

LIT 225: Art of the Essay Across Media and Time

The essay is everywhere: a newspaper, a YouTube Channel and a college app. Invented by Montaigne in the Early Modern Europe, the essay has risen to be a dominant cultural form. What did Montaigne want the essay to be? Has the essay become a victim of its success? We will consider four epochs in the history of the essay: Antiquity (Plutarch and Marcus Aurelius); Renaissance and Early Modern (Montaigne and Thomas Browne); Romanticism (Rousseau and Hazlitt); and Contemporary (Joseph Brodsky, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, James Baldwin, Zadie Smith, etc.) The class culminates in the examination of the cross-media forms of the essay (photo-essays of Lee Friedlander, essay films of Orson Wells and Chris Marker, and online video-essays).

Units: 3