Gallatin School, New York University
First Year Writing Seminar: Contemplation and Culture (FIRST-UG 385), Fall 2012
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11 AM-12:20 PM, Tisch LC13 (40 West 4th Street)
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A clever man guards his attention as his most precious possession. --The Dhammapada

Attention, taken to the highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. --Simone Weil

A student said to Master Ichu, "Please write for me something of great wisdom." Master Ichu picked up his brush and wrote one word: "Attention." The student said, "Is that all?" The master wrote, "Attention. Attention." The student became irritable. "That doesn't seem profound or subtle to me." In response, Master Ichu wrote simply, "Attention. Attention. Attention." In frustration, the student demanded, "What does this word 'attention' mean?" Master Ichu replied, "Attention means attention." --Dialogues of the Zen Masters

There is a significant body of cultural work that seeks to describe the experience or results of contemplation, offer instruction in its various methods, or to induce or encourage a contemplative state. In this course, we will examine works from a range of religious, philosophical, and aesthetic traditions which deal with some aspect of contemplative experience (including meditation, prayer, mysticism, and varieties of attention). In addition, the course will provide ample opportunity to practice elemental writerly and critical skills: writing in whole structures, writing prolifically, writing abstractly and concretely, rewriting, distinguishing observation from inference. Our final essay will include some practice in research.

Course Requirements:

- **Attendance (worth two letter grades).** You'll receive a separate grade for this: 0-1 unexcused absence=A; 2 absences=B; 3 absences=C; 4 absences=D; 5 or more absences=F.
- **Written observations (worth three letter grades).** About a page on assigned reading, due in hard copy every class meeting.
- **Three short essays (worth one letter grade each) and one longer essay (worth two letter grades).** To prepare for these essays, we'll do some first-person writing to explore a variety of literary shapes, shapes which we'll also encounter in our readings. You'll submit a first draft of each essay in hard copy in class on the due date; I'll provide written observations; you'll submit a final draft in hard copy on the due date for a grade. The grade will reflect not only the quality of the essay but your timely submission of all drafts and preparatory writing. Late essays will be progressively downgraded.

Blackboard:
We have a Blackboard course site where you'll find:

- **Announcements**, including the current reading and writing assignments. Always check the Announcements page well in advance of each class meeting to make sure you know what the
current assignment is. Announcements will also be sent to you NYU email address, so please be sure you have set your Blackboard settings to receive emails.

- **Course Documents:** All reading assignments will be found in "Course Documents." It's your job to print out the day's reading assignment and bring a hard copy to class. Here's how to get access to the readings that are in our Coursepack:

  - Go to the NYU Bookstore web site: [http://www.bookstores.nyu.edu](http://www.bookstores.nyu.edu)
  - Click on the "Textbook Inquiry and Ordering" link
  - In the "Search by ISBN" option, enter 978200006221B
  - Proceed to Checkout and complete your order.
  - After completing your order you will receive an email with your access code and instructions regarding accessing the Digital Coursepack.

**A Few More Things to Keep in Mind:**

- **In-class writing:** We’ll be doing a lot of it, and I’ll ask you to do this the old-fashioned way: with paper and pen. Why? Because attention is not only one of the key subject we’ll be reading about (as an essential element of contemplative practice); it’s also one of the key skills we’ll be practicing as readers and writers. I’ve observed that the presence of laptops, etc. tends to interfere with the practice of this skill. So please leave laptops, tablets, and cell phones in their cases during class meetings.

- **Saving copies of your work:** Please always keep a back-up copy of everything you write for the class.

- **E-mail:** Sometimes I’ll need to contact you by e-mail. If you tend to use an e-mail address other than your NYU address, please arrange to have any mail sent to your NYU e-mail address automatically forwarded to your non-NYU address.

- **Electronic noise:** Please check to be sure your cell phone and other electronic noisemakers are turned off before coming to class. If you forget, and your cell phone rings in class (it happens to the best of us), please do not answer the phone! Just turn it off as unobtrusively and quickly as you can. We’ll all do our best to act as if we never heard it ring.

