

## LHSP 130: Writing / Responding: Art and the Ekphrastic Impulse

English 130.002  
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MW 10:30-12

Charlotte Boulay  
cboulay@umich.edu  
office: 1132 SWC  
office hours: W 12-2  
and by appointment

This creative nonfiction course asks you to examine the possibilities of written response to the visual.

One interesting way of thinking about art and writing comes from a web site we will be working with this semester called *Learning to Love You More* by the artists Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher. They say,

The best art and writing is almost like an assignment; it is so vibrant that you feel compelled to make something in response. Suddenly it is clear what you have to do. For a brief moment it seems wonderfully easy to live and love and create breathtaking things. In this section we have archived some of the work that has commanded us in this way. In a sense, these are assignments -- in the same way that the ocean gives the assignment of breathing deeply, and kissing instructs us to stop thinking.

Lawrence Weschler, author of one of your books for this class, *Everything That Rises: A Book of Convergences*, asks of writing,

What might it mean to address readers and listeners as fellow citizens, subject to raptures of marvel, rather than just as Pavlovian consumers (abject objects of the jolt-salivate-spend technology that has so come to dominate the preponderance of our media environment).

This semester we will try to experience art and writing that are so interesting that they call on us to make a response. Then we will write about why (or why not) those pieces are the way they are and we'll create art of our own. This may be visual, or it may take another medium.

“Ekphrastic” is simply a form of the word “ekphrasis,” which means: “a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art”—Merriam Webster online.

Our semester will end with a presentation of our art and writing. We'll invite the rest of LHSP and have an opening party / performance.

### what materials do I need?

Required texts, available at Shaman Drum:

*Everything That Rises: A Book of Convergences*, by Lawrence Weschler  
*Still Life with Oysters and Lemon*, by Mark Doty

*The God of Small Things*, by Arundhati Roy

Coursepack available at Dollar Bill, 611 Church Street

A strong writer needs an expansive, vivid, interesting vocabulary. To this end, you should have access to both a thesaurus and a dictionary. If you don't know the meaning of a word in a piece of writing, look it up! There are several thesauruses and dictionaries available online at lib.umich.edu. If you want to purchase a dictionary, I like *The American Heritage College Dictionary* and the *Roget's Thesaurus*; the latter is available in paperback.

### course policies

My course policies are meant to be both practical and uncomplicated. Please use these course policies as a reference, but if you have any questions above and beyond them, please just ASK ME. You can always come to my office hours or send me an email.

- **attendance:** Come to class. You are allowed two unexcused absences this semester. Any additional absences will result in a deduction from your final grade. I will generally excuse absences for illness with a doctor's note, or for legitimate family emergencies. Please talk to me as soon as possible if you're having exceptional problems coming to class.

Class begins at 10:40 sharp, meaning you should be unpacked and ready to go by that time. You're welcome to bring your morning beverage to class, but please don't bring your breakfast. Wear appropriate apparel, i.e. not pajamas.

Be on time. Coming to class late is disrespectful and disruptive. I treat two late entrances as one absence. As a bonus, for perfect attendance I will add a point to your final grade. Who knows, this could be the difference between a B and a B+.

If you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out what you have missed by contacting a **classmate** for notes or by visiting me during office hours. If you miss a class you are still responsible for getting me that day's work on time.

- **email:** I check email between 9AM and 6PM. I do my best to get back to you the same day. I'm more than happy to answer questions via email. If it's urgent, though, you're probably better off contacting a classmate.

I consider email an important form of writing. For this reason, although your emails to me can certainly be informal, they should use sentences, not text-message-speak.

I do not accept work over email, ever. This means that if you're handing in a paper late, or because you can't make it to class, you need to get me a paper copy. Use my mailbox in Sweetland, or the drop box outside the Sweetland Writing Center on the first floor of Angell Hall.

- **due dates:** Your work is due at the beginning of class, regardless of back-ups in the fishbowl or broken printer crises. It is especially important that you turn in your drafts for workshop

on time, since your tardiness affects your peers. A late rough draft will result in a reduction of 1/3 of a letter grade from the final paper. For your final papers, I will not accept late work unless there is a special circumstance that you and I have discussed in advance.

- **use technology:** All your work for this class should be typed and double-spaced. Use Times New Roman font with regular-sized margins. You know what I'm talking about, right? No Courier New, no crazy formatting. No title page is necessary. Use page numbers. Use staples. Title your essay and put your name, my name and the date on it.

### **grading**

As a creative writer, I am aware that assigning grades to creative work is difficult. I have to grade you, however, and I have high standards. I will judge your work in this class on its originality, intellectual rigor and precision, the ways it incorporates the ideas and techniques we've discussed, fulfillment of the assignment's requirements, and effort.

Failure to proofread your work or to format it correctly and professionally will affect your grade.

### **grade breakdown**

It's really very simple.

- essay #1 = 10%; essays #2, 3, & 4 = 20 % each—your grade for essay #4 includes your visual component
- participation=30%, 10% written peer critiques, 15% in-class participation, 5% Weschler presentation

You must exceed expectations in all areas to earn an "A" in this course. I will discuss grades with you in my office hours. I will not discuss grades over email.

**plagiarism:** is passing off someone else's work as your own. My attitude about this is very simple: do not plagiarize anything, ever. We'll talk in class about the difference between paying homage to a favorite writer and ripping off their ideas and sentences. The first is interesting; the second illegal. If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism, talk to me. Also please be sure to read the University's official policy on plagiarism available on the English Department Web site at [www.lsa.umich.edu/english/undergraduate/plagNote.asp](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/undergraduate/plagNote.asp). I will not tolerate plagiarism. It could result in your failing this course and, potentially, your expulsion from the University of Michigan.

Some examples of plagiarism include:

- handing in a paper written (even partially) by someone else as your own work
- turning in the same paper for two different classes
- copying and pasting sentences from a website, even if you change some words
- not *citing* a source—that is, claiming someone else's ideas, sentences or words (even only a few words!) as your own, even accidentally

- changing a quotation (paraphrasing) without acknowledging the source or by using too much of the source's original language

### **sweetland writing center**

is located on the first floor of Angell Hall. My office is in Sweetland because I am also a writing tutor there. I encourage you to come to Sweetland and make appointments with tutors other than myself. In fact, you can't make an "official" appointment to see me there—but you can always come by during my office hours. It's great to get an extra pair of eyes on a piece of writing, so don't hesitate to come to SWC to get some extra feedback on your paper from another tutor. You can bring a draft or an idea to Sweetland and the tutors there can help you with anything from grammar to brainstorming ideas for an assignment for any class.

### **further assistance**

Please feel free to come and talk to me about any worry or difficulty you have with any aspect of this class. If you have special needs because of a learning or a physical disability, please let me know, and please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (G219 Angell Hall; 763-3000; [www.umich.edu/~sswd/ssd/](http://www.umich.edu/~sswd/ssd/)).