Jour 304 New New Journalism (Literary Nonfiction) – Spring 2017
Weinstein Hall, Room 105: Noon to 1:15 p.m. Mon-Wed
Teacher: Mike Spear
Office Hours: 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Monday and Wednesday
(Note: It is much easier to contact me by e-mail than by phone. Avoid phone frustration and use my e-mail: 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 start with writers of the new journalism era and proceed to the era of new new journalism. 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. As we go through the years, we will consider the ties between form and content as well as the key historical factors of the time these pieces were written.

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 always 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? Are there limits to the freedom the writer has in this genre?

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 Plan: (Always subject to the slings and arrows of fortune) Besides the analysis of everything read during the semester, there will be a report and short quiz at the completion of each book. There will be graded reports about some of the writers we cover. There will be a midterm research paper on new journalism writers. And there will be a final, which consists of 20-minute TED talks on writers of new new journalism.
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 (25 percent).

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.

Course Texts: Because these are all inexpensive and easily acquired in second-hand bookstores in your neighborhood or online, you will not find them in the campus bookstore or library. If you have any problem getting them, go to Amazon.com or Half.com.

Slams: There will be two poetry slams during the semester. In doing these, follow this procedure: 1. Pick out a poem 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 these are: Feb. 22 and April 12. So pick a poem from the list on blackboard right away and get started. These will graded by outside judges. This is an easy A.

Your Midterm:

Pick one of the well-know writers of new journalism 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 show why he or she is part of the new 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.
New Journalism writers include:
Tom Wolfe,
John McPhee
Hunter Thompson
John Hersey
Jane Kramer
Lillian Ross
Clay Felker
Truman Capote
David Halberstam
Joan Didion
Norman Mailer
Terry Southern
Dan Wakefield
Peter Matthiessen
William Finnegan
Joe McGiniss
Rex Reed
Larry L. King
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:

Gay Talese
Jon Krakauer
Susan Orlean
Lawrence Wright
William Langewiesche
Tracy Kidder
Michael Peterniti
Eric Schlosser
Ted Conover
Michael Lewis
Richard Preston
Richard Ben Cramer
Jon Franklin
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”

Note: I will provide a number of long-form magazine articles during the semester by well-known literary journalists.

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

Week 1: Jan. 9 & 11

Week 2: Jan. 16 & 18

Week 3: Jan. 23 & 25

Week 4: Jan. 30 & Feb. 1
Monday: Assignment: “La Dolce Viva” (1968) by Barbara L. Goldsmith.

Week 5: Feb. 6 & 8
Week 6: Feb. 13 & 15
Wednesday: Assignment: “Yeager” (1979) by Tom Wolfe.

Week 7: Feb. 20 & 22 (1st Poetry Slam)

Week 8: Feb. 27 & March 1

Spring Break, March 3-12

Week 9: March 13 & 15

Week 10: March 20 & 22
Monday: Assignment: “Flying Upside Down” by Tracy Kidder.

Week 11: March 27 & March 29

Week 12: April 3 & April 5

Week 13: April 10 & 12 (2nd Poetry Slam: Shakespeare)
Wednesday: Assignment: “The Apostate” by Lawrence Wright.

Week 14: April 17 & 19

Book assignments for the semester:

2. “The Orchid Thief” by Susan Orlean. (Read between these dates: Jan. 25 and Feb. 22. Report due on Feb. 22.)

3. “Fast Food Nation” by Eric Schlosser. (Read between these dates: Feb. 22 and March 22. Report due on March 22.)


Note: You may start reading these books at any time, but get your book assignment from me before you do. These assignments (reports) will be due on the dates listed above.

Last day of classes is April 21.