

Jour 314 Literary Journalism, Fall 2022

Weinstein Hall, Room 418: Noon to 1:15 p.m. Tues.---Thurs.

Teacher: Mike Spear

Office Hours: 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday

(Note: It is easier to contact me by e-mail than by phone:

mspear@richmond.edu

Course goal: The broad goal of this course is to make you aware of the genre of literary journalism, to make you critical, analytical and skeptical readers, to expose you to the works of many literary journalists and to make you aware of the difference between the work of literary journalists and that of journalists who do traditional reporting. We will look at the methods the reporters use, and we will see how literary journalism has emerged as an art form, how it transcends the practical fact of journalism, how it can be powerful, stirring and important. At its best, like fiction, it shows the human condition in many lights. Occasionally it may suggest the meaning of this existence and question its purpose.

We will look at literary journalism throughout the 20th and 21st Centuries. We will observe how writers with an abundance of talent began to write beyond the ordinary restrictions of journalism. We will follow this to the present as it developed into long-form magazine writing or reportage, as it is widely known.

This course is designed as a seminar. It is not a writing workshop. You will be expected to analyze and write (type) a report on everything we cover during the 14-week semester. You will be asked to look closely at the writing styles of the various writers, in particular how they use the language to tell stories, the “sound” of their writing voices and the literary techniques they use. You will be asked to access the methods writers use to get the stories and to point out any areas that might be suspect if you encounter them. Along the way, you might ask such things as what purpose does the writer have in telling the story? Is he or she mainly trying to entertain, inform, enlighten or illuminate? Has the writer met the standard of literary journalism through research and literary techniques? What are the main characteristics of literary journalism?

Responsibility: Grading in this course is based on the assumption that you read every book or article assigned during the semester, did all the things required in each reading assignment and that you came to class and readily and enthusiastically took part in discussions of the assignments.

Course text: “The Best America Magazine Writing 2021” Columbia University Press.
New York.

Course Grades: Course grades are based on performance in the classroom, on homework and on a series of quizzes and tests on the reading (50 percent), a midterm (25 percent) and a final (25percent).

Attendance: You must come to class, and you must come on time. You cut class at your peril. This course is packed with reading assignments that we will talk about extensively in class. If you are forced to miss a class by conditions beyond your control, let me know ahead of time. **The bonus:** If you miss no classes during the semester and are not late for any classes, I will add a half point to your overall final grade. In other words, if you earn a B for the course, I will boost that to a B+ for perfect and punctual attendance.

Slam: There will be a Shakespeare poetry slam during the semester. Here is the procedure: 1. Pick out a passage of at least 15 lines; 2. memorize the lines; 3. Then get speech center help (required) on how to perform the poem. The dates for this is Oct. 27. So, pick a poem right away and get started. These will be graded by outside judges. This is an easy A.

Your Midterm:

Pick one of the well-known literary journalists and write a thorough profile. This should include:

1. A list of the writer's books.
2. A list of this writer's magazine articles – as many as you can find.
3. Provide a thorough description of the kinds of topics the writer picks.
4. Provide detailed and thorough criticism from at least five sources of the writer's work.
5. Provide at least three passages that clearly demonstrate the writer's skill and style. You should explain what it is about these passages that you like also.
6. List the characteristics in this writer's work that shows why he or she is part of the literary journalism movement.
7. Include as much as you can about the writer's life, especially early life that may have influenced his or her writing.
8. Beyond the writing, what is the reputation of the writer? What are the good and bad things that are being/have been said about him or her?
9. You should write this as a fast-paced long-form magazine article.
10. Include two or three photos if available.
11. At the bottom of your story, list all of your sources. If people are involved, list time, where and how interviewed.
12. How long should these be? As any newsroom editor would tell you, write the story until you cover everything, then quit. You must know that it is easy to see if you slack off in these.

