Spring 2014 Cynthia Taft

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**Preview of the first essay assignment--Due Monday, February 24th**

Readings to consider:

Henry Beston, “Autumn, Ocean, and Birds, I” from *The Outermost House* (isite link)

Rachel Carson, excerpt from *Silent Spring* (*Am. Earth*, 835-848)

Loren Eiseley, “The Judgment of the Birds” (isite link)

Aldo Leopold, “Marshland Elegy” (*Am.Earth*)

Jack Turner, “The Song of the White Pelican” (*Am. Earth*)

Each of these authors draws upon the symbolic resonance of a particular bird or group of birds, but the power of each work depends upon carefully observed details. In a coherent essay that develops a unifying argument or thesis, explore the relationship between the observed details and the symbolic associations of a particular bird or group of birds in one of these four works.

More details to follow.

**Pre-Draft exercise 1.1: Making the details work for you. (Due February 3rd)**

Search your memory for an encounter with a particular bird (it does not need to be a close encounter). It may help to consider some of the birds that even urbanites encounter routinely:

* Pigeons, Canada geese, ducks, sparrows, blue jays, robins, cardinals, sea gulls, and crows.

Or less common birds, such as

* Owls, hawks, peregrine falcons, bald eagles, gold finches, turkeys, hummingbirds, red-winged blackbirds, swans, & woodpeckers.

Shy away from bird feeder encounters. Think, instead, of an instance in which you were intrigued or disturbed, or just taken by surprise—perhaps a flock of wild turkeys traipsing across a suburban lawn, a gaggle of geese moseying across the interstate, a crow stealing bottle caps for its nest, or a cardinal crashing into a plate-glass window.

I. Devote one page of your exercise to your description of the bird and its action. Do not include your thoughts or your feelings about the encounter on this page, but do try to evoke the entire sensory experience. Focus on the bird, and recreate the scene for your readers. Don’t worry about the number of words; just use enough words to convey a complete picture.

II. On the following page, note your reaction to this encounter. Why did it stick in your mind? What associations did it bring to mind?

\*\*Submit a copy of your pre-draft exercise 1.1 in the drop box for Assignment 1.1 before class & send one copy as an attachment to my email address: [ctaft@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:ctaft@fas.harvard.edu).

\*\*Print out 3 copies of your pre-draft exercise and bring them to class on Monday, February 3rd.