

Advanced Creative Writing

Dr. Mary Leen

Summer I 2004

Rationale

This course seeks to stimulate your senses toward a practice of expressing yourself in writing. Each week we will focus on publication as a direction for your art.

Required Texts (primarily for your own inspiration)

In a Field of Words: A Creative Writing Text, Sybil Estess & Janet McCann

Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking, David Bayles & Ted Orland

Assignments

Readings from above texts as preparation for class-time experience

In-class writing exercises

Weekly journals (collected on Mondays): twenty (20) pages handwritten OR ten (10) pages typed each week (stream of consciousness is fine)

Semester Grade

Portfolio: your collection of in-class exercises and weekly journals

Schedule

Wednesday June 2	Full moon and Chuck's birthday Introduction and an in-class exercise
Thursday June 3	Some thoughts on publication: Miller Library p. 93 — 112 in Art/Fear In-class writing exercise: What is worth doing? (see page 94) Friday June 4 Writing Day
Monday June 7	Tour of University Museum In-class writing exercise: Field p. 148 - 153 Collect journal pages
Tuesday June 8	Film in Light Hall In-class writing exercise. Take notes during the film: what scares you? Lighting? Music? Movement? Afterward: what scares you the most in your life? What are some unknowns that might scare you more?

Wednesday June 9	Tour of university greenhouse In-class writing exercise: Art & Fear 1 — 8. What is art? Why do we make art?
Thursday June 10	On publication: beginning to write (with publication as a goal) Meet in Miller Library: Art & Fear 9 - 21 In-class writing exercise: visions, materials, uncertainties
Friday June 11	Writing Day
Monday June 14	Downtown Gallery Exploration: meet at Rejuvenation (before and after galleries) — Broadway, Bullard, and Yankie Streets In-class writing exercise: sestina, Field 162 - 65 Collect journal pages
Tuesday June 15	Rick Davis: Magic of Paradox In-class writing
Wednesday June 16	Primary Colors Potluck” My house
Thursday June 17	On publication: advice on the practice of writing Meet in Miller Library Bring a draft to exchange
Friday June 18	Writing Day
Monday June 21	Film In-class writing exercise
Tuesday June 22	Jack Ellis: Theater Mantra Webb Theater In-class writing exercise
Wednesday June 23	Hike Boston Hill “In-class” writing exercise
Thursday June 24	On publication: bypass agents to editors Meet in Miller Library In-class writing exercise
Friday June 25	Writing Day
Monday June 28	Desert Larks rehearsal In-class writing exercise

Collect journal pages

Tuesday June 29

Music in Media Services

In-class writing exercise

Wednesday June 30

Rock shop on Little Walnut

“In-class” writing exercise

Thursday July 1

On publication: “This isn’t toothpaste we’re selling.”

Meet in Miller Library

In-class exercise

Friday July 2

Full Moon

Share Art

ADVANCED CREATIVE WRITING

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Writing Ideas from Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*

- 1) Tell about the quality of light coming in through your window, Jump in and write. Don't worry if it is night and your curtains are closed or you would rather write about the light up north — just write. Do for ten minutes, fifteen, a half hour.
- 2) Begin with "I remember." Write lost of small memories. If you fall into one large memory, write that. Just keep going. Don't be concerned if the memory happened five seconds ago or five years ago. Everything that isn't this moment is memory coming alive again as you write. If you get stuck, just repeat the phrase "I remember" again and keep going.
- 3) Take something you feel strongly about, whether it is positive or negative, and write about it as though you love it. Go as far as you can, writing as though you love it, then flip over and write about the same things as though you hate it. Then write about it perfectly neutral.
- 4) Choose a color — for instance, pink — and take a fifteen-minute walk. On your walk notice wherever this is pink. Come back to your notebook and write for fifteen minutes.
- 5) Write in different places — for example, in a Laundromat, and pick up on the rhythm of the washing machines. Write at bus stops, in cafes. Write what is going on around you.
- 6) Give me your morning. Breakfast, waking up, walking to the bus stop. Be as specific possible. Slow down in your mind and go over the details of the morning.
- 7) Visualize a place that you really love, be there, see the details. Now write about it. It could be a corner of your bedroom, an old tree you sat under one whole summer, a table at McDonald's in your neighborhood, a place by a river. What colors are there, sounds, smells? When someone else reads it, she should know what it is like to be there. She should feel how you love it, not by your saying you love it, but by you handling of the details.
- 8) Write about "leaving." Approach it any way you want. Write about your divorce, leaving the house this morning, or a friend dying.
- 9) What is your first memory?
- 10) Who are the people you have loved?
- 11) Write about the streets of your city.
- 12) Describe a grandparent.

- 13) Write about: swimming, the stars, the most frightened you've ever been, green places, how you learned about sex, your first sexual experience, the closest you ever felt to god or nature, reading and books that have changed your life, physical endurance, a teacher you had. Don't be abstract. Write the real stuff. Be honest and detailed.
- 14) Take a poetry book. Open to any page, grab a line, write it down, and continue from there. A friend calls it "writing off the page." If you begin with a great line, it helps because you start right off from a lofty place. "I will die in Paris, on a rainy day...it will be a Thursday," by the poet Cesar Vallejo. "I will die on Monday at eleven o'clock, on Friday at three o'clock in South Dakota riding a tractor, in Brooklyn in a delicatessen," on and on. Every time you get stuck, just rewrite your first line and keep going. Rewriting the first line gives you a whole new start and a chance for another direction — "I don't want to die and I don't care if I'm in Paris or Moscow or Youngstown, Ohio."
- 15) What kind of animal are you? Do you think you are really a cow, chipmunk, fox, horse underneath?

