

AP/EN3179 3.0: Art of the Personal Essay

Term: S2, 2019

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12-3pm

Location: Founders College (FC) 105, Keele Campus

Course Director: Dr. Lauren Fournier

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This course examines the history, development, and craft of the personal essay. Unlike the formal essay which tends to eschew the first-person perspective and insist upon an apparent detachment and attempt at objectivity, the personal essay is, well, *personal*. It is conversational, intimate, reflective, and subjective. It is well-suited to writing in the age of social media. And, as a personal mode disseminated in public, it is often tied to issues around disclosure and exposure of realities about oneself and others. In this course, we will explore the relationship between blogging, and even extended posts on Facebook and Twitter, and the personal essay alongside related genres like creative nonfiction, memoir and life-writing, and autofiction. In so doing, we will look at the history of this form and follow its trajectory from the work of Montaigne to [Manrepeller](#). We'll consider the present context of the personal essay as a form, in light of what has been called the rise of a "First Person Industrial Complex" in academia and popular culture, and the ways that the personal essay is tied to constructions of the self both online and IRL.

Delivery Format: Seminar

Category: D (Popular Genres)

Historical Requirement: N/A

Requirements:

Blog Posts (4 posts, 750-1250 words each) – 40%

Term Essay (2000-2500 words, 6-7 pages double-spaced) – 25%

Revised Term Essay (integrating feedback from instructor) – 10%

Final Exam (In-class) -15%

Participation - 10%

Course Readings:

- Dillion, Brian, *Essayism* (excerpts)
- Roderique, Hadiya, "[Black on Bay Street](#)"
- Montaigne, "[That Our Affections Carry Themselves Beyond Us](#)" and "[Of Liars](#)"

- Orwell, George, "[Shooting an Elephant](#)"
- Didion, Joan, "[On Self-Respect](#)"
- Gay, Roxane, "[Not Here To Make Friends](#)"
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi, "[I'm Not Black, I'm Kanye](#)"
- Coates, Ta-Nehisi, "[Why I'm Writing Captain America: and why it scares the hell out of me.](#)"
- Als, Hilton, "[Revealing and Obscuring Myself on the Streets of New York.](#)"
- Benaway, Gwen, "[Trans Girl in Love](#)"
- Heti, Sheila, "[Why Go Out](#)"
- Hedva, Johanna, "[Sick Woman Theory](#)"
- Hodson, Chelsea, "[I Could Live Without Speaking \(After Autoportrait by Edouard Leve\).](#)"
- Didion, Joan, "[After Life](#)"

All readings required for this course will be available for free access online. Each week there will be one, and sometimes two, primary texts that students are required to have read before class. Everything we are reading in this course are essays, and they are typically quite short. Occasionally, there will be recommended readings that the instructor will reference during lectures: those readings are not required, but are rather recommended if you have the time and interest. When it comes to the required readings, students are expected to come to class ready to actively discuss the course readings together: if you are someone who likes to take notes, or print out the text and highlight it, etc., I encourage you to do whatever will help you in engaging deeply with the texts that we are taking up together.

Open To: Year 3 or 4

Assignments

Blog Posts (4 posts, 750-1250 words each) – 40% (10% per post)

Due date: 12 prompts will be distributed during the first week of class, and you will have to choose 4 prompts to respond to. The due dates of the blog posts are as follows:

- **Wednesday, July 3 (by 5pm, EST)**
- **Wednesday, July 10 (by 5pm, EST)**
- **Friday, July 12 (by 5pm, EST)**
- **Friday, July 19 (by 5pm, EST)**

Term Essay (2000-2500 words, 6-7 pages double-spaced) – 25%

Due: Sunday, July 14 (by midnight, EST)

- Essays returned to students, with feedback, in-class on Thursday, July 18

Revised Term Essay (integrating feedback from instructor) – 10%

Due: Wednesday, July 24 (by 9am EST)

Final Exam (In-class)– 15%

Written in-class on **Tuesday, July 23, from 12-3pm** (regular class time).

The final exam will consist of short-form questions (requiring a paragraph response) and one short essay. You will have the full three hour class to write the exam.

