Writing the Present Day Life

Gallatin School of Individualized Study, NYU
Spring 2014
601 Washington Place
IDSEM-UG1722

Professor Judith Greenberg
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Wednesdays, 6:20-9 pm
office hours: 1-2:30 Thursday
509 Washington Place

Course Description:

This course examines the impact of the digital age on questions of writing, identity construction, and love. Our entry into the digital age has been compared to the cultural shift that occurred when the Gutenberg Bible enabled the wide distribution of the written word. What is the relationship between the “spirit of an age” or Zeitgeist and its narratives and texts? For example, at the end of Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando* (1928), her time-traveling and sex-changing Elizabethan heroine Orlando enters “the present day.” By the novel’s end, Orlando has grown into a young woman in “present day” London. Who might Orlando be today? Reading a range of texts including, Duras’ *The Lover*, Janet Malcom’s, *The Silent Woman*, Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home*, Cindy Sherman’s photographs and Chaplin’s film *Modern Times*, we explore identity and writing both in previous literary periods and in our Digital Age. We conclude with students writing their own last chapter of *Orlando*, situated in present day New York.

Course Learning Goals:

- Examine how culture, history and material conditions impact writing
- Think critically about gender construction, identity, and writing
- Strengthen analytic and creative writing skills
- Deepen knowledge of Virginia Woolf’s work, especially *Orlando*
- Develop awareness about the influences of the Digital Age upon our writing & thinking

Required Texts:

- Virginia Woolf:
  - *Orlando*
  - *A Room of One’s Own*
- Tom Stoppard, *Arcadia*
- Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life*
- Janet Malcom, *The Silent Woman*
- Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*
- Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*
- Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What The Internet is Doing to Our Brains*
- Sarah Ruhl, *Chekov’s Three Sisters and Woolf’s Orlando*
- Theoretical readings will handed out in class or posted online
- 1992 Film *Orlando: A Biography* (directed by Sally Potter)
Required Assignments:
- Spirit of the Age paper, 3-4 pages, due Feb 12
- Midterm paper, 5-7 pages, due March 23
- Blog, 500 words, due April 23
- Final (Orlando, Chapter 6); due May 7; extensions by permission only

Other Course Requirements:
Students are expected to:
- Attend every class
  - More than one unexcused absence will result in a lowered grade
- Arrive on time, stay for the entire class, or speak with the professor if necessary to arrive late or leave early
- Turn in papers on time (grades are lowered a half grade for every day late).
- If you need an extension, ask for permission before the due date.
- Read and think critically about all assigned books and articles
- Participate actively in discussion (and focus discussion on the class reading)
- Behave respectfully to other students and the professor
  - This includes no cell phones or texting in class – violators will be asked to leave class for the day, will be counted as absent, and must set up a meeting with the professor to discuss.

Grading

Final grade will be determined by calculating all four written assignments. While it is expected that all students will contribute regularly and thoughtfully to class discussion, a grade may be improved based on excellent participation or lowered based on a lack of participation (silence, leaving class, talking to another student on the side, or other disrespectful behavior).

Academic Integrity & Plagiarism:
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 (http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html)
**Wednesday, January 29:** Introduction
Read & Discuss “Mr. Bennett & Mrs. Brown,” “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”
In-class writing exercise: My Present Day Self

**February 5:** read *Orlando*

**12:** Elizabethan & Jacobean Years
Reread Chapters 1 & 2; Read poetry excerpts (handout)
*3-4 page essay due: “How does the ‘spirit of the age’ affect Orlando?”*

**19:** Romantics
Reread Chapter 3, Read Stoppard’s *Arcadia*

**26:** Victorians & Gender
Reread Chapter 4, Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* & Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (handout)

**March 5:** Modern Times

**12:** Material Conditions & Writing
Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*; *Paper due: 5-7 pages*

**SPRING BREAK**

**26:** How to Write a Life?
Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions*, Peter Brooks, *Enigmas of Identity*, (handout)

**April 2:** Biography/Autobiography
Janet Malcom, *The Silent Woman*

**9:** Photography & Life “Writing”
Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, Cindy Sherman, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, (handout)

**16:** The Digital Mind
Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What The Internet is Doing to Our Brains*; Umberto Eco & Jean-Claude Carrière, *This is Not the End of the Book* (excerpts, handout)

**23:** Life Stories; New Forms
Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home*; *Blog due*

**30:** Rewriting Orlando

**May 7:** Chapter 7: Orlando, 2014
*Final chapter due;* Readings, performances, review