

Fall 2012

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY  
Department of English

Professor Ethel Morgan Smith  
331 Colson Hall  
304-293-9732  
[etsmith@wvu.edu](mailto:etsmith@wvu.edu)  
(I don't use MIX)

Office Hours:  
Tue: 4-5:30 pm  
and by appointment

**English 618-Graduate Writing Nonfiction Workshop**

This course is designed for advanced creative writers, which will allow you to share your writing in a workshop setting. You will write at least **two essays**, one due at midterm and the other at the end of the term, between **10-15 pages long**. If you are working on a collection of essays, be prepared to submit your first few chapters with an outline of the rest of the work. Student manuscripts will be critiqued with the goal of isolating manuscripts' strengths and weaknesses, and with an eye toward publication.

The course will explore the genre of creative nonfiction with emphasis on identity. But most important we will write and talk. Probably than any other form of literary discourse, from the slave narratives to memoirs, this genre of writing has been chosen by writers to articulate ideals of selfhood, which is very important to a sense of identity, both individual and communal. In order to understand how nonfiction is put together—how the raw material of inspiration is transmuted into art. For example, we will see development of style and structure through the essays of James Baldwin, Paul Lisicky, Maya Lin, Alice Walker, and others. Our own writing will take form and shape as we write and discover.

Further, this course will offer students an opportunity to develop and build on skills you've already acquired. Writing well, as you know, is difficult and demanding. It must be given your full attention. I hope this course will provide ideas to help you further your dream of becoming a successful writer. We all have stories to tell. The instinct of telling stories is an intrinsic characteristic for human beings. It is also a way to organize our lives, give shape to our days or create containers for our experiences. Our ambition will be to help the author see those works through to fruition.

Attendance is crucial in order to build workshop camaraderie and skills in editing/critiquing. Attendance is further crucial in that careful reading of your peers' work and thought critique of their manuscripts is the core of the course. There is also a lot of reading that will, of course, enhance your life and enrich your writing. You will be expected to keep an informal reading response journal on all of your reading.

**It is very important to me that you have time for your own writing and for every class there are stories to critique** Professional manuscript set-up, ready to go out into

the world if need be—that includes word count and running head with pagination. This will be a traditional workshop with manuscripts written on and signed so the writer can contact you later for further discussion if necessary. I don't need to see these since I'll see them during your final conference at the end of the semester. However, if you are receiving manuscripts back without cogent comments, please let me know. Part of the workshop experience is to be a good reader/editor. You might prefer to type your comments separately for the workshopped story. The writer of the story remains respectfully mute, and can respond at the end of the discussion. Try to pinpoint one good element about the work and perhaps start with this and then move on. Please do not flinch from saying the hard thing that needs to be said, but try always to give the criticism with a suggestion for how it can be improved. We should be beyond the point where I have to call on people to give comments. Every workshop dynamic is different. I'm sure this is going to be a great class!

You will also be expected to attend all of the department's literary events, listed below. I consider this to be a very important aspect of the course and your experience as a graduate student. After each reading you're expected to write a **one-two page response** to the reading. This is due the next time class meets after the reading.

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Sept 13<sup>th</sup></b> | <b>Jonathan Coleman Reading-Gold Ballroom-7:30 pm</b>                               |
| <b>Oct 3<sup>rd</sup></b>   | <b>Katy Ryan Reading-130 Colson Hall-7:30 pm</b>                                    |
| <b>Oct 17<sup>th</sup></b>  | <b>Michael Blumenthal &amp; Bruce Bond Reading<br/>Robinson Reading Room-7:30pm</b> |
| <b>Oct 29<sup>th</sup></b>  | <b>Jaimy Gordon-Strum-Writer-in-Residence<br/>Robinson Reading Room-7:30 pm</b>     |
| <b>Nov 7<sup>th</sup></b>   | <b>Ethel Morgan Smith Reading-Gold Ballroom-7:30 pm</b>                             |

Grades depend on the writing and respect that you show to the art form; and your ability to follow other assignments. Judgment is necessarily subjective but many things determine a final grade: attendance, **(this is a must)**. Since we only meet once weekly if you miss twice, you're heading for a drop in your grade. Getting work read and being prepared to discuss the stories both the handouts and your peers are your main jobs. The careful reading you give to your colleagues' work will not only develop your critical skills but they will strengthen your own writing.

