

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Vanderbilt University

The Writing Life

The Fall Semester of the 2023-2024 Academic Year

Wednesday morning, October 11, 2023

Victor Judge

Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs

Lecturer in Literature and Religion

Vanderbilt University Divinity School

Office 137-H

411 Twenty-first Avenue, South

Nashville, Tennessee 37240

office telephone: 615/343-3964

victor.judge@vanderbilt.edu

The Community of Writers

Peg Beehan

Tim Cope

Helen Delph

David Fox

Gina Griffith

Robbie Michel

Gail Robinson

Carlin Sapperfield

Kate Stephenson

Nancy Sutsko

David Tharp

Carol Titus

Kathy Tree

William Woodruff

“When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner’s pick, a woodcarver’s gouge, a surgeon’s probe. You wield it, and it digs a path you follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow, or this time next year.

You make the path boldly and follow it fearfully. You go where the path leads. At the end of the path, you find a box canyon. You hammer out reports, dispatch bulletins.

The writing has changed, in your hands, and in a twinkling, from an expression of your notions to an epistemological tool. The new place interests you because it is not clear. You attend. In your humility, you lay down the words carefully, watching all the angles. Now the earlier writing looks soft and careless. Process is nothing; erase your tracks. The path is not the work. I hope your tracks have grown over; I hope birds ate the crumbs. I hope you will toss it all and not look back.”

~Annie Dillard
(30 April 1945 –)
from *The Writing Life*
1989
pages 3 and 4

"The Life of the Writer"

You should see me
with this paring knife,
dividing grapefruit sections.
But surely it is good
to make breakfast
even when it means the fruit
gets cut in half and then
divided with an inadequate tool
into tiny separate sections,
each cut leaving some behind,
the rest spooned out and
gone, before I can even picture the whole
yellow-pink roundness forming
like a small early sun
in silent, fragrant air, gathering into itself
a full measure of juice, somewhere
in a distant orchard long before
it was divided and divided
and divided.

~Lynne Hugo deCourcy

(30 December 1946)

“Advice to Writers”

Even if it keeps you up all night,
wash down the walls and scrub the floor
of your study before composing a syllable.

Clean the place as if the Pope were on his way.
Spotlessness is the niece of inspiration.

The more you clean, the more brilliant
your writing will be, so do not hesitate to take
to the open fields to scour the undersides
of rocks or swab in the dark forest
upper branches, nests full of eggs.

When you find your way back home
and stow the sponges and brushes under the sink,
you will behold in the light of dawn
the immaculate altar of your desk,
a clean surface in the middle of a clean world.

From a small vase, sparkling blue, lift
a yellow pencil, the sharpest of the bouquet,
and cover pages with tiny sentences
like long rows of devoted ants
that followed you in from the woods.

~Billy Collins

(22 March 1941 –)

Poet Laureate of the United States from 2001 to 2003

from *The Apple That Astonished Paris*, page 57, The University of Arkansas
Press, Fayetteville, 2006.

The 2023 Fall Semester Sessions

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

Wednesday, October 25, 2023

Wednesday, November 8, 2020

Wednesday, November 22, 2020

The due date for submitting the manuscripts will be **noon** on the **Saturday** prior to the Wednesday session. A compilation of submissions will be sent electronically to all members of the community for reading in advance of each session. Please submit the drafts as **Word documents** (*only*) to victor.judge@vanderbilt.edu.

The Prompt for Writing Exercise I

(to be discussed at the conclusion of class on October 11, 2023)