- **Arriving:** We’ll start class right on time. If for some extraordinary reason you arrive late, please quietly look in at the door to check to see if a fellow student is reading something out loud. If she/he is reading out loud, please wait until she/he is finished, then come in quietly.

**Academic Integrity:** Here is the Gallatin School's official statement on academic integrity:
"As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html) for a full description of the academic integrity policy."

**Reading and Assignment Schedule**
This may be subject to some change as we move through the semester, so please always check our Blackboard Announcements page for current assignments.
**Part 1: Fables, Aphorisms, Parables**

Tuesday, Sept. 4: Name game. Fable 1. Prolific writing. HW: Fable 2.


Tuesday, Sept. 11: Hear observations on Blake and *Dhammapada*. HW: Read and make written observations on Rumi; "Do you think I know"; "Mouse and Frog"; "Moses and the Shepherd"; "Elephant in the Dark"


Tuesday, Sept. 18: Hear observations on *Sayings* and *Gateless Gate*. HW: Eihei Dogen, “Actualizing the Fundamental Point” (Genjo Koan), "Birth and Death" (Shoji), and Simone Weil, "Attention and Will."


**Part 2: Two Ways: Cataphasis and Apophasis**

Tuesday, Sept. 25: Hear "Once/Now" core-essay. Submit. HW: Write a second "Once/Now" core-essay, with a new first paragraph that expands the seed sentence.

Thursday, Sept. 27: Hear one or two "Once/Now" (2) core-essays + intro. Observe and write conclusions. Submit. Write seed sentences for Essay 2, on any two texts we've read so far. HW: Write a first draft of Essay 2.


Tuesday, Oct. 9: Hear observations on Hopkins. HW: Read Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”; choose any two sections for written observation.

Thursday, Oct. 11: Hear observations on Whitman. HW: Read Wilderness poems from Ancient China: Meng Hao-Jan, “Sent to Ch’ao, the Palace Reviser” Li Po, “Reverence Pavilion Moutain, Sitting Alone” Tu Fu, “Inscribed on the Wall at Chang’s Recluse Home,” “In Reply to a Letter from Meng,” “Facing Night,” “Night (2)”
Han Shan (Cold Mountain) poems
Choose four poems for written observation.

Tuesday, Oct. 16: No class meeting


Tuesday, Oct. 23: Hear observations. Read Meister Eckhart, Sermons 52 and 101

Thursday, Oct 25: Hear observations on Eckhart. HW: Write observations on Heart Sutra, and selections from Nagarjuna, "Verses from the Center"


Part 3: How to Get (T)here from Here: Instruction and Intinerary


Tuesday, Nov. 13: Hear observations on readings. HW: Read and write observations on Rumi, "The Sunrise Ruby", "Today, like every other day"; Eihei Dogen, “Rules for Zazen”

Part 4: Argument, Assessment, Research

Thursday, Nov. 15: Write seed-sentences: People say.... HW: Argument core + new first paragraph.

Tuesday, Nov. 20: Hear Argument. Write conclusions. Seed-sentences: Two Voices. HW: Write "Two Voices" core + intro

Thursday, Nov. 22: No class (Thanksgiving)

Tuesday, Nov. 27: Hear "Two Voices." Write conclusions. Submit HW: Choose one artist/author/work we’ve observed this semester. Reread what we've read and your own journal entries about the works we’ve observed. Write a list of at least 10 questions you have about this author's or artist's work, life, historical context, contemplative methods, etc. Choose the most interesting question (or set of related questions). Write the answer to this question: what kind of sources might help me answer this question?
Thursday, Nov. 29: Bobst Library orientation. HW: Find four sources related to your research questions.

Tuesday, Dec. 4: Hear research questions and ideas about source material in class. HW: Read the sources and gather quotations that pertain to your research question. Write a short paragraph describing each source: what is it, and why is it useful for your essay?

Thursday, Dec. 6: Hear annotated reports on sources. Citing sources and compiling a list of Works Cited. Seed sentences for final essay. HW: Write a draft of an essay, using source material as well as your own observations.

Tuesday, Dec. 11: Hear first draft of Essay 4. Submit