### **Literary Works for Discussion**

“The Fire This Time: Letter to the Bishop,” by James Baldwin, “Between Art and Architecture,” by Maya Lin, “New World” by Paul Lisicky, “In Search of Our Mothers Gardens,” by Alice Walker

**Secondary Texts: It is highly recommended by the professor that students have some experience with the following texts:**

*The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard

*The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin

*Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe

*Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

*Lost in the City* (a collection of short fiction) by Edward P. Jones

*Annie John* by Jamaica Kincaid

*Elbow Room* (a Pulitzer-prize collection of short stories) by James Alan McPherson

*House* by Toni Morrison

*The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson

*Black Boy/Native Son* by Richard Wright

*Birth of a Nation* (film)

*Carmen Jones* (film)

**Class Schedule: (subject to change)**

Week of

**Aug 23<sup>rd</sup>** Introduction to goals and expectation for the course. *The Price of the Ticket* (film-James Baldwin) Assignment: "The Fire This Time: Letter to the Bishop."

**Aug 30<sup>th</sup>** Assignment: Short Bio- 500 words- Baldwin's "Autobiographical Notes" (guide)

**Sept 3<sup>rd</sup>** **Labor Day Recess**

**Sept 6<sup>th</sup>** Assignment due: one-two page analysis: "The New World"

**Sept 13<sup>th</sup> Jonathan Coleman Reading-Gold Ballroom-7:30 pm**

**Sept 13<sup>th</sup> Workshopping of Stories/Essays**

**Sept 17<sup>th</sup> Rosh Hashanah (Day of Special Concern)**

**Sept 17<sup>th</sup> Student Submissions for Strum Writer-in-Residence Deadline**

**Sept 26<sup>th</sup> Yom Kippur (Day of Special Concern)**

**Sept 27<sup>th</sup> Reading Day: Professor Smith at ASHLHA Conference**

**Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> Katy Ryan Reading-130 Colson Hall-7:30 pm**

**Oct 3<sup>rd</sup> Semi-Annual Pizza Party-130 Colson Hall-11:30-1:30 pm**

**Oct 4<sup>th</sup> Continue Workshopping**

**Oct 11<sup>th</sup> Midterm-Individual Conferences with Professor**

**Oct 17<sup>th</sup> Michael Blumenthal & Bruce Bond Reading-Robinson Reading Room-7:30 pm**

**Oct 25<sup>th</sup> “Between Art and Architecture” and “In Search of Our Mothers Gardens”**

**Oct 26<sup>th</sup> Last Day to Drop a Class**

**Oct 26<sup>th</sup> Eid-al-Adha (Day of Special Concern)**

**Oct 29<sup>th</sup> Jaimy Gordon Reading-Robinson Reading Room-7:30 pm**

**Nov 6<sup>th</sup> Election Day! No Class**

**Nov 7<sup>th</sup> Ethel Morgan Smith Reading**

**Nov 8<sup>th</sup> Continue Workshopping**

**Nov 12<sup>th</sup> Veteran’s Day**

**Nov 12<sup>th</sup> Birth of Baha’u’llah (Day of Special Concern)**

**Nov 18-25<sup>th</sup> Thanksgiving Recess**

**Nov 29<sup>th</sup> PWE Post Display-130 Colson Hall-10:00 am-5:00 pm**

**Dec 6<sup>th</sup>                      Last Day to Withdraw from University**

**Dec 7<sup>th</sup>                      Last Day of Class**

**Dec 10-14<sup>th</sup>              Individual Conferences**

### **HONOR CODE**

Any work that you submit must be your own. In addition, any words, ideas, or data you borrow from another source (individual, website, and published text) must be properly documented. It is your responsibility to learn the rules and conventions of citing sources in your academic work. If you have questions about academic citation, consult with me during office hours or raise the issue in class. Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses. Clear cases will result in an **F** for the course and other academic sanctions. Please see the WVU Undergraduate Catalog section on Academic Integrity/Dishonesty for a full explanations and procedures.

### **LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

WVU is committed to social justice. I support that commitment and will work to create a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. I welcome suggestions for furthering such an environment. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services-304-293.6700.