter with the new password immediately.

ASSISTANCE

If you find that your course(s) are not listed or it appears as though you have been enrolled in the wrong course(s) please contact EMU-Online student services at 734.487.1081 or emuonline@emich.edu (M-F, 8am-5pm EST). For 24/7 technical assistance please contact the EMU-Online helpdesk at 888.538.0515 or helpdesk@emuonline.edu