Creative Nonfiction, WRTNG-UG 1300  
Gallatin School, NYU, Fall 2014

Course Description
The best literary nonfiction borrows several things from fiction: strong character development, well crafted, nuanced scenes, and a tangible narrative arc. But it also often bears the hallmarks of good journalism: thorough research, live reporting and a writer’s quizzical, intelligent stance. This class meets directly at the intersection of fiction’s energy and journalism’s integrity—the place where literary nonfiction is born.

In this class, students will not only learn the components of a good story, but what makes an idea compelling to a diverse audience to begin with. We’ll look at and write three forms of nonfiction: memoir, the personal essay, and the literary profile. We’ll read masters in these three major styles as well as some newer voices to look at elements like tone and approach, argument and appeal. Each form is distinct, but we’ll build on the skills we establish as the class moves along. The memoir, for instance, will be a short assignment, and based entirely on your lived experience. The personal essay can incorporate pieces of your life and belief systems, but must also integrate close observation, reporting and outside research. The final feature, a profile of a person you don’t know, will be based entirely on reporting but will be literary in style and approach, with attention to scene, character development and so on.

Emphasis in this course will be on revision, as two out of three of your stories will require major rewriting, depending on which workshop group you’re in. Students will also learn effective editing strategies for their own writing by working closely with their peers. Readings will be somewhat extensive and come from one compiled reader.

Objectives
• Introductory knowledge of three forms of Creative Nonfiction
• Reading as a writer
• Writing skills, particularly the use of narrative form and other story telling elements in the telling of true stories

Required Tools and Texts
• Course Reader, at NYU bookstore
• Some kind of handheld tape or digital recorder for interviews. Smartphone recordings acceptable.
• A notebook
Readings
“On Keeping a Notebook,” Joan Didion
“Resume,” Luc Sante
Excerpt from “Name All the Animals: A Memoir,” Alison Smith
“Personal History: Lunch at the Biltmore—An Outing with My Father,” Oscar Hijuelos
“Native Son,” James Baldwin
“Shooting an Elephant,” George Orwell
“Some Thoughts on Mercy,” Ross Gay
“Sentimental Medicine,” Eula Biss
“The Christian Paradox: How a Faithful Nation Gets Jesus Wrong,” Bill McKibben
“Writing to Confess,” bell hooks
“In History,” Jamaica Kincaid
“A Personal Essay by a Personal Essay,” Christy Vannoy
Selections from Up in the Old Hotel, Joseph Mitchell
“Dr. Daedalus,” Lauren Slater
“George Divoky’s Planet,” Darcy Frey
“The American Man, Age Ten,” Susan Orlean
“Frank Sinatra Has a Cold,” Gay Talese

Additional readings as assigned

Course requirements
· Attendance & participation · One memoir (1200- 1800 words)
· Close readings of required texts · One personal essay (1500-2500 words)
· Writing Exercises · One literary profile (10-12 pages)
· 1-2 paper drafts for each story

Submission Format
When you are up for workshop, you must submit your draft to Classes on or before the deadline we collectively determine. Please do not submit written work that you do not want others to see. Bring one copy of final papers to class for me. All final papers must be handed in at the start of class. You must staple all drafts (with my comments) to the final assignment. All work is to be typed in 12-point font and double-spaced. Your name, assignment title, the date, my name, and the class number must appear on the upper right corner of the first page. Your name and the assignment title should repeat on each individual page. Number all pages in the lower right hand corner. Always proofread your work before handing it in. Proper grammar and spelling count as part of your grade.

Late and Missed Assignments
Although drafts will not be graded, they still must be turned in on time. Late drafts will not be accepted. If you do not turn in a draft—or miss your deadline—you are still responsible for turning in a final version of the paper, the grade of which will be lowered by one letter. Late final papers will adversely affect your grade as well, resulting in an additional letter grade reduction on the assignment. Keep in mind that late or missed exercises or drafts take their toll on the quality of final papers. Final papers will be
considered late if you arrive more than **fifteen minutes** late to class to hand in your draft.

**Written Critiques**
Bring two copies of your critiques to class, one for the student being critiqued and one for me. All critiques must follow the submission format listed above and should be at least one page long.

