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ENST 573.01: Environmental Writing

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ENST 573: Environmental Writing

M/W 11:00 - 12:20 NAC 202

Melissa Mylchreest melissa.mylchreest@umontana.edu

Office hours: Rankin 016 M/W 10:00 - 11:00 & by appt.

Required Texts:

- 1) *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*; Jack Hart (2011)
- 2) Moodle Readings ENST 573.01 - Mylchreest

Additional Texts:

- 1) *Tell it Slant: Creating, Refining, and Publishing Creative Nonfiction*; Miller and Paola (2nd ed)
- 2) *Pocket Manual of Style*; Hacker and Sommers (7th ed)

Goals & Purposes:

In this class, we're going to focus on a few key questions:

- 1) What does good nonfiction writing look and sound like? How does it work? We might say that we know it when we see it - but how?
- 2) What is environmental writing, anyway?
- 3) How can we put the answers to 1 and 2 together in order to hone our own writing?

Not surprisingly, I'm going to ask you to write a lot and to read even more. I'm also going to ask you to think critically, not just about the craft of writing, but about the topics and issues you discuss *in* your writing as well. It's my hope that through workshops and conversation, you'll challenge and inspire each other to be good readers, better writers, and engaged participants in the world of environmental concerns.

We're going to explore not only what makes an essay tick, but also how content and form can work together. Edwin Dobb, who taught a narrative nonfiction class here many years ago, put it best in his syllabus, so rather than reinvent the wheel I'll just go ahead and quote him here:

Subject, no matter how fascinating or significant, isn't in itself a story...Although our work will be anchored in fact, always in conversation with fact, the shape it assumes will be fictional, an invention. This is the creative side of creative nonfiction, whether the particular form is narrative-driven explanatory reportage, essay, memoir, profile, travelogue, or various hybrids thereof - any of which you are free to attempt, but only if the form serves the story.

Required Writing:

Essays

You'll write two major essays for this class, the first due **Wednesday, September 28**, the second due **Wednesday, October 26**. When you turn them in, please bring copies for everyone in class, plus one for me. We'll workshop two essays in each class thereafter.

A few notes:

- One essay will be shorter (5 to 10 pages) and one longer (10 to 20 pages) - it's up to you which you write first. This allows for a lot of variation in your semester page count, obviously, but different subjects and writing styles require different treatments, and I want to give you plenty of latitude. As always, aim for quality, not quantity.
- You'll choose one essay for significant revision, which will be due on or before December 12. You can revise the second one for extra credit, if you wish.
- Formatting: One-and-a-half or double-spaced, 12 point font, reasonable margins, numbered pages, word count. PLEASE proofread and edit all work before turning in.

- Additional challenge (This isn't a requirement, but it's something I encourage you to try): Make someone *other than you* the main character of one of your essays. It's fine if you're in it, but try to write something that isn't a classic first-person, personal essay.

Weekly Writing

Please bring a weekly writing-in-progress to share with the class each Wednesday, beginning the week of Labor Day, EXCEPT the weeks that your long essays are due (9/26 and 10/24). These should be 200 to 300 words at most, and can be of any subject or purpose of your choosing: Brainstorms for larger assignments, thoughts on readings in *Storycraft* or elsewhere, responses to prompts from *Telling It Slant* or elsewhere, musings, responses to ongoing issues in the world, etc. Your choice. You only need to bring one copy of these.

Reading Response

You'll write one reading response (500-750 words) to a relevant, recent essay that you've read in a magazine, newspaper, journal, etc., due **Monday, October 10**. You can find plenty of examples under our "Miscellany" folder on Moodle, or you're welcome to bring in stories from elsewhere - including radio and podcasts, which I think can often exemplify good storytelling even better than essays. I want to know about your ability to read as a writer - tell me what about the essay's voice, style, point of view, tone, relationship between form and content, etc. stands out to you. Again, you only need to bring in one copy.

Book Review

Over the course of the semester, I'd like you to read one book of your choosing - the only stipulation is that it must fall within the broad spectrum of "nonfiction that has something to do with the environment." If you're looking for suggestions, feel free to ask. It's fine if it's a book you're already reading for another class. You'll write a book review (500-750 words, **due Monday, 11/21**) - which is *not* the same as a book report. Consider the same questions as with the reading response due earlier in the semester: How do form and content influence each other? How do voice, style, scene, character, etc. play roles in the book? Highlight the major argument/theme of the book, and discuss its overall effectiveness. You'll present your response to the class, but this will not be a direct recitation of your review - I want you to be able to speak extemporaneously about the book, its subject, its form, etc. and I'm hopeful that each book will spawn class discussion.

