

Proposal: English 308: "Perception . . . and Response"

Perhaps the subtitle of the course should be, Writing as a Mode of Consciousness. What I intend to focus on in this variant is the intensely-careful reading and writing of "high-density" prose, a variety of prose which I will avoid defining for the moment but will gesture at by referring to the list of texts, below. I mean that sort of prose which is particularly reliant upon sensory perception of the external world for its substance, less so at any rate than on ideas or issues or arguments or persuasion. Probably our archetype for this mode is Thoreau, and Annie Dillard follows directly in his wake with her deep seeing, but there are other forms as well, and I intend to show throughout the semester that in fact Nature is not an indispensable subject-matter for the process of Awareness (both sensory and verbal) to operate. Lewis Thomas and others are illustrative: any profession, any set of surroundings will do. Of course, I am aware that Freshmen at U.T. are not Thoreaus by any stretch of the imagination, but then again I also believe that the texts themselves are arresting and compelling, and also that Imitation is a useful early form of learning. So, I propose to focus, relentlessly, on the texts, and on learning to do that variety of most-attentive Reading which the texts require, as well as that most-attentive Awareness of the world that the texts contain.

Readings: at the very least (for now),
James Agee, A Death in the Family
-----, Let Us Now Praise Famous Men
Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek
Henry David Thoreau, Walden
Ranier Maria Rilke, The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge
Lewis Thomas, The Lives of a Cell.

Probably (?) the Norton Reader, Fourth Edition Longer.

Possibly also: Richard Selzer, Mortal Lessons (on surgery)
Janet Burroway, Raw Silk
Michael Herr, Dispatches (Vietnam).

Ceratinly a grammar text for reference--probably the Harbrace.
And perhaps also Donald Stewart's The Authentic Voice-- a short text on finding one's voice and real subjects in writing.

Obviously this list is too long; probably I should make some of them optional, dependent on student interests. Authenticity is an absolute desideratum in this course.

Writing: A required journal, with extensive writing every week required but not graded. I hope to make a real commitment to Quality rather than Quantity, but I understand that Quantity is the first step to Quality for uneasy writers. Probably I will also ask for four to six papers over the term, to be turned in whenever the student decides he is ready; I will not have deadlines, contrary to my usual practice. Correspondingly, I will ask the students to write out a contract for the course and grade

themselves. That, too, is contrary to my normal scheme of things, but it seems to me consistent with the aims of this sort of course. I will also expect almost perfect attendance, once again surprising myself.

Objectives: Awareness, Reflectiveness, high-density Writing. We probably don't need too many Thoreaus around at any given time, but we could stand as much reflectiveness as we can get. I will encourage students to be both introspective and externally-perceptive, and by removing all paper deadlines I hope to encourage them to speak (turn in a paper) only when they have something substantial to say. Insincere writing--indeed, "themes"-- we can do without. I will have to assume, regardless of whether it is true or not, that freshmen in fact have things they need to talk about, and are aware of; I will also assume-- and tell them, repeatedly-- that compression is a considerable virtue.

I am herewith requesting two sections of this variant for Spring 1979 semester from the FEPC.

1/30/78 Jerry Brogan

1. Uneasy with terms. & how writing will be generated from the texts.
Authenticity
Awareness
High-density
2. Worried about the contract grade; grade inflation: emphasizes Quality, but contract grade is based on quantity.
3. Student may get into problem.
4. Recommend,
 1. Tentative syllabus.
 2. More careful def. of terms.
 3. Suggest what type of writing student will do.