Literary Journalism writers include:

Gay Talese

Jon Krakauer

Susan Orlean

Lawrence Wright

William Langeweische

Tracy Kidder

Michael Peterniti

Eric Schlosser

Ted Conover

Michael Lewis

Richard Preston
Richard Ben Cramer
Jon Franklin
Leon Dash
Gary Smith
Kathryn Schulz
Tom Wolfe,
John McPhee
Hunter Thompson
John Hersey
Jane Kramer
Lillian Ross
Truman Capote
Joan Didion
Norman Mailer
Terry Southern
Dan Wakefield
Mark Kramer
Walt Harrington
Margaret Talbot

Your final:

Final TED talks (videos) A TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) talk is a well-developed video on any subject. In our case it will involve new new journalism writers we read during the semester. In producing the TED talk, you should include detailed biographic information, summaries of their careers, a list of their best work, including what at least five experts say about their work. You should use both general reference sources -- encyclopedias, biographical dictionaries, and specific biographies and/or works of literary criticism. You should include a sentence or passage by the writer that has won praise from critics, something about the writer's unique voice that could only have been written by him or her. You should use photos of the writer that represent well his or her character. These videos should be stories with a clear beginning, middle and end. You will work in teams of two. Here are the writers we will examine in these videos:

Important Books: These are in the library, and you will need them for your midterm and final. You might want to buy them. They are not expensive. And there is much in them that you will want to read long after the class.

“The New New Journalism” by Robert S. Boynton

“The Art of Fact” edited by Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda

“The Gang That Wouldn’t Write Straight” by Marc Weingarten

“The New Journalism” edited by Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson

“The Literary Journalist” by Norman Sims

“The Reporter as Artist: A look at the New Journalism Controversy” edited by Ron Weber

“The John McPhee Reader”

“The Second John McPhee Reader”

(These assignments (below) may change as new long-form articles appear.)

Week 1: Aug. 23 & 25

Tuesday: Assignments: What is Literary Journalism? (A compilation.)

Thursday: Assignments: “Portrait of Hemingway” by Lillian Ross. (1950)

Week 2: Aug. 30 & Sept. 1

Tuesday: Assignments: Selected pieces by Jimmy Breslin (1960s)

Thursday: Assignment: “La Dolce Viva” by Barbara L. Goldsmith. (1968)

Week 3: Sept. 6 & Sept. 8

Tuesday: Assignments: “The Duke and his Domain” Truman Capote. (1957)

Thursday: Assignment: “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream by Joan Didion. (1968)

Week 4: Sept. 13 & Sept.15

Tuesday Assignment: “The Election that Could Break America” by Barton Gellman (2021)

Thursday: Assignment: “Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga.” by Hunter Thompson. (1966)

Week 5: Sept. 20 & Sept 22

Tuesday: Assignments: “Levels of the Game” by John McPhee. (1969)

Thursday: Assignments: “The Curve of Binding Energy” McPhee (1975)

Week 6: Sept. 27 & Sept. 29

Tuesday: Assignment: “The Last American Hero” Wolfe (1969)

Thursday: Assignment: “Sinatra Has a Cold” Gay Talese (1966)

Week 7: Oct. 4 & Oct. 6

Tuesday: Assignment: “Yeager” Wolfe (1979)

Thursday: Assignment: “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved” Thompson (1970)

Fall break: Begins after classes on Oct. 7. Classes resume Oct. 12

Week 8: Oct. 13

Thursday: Assignment: Excerpts from “Marie Clarie’s Guide to Protecting Yourself Online” Edited by Megan DiTrollo. (2021)

Week 9: Oct 18 & Oct. 20

Tuesday: Assignment: “The Store That Called the Cops on George Floyd by Aymann Ismail. (2021_

Thursday: Assignment: “Guarding Sing Sing” by Ted Conover (2000)

Week 10: Oct. 25 & Oct. 27

Tuesday Assignment: “The Weirdly Enduring Appeal of Weird Al Yankovic. (2021)

Thursday: Assignment: “The Black American Amputation Epidemic” by Lizzie Presser (2021)).

Week 11: Nov. 1 & Nov. 3

Tuesday: Assignment: “The No-Stats All-Star” By Michael Lewis (2009)

Thursday: Assignment: “Jonathan Lebed’s Activities” by Michael Lewis. (2002)

Week 12: Nov. 8 & Nov. 10

Tuesday: Assignment: “The Really Big One” by Kathryn Schulz. (2015)

Thursday: Assignment: “Michael Jordan: A History of Flight” by Wright Thompson (2021)

Week 13: Nov. 15 & Nov. 17

Tuesday: Assignment: “The Disappeared” By Aura Bogado (2021)

Thursday: Assignment: “The Plague Year” by Lawrence Wright. (2021)

Thanksgiving Break: begins after classes on Nov. 22. Classes resume on Nov. 28.

Week 14: Nov. 29 & Dec. 1

Tuesday: Assignment: “The Collaborators” By Anna Applebaum (2021)

Thursday: Assignment: Review”