Other Requirements:

Class Reading

Our course reading will be frontloaded within the first month of the semester; after that, we'll be focusing on reading and workshopping one another's essays. Course readings will be found in *Storycraft* and on Moodle. Please come to class prepared to discuss these readings.

Workshop Participation

Read your classmates' essays, make notes or questions (no need for line-editing, please), and write a short, *signed* response for them before class. You'll return your copy of their essay to them after their workshop session. A note on workshopping: I'm interested in thought-provoking, inquisitive discourse. I won't tolerate petty sniping, peevishness, contention for contention's sake, or anything of that ilk. We're all grownups, folks.

Outside Readings

Please attend your choice of **2** live readings during the semester, and write a one-paragraph response to each (200 - 300 words) and turn in within a week. Options include Montana Book Festival, ongoing readings at Shakespeare & Co. and Fact & Fiction, etc. Please let us know of any upcoming readings that you hear of!

Attendance

Put simply: Show up and participate. If you know you're going to miss a class, let me know in advance and it won't be a problem. If you miss class frequently and without advance notice it will negatively impact your grade.

Grading:

Since this is a graduate class, I don't give letter grades on creative work - I will, however, offer written feedback on all major writing assignments as well as in-class feedback. I base overall course grades on your participation in class, as well as the quality of your writing, revisions, and effort. If at any point you're curious about how you're doing, feel free to ask.

ENST 573 Fall 2016 Schedule (subject to change):

Week 1

- Monday (8/29): Intros, syllabus, getting started
Read: Storycraft - Intro & Story (pp 1-20)
- Wednesday (8/31): Answer questions, discuss reading, discuss essays as form
Read: Storycraft - Structure & Point of View (pp 20-61)
Moodle - Prologue & Clan of One-Breasted Women (Williams)
Safe Passage (Goldfarb)

Week 2

- Monday (9/5): NO CLASS - LABOR DAY
- Wednesday (9/7): Discuss weekly writing; Discuss readings
Read: Storycraft - Voice and Style, Character (pp 62-88)
Moodle - The Other Side of Fire (Ryan)
excerpt from Encounters with the Archdruid (McPhee)

Week 3

- Monday (9/12): Discuss readings
Read: Storycraft - Scene (pp 89-106)
Moodle - Baked Alaska (Solomon)
End Times (Lyons)
- Wednesday (9/14): Discuss weekly writing; discuss readings
Read: Storycraft - Action, Dialogue (pp 107-135)
Moodle - Mountain Lion (Childs)
Bones (Spragg)

Week 4

- Monday (9/19): Discuss readings
Read: Storycraft - Theme (pp 136-145)
Moodle - Out West (Wilkins)
On the Edge with Edward Abbey... (Bowden)
Heaven and Earth, Living Like Weasels (Dillard)
- Wednesday (9/21): Discuss weekly writing; discuss readings
Read: Storycraft - Reporting (pp 146-162)
Moodle - The Climate of Man (Kolbert)
The Crying Indian (Strand)
Can Montana's Smith River Survive...? (Solomon)

Week 5

Monday (9/26): Discuss readings

Wednesday (9/28): FIRST ESSAY DUE

Read: Storycraft - Story Narratives, Explanatory Narratives, Other
Narratives (163 - 218)

Class Essays

Reading Response essay (your choice)

Week 6

Monday (10/3) & Wednesday (10/5): NO CLASS

Week 7

Monday (10/10): READING RESPONSES DUE - discuss in class

Read: Class essays

Wednesday (10/12): Discuss weekly writing; Workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Week 8

Monday (10/17) Workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Wednesday (10/18): Discuss weekly writing; Workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Week 9

Monday (10/24): Workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Wednesday (10/26): SECOND ESSAY DUE; workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Week 10

Monday (10/31): Workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Wednesday (11/2): Discuss weekly writing; Workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Week 11

Monday (11/7) Workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Wednesday (11/9): Discuss weekly writing; Workshop essays

Read: Class essays

Week 12

Monday (11/14) Workshop essays

Wednesday (11/16) Discuss weekly writing; workshop essays

Week 13

Monday (11/21) BOOK REVIEWS DUE

Wednesday NO CLASS

Week 14

Monday (11/28) Book reviews & discussion

Wednesday (11/30) Book reviews & discussion

Week 15

Monday (12/5) Book reviews & discussion

Wednesday (12/7) Course wrap-up

Week 16

Monday (12/12) : FINAL REVISIONS DUE