**Attendance and Tardiness**
Attendance is mandatory. Aside from religious observances, you are permitted only one excused absence without an adverse effect upon your grade. Excused absences must be accompanied by a doctor’s note. If you miss more than one class, your grade will drop by the following proportion: A- to B+, B+ to B. Missing a third class will cause you to fail. **Class will start promptly on time.** Being tardy—more than five minutes late—three times will count as an absence. Missing more than a half-hour of any class will count as an absence.

**Participation**
You must participate productively both in the discussion of assigned texts and in the discussion of your peers’ work. Productive participation counts as twenty percent of your grade. You will be called on if you do not participate voluntarily.

**Conferences**
Many students prefer to meet for a one-on-one conference before final papers are due. I am also always happy to meet with you at any time during the term.

**Class Etiquette**
No eating, headphones, or computers. All cell phones must be turned off (not set on vibrate) and put away. Once again, be on time. The only way we can ensure that everyone gets equal workshop time is to stay on schedule.

**Disability and Counseling and Psychological Services**
If you have a disability or psychological issue you must let me know as soon as possible and what, if any, special accommodations you need. All students requesting accommodation need to provide official documentation.

**Gallatin Statement on Plagiarism**
As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction in accordance with the Student Discipline and Grievance Rules of the Gallatin School of Individualized Study and may include dismissal from the University.

Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Note that plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity are matters of fact and not intention, and apply to all material submitted as a Gallatin student. In other words, regardless of whether they are deliberate or accidental, all violations are subject to...
potential disciplinary action. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [http://gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

**Grading**
The final grade for the semester will be determined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memoir</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Essay</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Profile</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You must complete all of your assignments in order to pass the class.

**Week One: 9/2**
Introduction
What is Literary Nonfiction?
In-class Exercise
Reading for next week: Joan Didion, Luc Sante, Alison Smith and Oscar Hijuelos
Assignment for next week: Sante writing exercise and personal statement

**Week Two: 9/9**
Discuss Alison Smith and Oscar Hijuelos
Sante Exercises
Emotional truth versus literal truth
Writing Children: Kid logic
The physical world—using all five senses
How to critique/workshop etiquette
Reading for next week: James Baldwin and peer drafts
Assignment for next week: First draft of memoir

**Week Three: 9/16**
Discuss Baldwin
Connecting your work to larger social themes
Creating believable dialogue
Workshop Group A

**Week Four: 9/23**
Workshop Group B
Reading for next week: Orwell and Gay
Week Five: 9/30
FINAL MEMOIRS DUE
The Personal Essay: What is it?
Discuss Orwell and Gay
Story/emotion and Argument
Place as Focus
Reading for Next Week: Biss and McKibben

Week Six: 10/7
Discuss Biss and McKibben
Incorporating research
Idea as focus
Discuss personal essay assignment/coming up with ideas
Reading for next week: hooks, Kincaid, and Vannoy
Assignment: personal essay ideas

FALL RECESS—NO CLASS: 10/14

Week Seven: 10/21
Discuss hooks, Kincaid, and Vannoy
style/voice/persuasion
Reading for next week: peer drafts
Assignment for next week: First draft of personal essay

Week Eight: 10/28
Workshop Group C

Week Nine: 11/4
Workshop Group A
Reading for next week: Mitchell, Slater, and Frey

Week Ten: 11/11
FINAL PERSONAL ESSAYS DUE
Discuss Mitchell, Slater, and Frey
What is a profile?
Coming up with ideas
For next week: Contact your profile subject and set up time to interview
Readings for next week: Orlean and Talese

Week Eleven: 11/18
How to do an interview
Shaping the profile
Discuss Orlean and Talese
Reading for next week: peer drafts
Assignment for next week: First draft of profile
Week Twelve: 11/25
Workshop Group B

Week Thirteen: 12/2
Workshop Group C

Week Fourteen: 12/9
Last class
Final Profiles Due

Please sign up for a workshop group below. You can see on the syllabus the workshop schedule; papers will be due to Blackboard 36 hours before class.

Group A will have their memoirs and personal essays workshopped.

Group B will have their memoirs and profiles workshopped.

Group C will have their personal essays and profiles workshopped.

Group A

1. ________________________
2_________________________
3_________________________
4_________________________
5__________________________

Group B

1. ________________________
2_________________________
3_________________________
4_________________________
5__________________________

Group C

1. ________________________
2_________________________
3_________________________
4_________________________
5__________________________