

CRWR 587: Nonfiction II
Spring 2011, Natalie Kusz
Monday, 5:30-10 p.m., Health Sci. 278

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NONFICTION II: THE 20TH CENTURY AND BEYOND

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

To examine and identify contemporary nonfictive writing methods, as well as the various subgenres into which modern nonfiction naturally divides.

To help students develop the ability to emulate the distinctive writing styles of specific authors.

TEXTS:

Didion, Joan. *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008.
ISBN 9780374531368

Hellman, Lillian. *An Unfinished Woman*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1999. ISBN 0316352853

Lopate, Phillip. *Getting Personal*. Boston: Basic Books, 2003. ISBN 9780495041749

Mailer, Norman. *The Armies of the Night*. New York: Plume, 1994. ISBN 0452272793.

Matthiessen, Peter. *The Birds of Heaven: Travel With Cranes*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001. ISBN 978-0865476578

McPhee, John. *The Survival of the Bark Canoe*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1982.
ISBN 0374516936

Wilson, Jason and Paul Theroux, eds. *The Best American Travel Writing, 2001*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001. ISBN 978-0618118786

Photocopied readings, as assigned.

GRADING:

Grades will reflect absolute attention to deadlines, completion of all required coursework, the quality of your oral and written assignments, and the depth of your critical observations.

Because the course is quite short, there is no room for class tardiness or absence.

METHODOLOGY:

The bulk of our class time will involve discussion and dissection of the reading assignments, with periodic in-class writing practice. Out-of-class work will include weekly technique journals (see below), preparation of an oral presentation (also below), and a two-part final written assignment (yes, below).

ASSIGNMENTS:

Oral introduction:

Each of you will be responsible for introducing part of one class period's reading. This introduction should take the form of a 10- to 15-minute "orientation" to the work(s) and/or author(s) at hand, and may include a mini craft lecture, a *brief* author's bio, handouts, visual aids, and any other material which will give background and context for our readings. We will schedule these introductions on the first day of class, and if we have a large number of people, there could be two introducers per week. In that case, you may divide your week's material any way you wish – with each person taking a specific aspect of the text or author, each person introducing a relevant writing technique, etc. – or you may combine efforts to give cooperative, team-based intros.

Weekly technique journal:

For each week's reading, you will upload to our Blackboard site a one-page typed, single-spaced analysis of some point of craft in the work at hand. The emphasis here is on *how* an author accomplishes what he or she does. For instance, one might note that Lillian Hellman is particularly gifted in the use of the flash-forward; a technique journal entry on this subject would dissect passages of Hellman's work, discussing *how* her various flashes forward function, *when* she employs this technique, and *why* it serves the essay well at these points. Journal entries should be excruciatingly specific, and it is appropriate to include a discussion of how you plan to "steal" the points of craft for your own work. **Please upload your technique journal a full 24 hours before class.**

Two-part final written project:

In your ultimate project you will demonstrate your grasp of this course's two objectives: the identification of nonfiction prose techniques, and the emulation of them. **You may hand in this assignment at any time during the quarter, but no later than the final due date. Turn it in by posting it on Blackboard.** The two parts of the project are as follows:

Part I: Technique analysis of a single author. 3-5 pages, double spaced.

Choose an author from our reading list and do an exquisitely-detailed analysis of that author's form and style. Demonstrate both your own knowledge of nonfictive techniques, and the author's specific versions or uses of those techniques.

Sample questions you might address: What prose techniques distinguish this author from other nonfiction authors? Does this author's work fall into a nonfictive "subgenre" such as nature or travel writing, and if so, how does it compare to work by others in the subgenre? In what ways do voice, tone, diction, sentence and paragraph rhythms, authorial distance, temporal considerations (i.e. where on a time line the author is writing in relation to the events portrayed), etc., influence the way the work is formed? In short, how would you identify a work by this author if it had no byline attached?

Part II: Emulation piece. 3-5 pages, double spaced.

Write a short essay in which you copy, exactly, your chosen author's style. Don't plagiarize the author's phrasings or content, but do make your prose method indistinguishable from this person's. Note that this is not an assignment in parody, but is rather a serious opportunity for you to demonstrate your ability to distinguish one author's style from the styles of all others.

SCHEDULE:

- Mar. 28:** Introduction, Scheduling, Discussion of nonfiction's subgenres.
- Apr. 4:** THE EXPERIMENTAL 1960s: "NEW JOURNALISM" and "gonzo" offshoots
Gay Talese, "Looking for Hemingway" (handout)
and "Frank Sinatra Has A Cold" (handout)
Hunter S. Thompson, "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved" (handout)
Tom Wolfe, "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test." (handout)
Louis Menand, "Believer," *The New Yorker*, March 7, 2005, pp. 27-28. (handout)
Michael Depp, "What Happened to the Revolution? The Legacy of New
Journalism," *Poets & Writers*, May/June 2004, pp. 17-21. (handout)
Introducers: 1. _____ 2. _____
- Apr. 11:** NEW JOURNALISM EVOLVES: REPORTAGE EMBRACES THE "I"
Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*
Introducers: 1. _____ 2. _____
Note that the Get Lit! festival is this week. You are required to attend at least 5 hours of festival events. You'll get these hours 'back,' so to speak, when we do not hold class on May 23.
- Apr. 18:** THE PERSONAL ESSAY
Phillip Lopate, *Getting Personal*
Introducers: 1. _____ 2. _____
- Apr. 25:** MEMOIR: A VOICE AND A FORM
Lillian Hellman, *An Unfinished Woman*.
Introducers: 1. _____ 2. _____
- May 2:** RESEARCH-BASED LITERARY NONFICTION
John McPhee, *The Survival of the Bark Canoe*.
Introducers: 1. _____ 2. _____
- May 9:** NATURE WRITING
Peter Matheissen, *The Birds of Heaven*.
Introducers: 1. _____ 2. _____
- May 16:** HISTORY AS LITERATURE; ILLEGAL P.O.V.; META-NF
Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*. **Note that it is imperative that you read both Book 1 and Book 2. Expect a quiz.**
Introducers: 1. _____ 2. _____
- May 23:** TRAVEL WRITING
From *Best American Travel Writing 2001*:
Michael Finkel, "Desperate Passage," pp. 105-124.
Ian Frazier, "Desert Hideaway," pp. 125-131.
Susan Orlean, "A Place to Disappear," pp. 228-237.
Bob Shacochis, "Something Wild in the Blood," pp. 286-300.
No class meeting. Post technique journals on Blackboard.
- June 6 (Monday): two-part final project due in my mailbox by noon.**

University Statements

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

No person shall, on the basis of age, race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin or disability, be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of Eastern Washington University.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION STATEMENT

Eastern Washington University adheres to affirmative action policies to promote diversity and equal opportunity for all faculty and students.

ADA STATEMENT

Eastern Washington University is committed to providing support for students with disabilities. If you are a student with physical, learning, emotional, or psychological disabilities needing an accommodation, you are encouraged to stop by Disability Support Services (DSS), TAW 124 and speak with Kevin Hills, the Manager DSS or call 509-359-6871.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any question of Academic Integrity will be handled as stated in the EWU Academic Integrity Policy. This policy is on the EWU web site. Violations will result in a course grade of X.X.