Participation - 10%

Important Dates for S2 Term

June 21: Last date to add a course without permission of instructor

June 28: Last date to add a course with permission of instructor

July 15: Last date to drop a course without receiving a grade

July 16-29: Course withdrawal period (withdraw from course and receive a “W”)

Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

Week 1, Day 1 (June 18): Introduction to the Class

Week 1, Day 2 (June 20): Introducing Key Concepts

- Roderique, Hadiya, “[Black on Bay Street](#)” (2017)

Week 2: Confessional Writing: Personal, Philosophical, and Political

NOTE: Dr. Fournier is out of town this week, so lectures will be delivered via audio recording on Moodle or via email. Students will not be required to come to campus this week, but will be required to listen to lectures and respond via a participatory in-class writing exercise.

Week 2, Day 3 (June 25) - Confessional Writing and/as Philosophy and Political Theory

- Montaigne, “[That Our Affections Carry Themselves Beyond Us](#)”

- Orwell, George, “[Shooting an Elephant](#)” (1936)

- For reference: <https://www.manrepeller.com/2019/06/writing-life-advice.html>

- For reference: Dillon, Brian, excerpt from *Essayism*

Week 2, Day 4 (June 27)

- Didion, Joan, “[On Self-Respect](#)” (1961)

- Didion, Joan, “[After Life](#)” (2005)

Week 3: After Confession or “Post-Confession”: Contemporary Essayistic Writing

Week 3, Day 5 (July 2) - Post-Confession (Looking back, today; recent essayistic practices)

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi, “[I’m Not Black, I’m Kanye](#)”

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi, “[Why I’m Writing Captain America: and why it scares the hell out of me.](#)”

Week 3, Day 6 (July 4) - Post-Confession (Looking back, today; recent essayistic practices)

- Primary text: Als, Hilton, "[Revealing and Obscuring Myself on the Streets of New York](#)." (2018, *New Yorker*)
- Optional reading, which will be referenced in lecture: an interview with Hilton Als in *The Guardian* (2018): "[I had this terrible need to confess, and I still do it. It's a bid to be loved.](#)"

Week 4: Exposure and Disclosure, Facticity and Fictionalization

Week 4, Day 7 (July 9): Confessional Practices, Exposure, and Disclosure

- Benaway, Gwen, "[Trans Girl in Love](#)"
- Cheng Thom, Kai, "[8 Steps Toward Building Indispensability \(Instead of Disposability\) Culture](#)"

Optional reading, which will be referenced in lecture:

- Cheng Thom, Kai, "[4 Ways That Call-Out Culture Harms Trans Women \(And, Therefore, All of Us\)](#)"
- simpson, jaye, "[A Conversation I Can't Have Yet: Why I Will Not Name My Indigenous Abusers](#)"

Week 4, Day 8 (July 11) - The Question of Autofiction - Facticity and Fictionalization

- Gay, Roxane "[Not Here To Make Friends](#)"
- Heti, Sheila, "[Why Go Out](#)"

Week 5: Experimental Forms: Pushing the Boundaries of the "Personal Essay"

Week 5, Day 9 (July 16) - Memes, Manifestoes, and Autoportraits

- Hedva, Johanna, "[Sick Woman Theory](#)" (2015)
- Hodson, Chelsea, "[I Could Live Without Speaking \(After Autoportrait by Edouard Leve\)](#)." (*Hazlitt*, 2019)

Week 5, Day 10 (July 18) - Autofiction, Photographic Essays, and Image-Text

- We will meet as a class at the Ryerson Image Centre to do a tour of the Scotiabank Photography Award: Moyra Davey exhibition. Meet at the Balzac's next to the RIC at 12pm.

Week 6: Concluding Reflections: On Writing Personally in Public

Week 6, Day 11 (July 23) - In-Class Test

- You will have all three hours to write the test, though it should only take around two hours.

Week 6, Day 12: July 25 - Last Class

- We will wrap up the course, and have a concluding discussion. Final exams will be returned to students, along with any remaining course assignments (the revised essay).