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On Publication

Thursday, June 3

- 1) *Writer's Market* in library
- 2) Photocopy front pages (instructions) and a few pages of publishers
- 3) Choose a genre to publish:
 - a. Professional/academic article
 - b. Personal essay/memoir
 - c. Short story (fiction)
 - d. Novel (fiction)
 - e. Text book
 - f. How-to book
 - g. Poem(s) (individually)
 - h. Collection of poems
- 4) find "Maria's Notebook of Thieves" in American Poetry Review (microform?)
- 5) remember: 121 publishers said "no thanks" to Zen and the Art of *Motorcycle Maintenance*.
- 6) Start drafting a) your resume and b) a cover letter.

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On Publication: beginning to write with publication in mind

Thursday, June 10

- 1) choose a subject that excites you
- 2) flesh it out with examples, images, anecdotes, facts, and characters.
- 3) Gather the above notes/fragments, along with notes on background reading, research materials, people to interview, associations to contact, preliminary reflections and angles of approach.
- 4) Read related texts found under subject headings in Reader's Guide.
- 5) Spend some time (in class) writing-as-thinking in response to the following questions:
 - a. For whom should I write?
 - b. How should I address my reading audience?
 - c. What style will I use when I write for this audience?
 - d. What tone will I use with my chosen topic, and for my reading audience?
 - e. What do I want to say (to my vast reading audience. . . who are the people reading the top ten on the *NY Times* bestseller list. . . on which my book appears)?
 - f. How will I arrange my material for optimum effect? Sequence, structure.. linear? Chronological?

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On Publication: the *practice* of writing with publication in mind

Thursday, June 17

BRING A DRAFT TO EXCHANGE

- 1) Schedule time every day (or 3x/week) to write. . . with this attitude:
SELLING WHAT YOU WRITE IS THE ONLY WAY TO PAY RENT
(vs. writing is important but not urgent)
 - a. One three-hour morning might result in just one sentence, but if you practice this, you'll be waiting when ideas/inspiration arrive.
- 2) Be prepared to revise (and revise and revise). Hemingway rewrote the ending of Farewell to Arms 39 times before he was satisfied, before he (in his own words) "got the words right."
- 3) Get feedback from others before submitting a manuscript (ms). Use other writers or friends (whose intelligence you respect).
 - a. Pinpoint strengths and trouble spots
 - b. Show if/where it's boring
 - c. Can they (readers giving you feedback) follow what you're saying?
 - d. Are they comfortable with the language?
 - e. Which passages had to be read twice?
 - f. Which section do they remember the best?
 - g. If the ms had to be shortened, what would they delete?

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On Publication: bypass agents to editors

Thursday, June 24

- 1) Editors will be more likely to take a chance on you if they see you as a known quantity, a “pre-tested, pre-approved author.” Present yourself as established:
 - a. Use advisors or teachers at school: drop their names in cover letters and check for contact names at publishers (Lucia Getsi at *Spoon River Poetry Review*).
 - b. Approach speakers at readings: Border Book Festival in Cruces and Victoria Tester in our lit class; introduce yourself and (briefly) describe your work. A later email or letter to that published writer could produce a name (an editor), or you could get permission to use that writer’s name in a cover letter.
 - c. Go to weekend workshops: they offer sessions on marketing tips.
 - i. Anne Rice brought her first novel to such a workshop. And editor from Knopf was there, read it, took it to New York and published:

Interview with a Vampire.
 - d. Ask everyone you know for leads: your brother-in-law’s sister’s neighbor might be a production assistant at National Geographic. That name could be enough (in a cover letter) to get your work read by an editor.
 - i. Saji (editor at Los Angeles Times, and old college buddy) could give me a name of a big (newspaper) writer; with permission, that recognizable name could appear in my cover letter.
 - e. get pieces of your work published in respected periodicals. Those titles (in your cover letter) will also impress an editor.

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On Publication: “This isn’t toothpaste we’re selling.”

Thursday, July 1

- 1) book after book after book will fail to bring in a penny of profit:
 - a. published anyway because (some) editors believe (some) books are important to contemporary thought and literature.
 - b. An uneducated reading public will see each book as unique; large publishing firms promote titles that have a huge potential readership (dependent upon the education of the reading public).
 - c. “big books” (bestsellers, both fiction and non-fiction) are money makers (but take sales away from the majority of titles on a publication list).
- 2) KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE!
 - a. Identify the connections that already exist between
 - i. You and your work
 - ii. Classes/categories of readers
 - b. Keep the above in mind when writing. For instance: is your protagonist a liberated house-husband? If so, tell women’s organizations. Does your subject involve college students? Reach the campuses. Is there 1) a scene in Chicago? 2) a narrative account of abortion? 3) a proposal to abolish free public education? Find people/groups who identify with these areas of interest (who convene regularly, distribute newsletters, meet online) and spread the word about your project.
- 3) self-publishing is also an option:
 - a. easy to do with computer programs
 - b. not something I’d recommend in a grad-level writing class.

