

Questions on "This Pen for Hire" (1995) - Abigail Witherspoon

Write about question #5, #6 and one other question (total length: one to one and half pages). We will discuss all the questions in class.

1. What are the possible meanings of the title?
2. Why does the author use a pseudonym? What might the name "Abigail Witherspoon" signify? If the author wanted to cloak identity, why didn't he/she choose to be anonymous?
3. What do you see as the writer's motive for writing and publishing this essay?
4. In what ways is the style of the piece (semi-journal, retrospective diary) effective? Do you have any criticisms of Witherspoon's style?
5. Does the analogy between writing papers and prostitution, between writing and sexuality, work? How does the writer extend the metaphor in the essay?
6. Do you find the writer a reliable or believable narrator? Do you sympathize with Witherspoon? In what ways, if any, do your feelings toward the writer change as you read through the piece?
7. In what ways is this essay a personal confession? In what ways is "This Pen..." an educational critique? Do you see the writer's critique as valid?
8. How does this piece compare with Orwell's "Shooting An Elephant"? How might you feel about this essay if you knew that it had been written by a now-famous author?

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