
LITERARY JOURNALISM

In this course we will read seminal works in the field of literary journalism in the United States, starting with Nellie Bly, who, in 1887, feigned insanity to get herself committed to a mental institution in New York in order to explore conditions there. We'll continue our march

toward the present, lingering in the middle of the 20th century with some of the infamous New Journalists: Truman Capote, Joan Didion, Hunter S. Thomson, and Tom Wolfe. We'll end in the present with writers like Adrian Nicole LeBlanc and Ted Conover. Our intensive reading explorations will help us to investigate the various craft elements that literary journalists employ as well as ponder the larger ethical questions that the genre of literary journalism prompts

us to ask, questions that are linked to the author's role in and access to the story, to immersion reporting practices, and to the pursuit of objectivity. Additionally, and significantly, you will try your hand at immersion reporting and writing, producing your own literary journalism based on individual and group reporting exercises that will take you/us into the field—and to the movies. We will also have the opportunity to interview reporters and writers about their work, including Kevin Noble Maillard and Cheryl Della Pietra.

Instructor Information:

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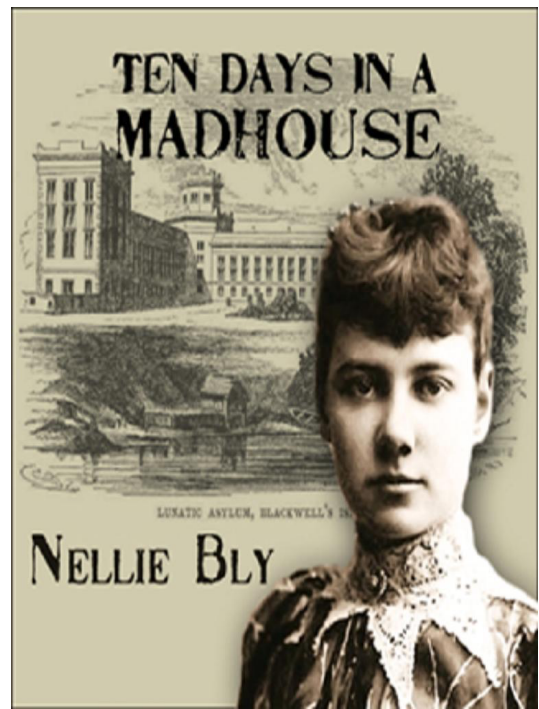
Office Hours: Mon. 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.,
Tues. 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m., Wed 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.

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Required Texts/Fees:

- *Ten Days in a Mad-House* (Bly), 1887: [available free online](#)
- *Hiroshima* (Hersey), 1946
- “Kandy-Kolored Tangerine Flake Streamline Baby” (Wolfe), 1963: available on our course site
- “Slouching Towards Bethlehem” (Didion), 1967: [available free online](#)
- *In Cold Blood* (Capote), 1966
- “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved” (Thompson), 1970: [available free online](#)
- “Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas” (Thompson), 1971: [available free online](#)
- *Gonzo Girl* (Pietra), 2015
- *Random Family* (Le Blanc), 2003
- Lancaster Trip Fee (~\$25)
- Movie Ticket (~\$12)



Assignments:

Historical Recollection Narrative (500-750 words) For this piece you will interview somebody about a national tragedy that is so seared in memory that s/he remembers exactly what s/he was doing when s/he learned of the tragedy or experienced it and how s/he felt in the moments and days that followed. You likely all know somebody who was impacted by the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks

—including yourselves—but try reaching back farther in history, to a time when you were not alive. Interview somebody about the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King, Jr. Wars invoke strong memories. How about somebody who remembers the Attack on Pearl Harbor, the D-Day invasion of Normandy, the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan? If you're not from the U.S., consider a tragedy in your own country's history. Write a narrative, in third person, based on your interviewee's experience, including any necessary details about the event itself.

Lancaster Reporting Story (750-1,000 words) During our day-long excursion to several Amish and Mennonite communities in Lancaster, you will be assigned to one of five reporting groups: Amish school, Mennonite school, Amish dairy farm, Amish pig farm, Amish general store. Following the trip, you will write a descriptive narrative about your assigned locale and any people in it. You're welcome to zero in on a single subject in order to focus your story, but you should place that subject in his/her setting, which you should describe in great detail. Other students are allowed to ask questions as appropriate but the reporting group assigned to the locale gets first dibs and will take the lead on any formal interview(s) so that we don't overwhelm our guests.

College Life Immersion Story (500-750 words) For this piece, you will attend a social gathering of your peers and write a short immersion piece. What kind of gathering? Anything that allows the reader a glimpse into the social life of college students at St. Joe's. Obviously St. Joe's has a range of students who do a range of activities in their "off-time." In that sense, what may be ordinary for one group of students may not necessarily be typical for most students. That's fine. Go to a party, hang out with a group of students who play video games every Friday night, or another group that spends weekend nights studying in the library or working out at the gym. In writing the piece, concentrate on observations and dialogue gathered while immersed in the story.

Author Report/Critical Reception Report (250 words each) Over the course of the semester, every student will do one **Author Report** and one **Critical Reception Report**. At the beginning of the semester each student will be assigned to their texts

and corresponding assignments. For the **Author Report**, your goal is not to give us a complete summary of the author's life but to tell us a few things that you think are useful to our understanding of the text that we are reading. For example, if you find an interview with the author, you might share with us what the author says about his/her own work. For the **Critical Reception Report**, you should give us a sense of how the author's work was received, by the general public or by critics, when it was first published. You might glean this information from critics reviewing the book at the time it was published or at a later point.

For both of these reports, please be interested in whatever you choose to write about; if you're not interested, we're not interested. Find something that makes your mind leap a bit, that enhances your reading and understanding of the author/text that you can pass along to the rest of us.

Finally, for both reports, you should consult outside sources. Online sources are fine, but they should be legitimate sources for reporters/scholars. Sure, do a Google search to start. Sure, take a look at Wikipedia. But don't end there. Keep searching until you find material that is credible. Don't forget about SJU Discover or another SJU library database, great places to search for credible material. At the end of your report, include links to any sources. How many sources for each report? No limit but at least two.

Discussion Questions: On days in which students are not required to complete Author Reports or Critical Reception Reports and/or in which reading has been assigned, they **MUST** bring to class a list of discussion questions (3-5 questions) to help guide our discussion for the day. Questions may be about content, about reporting, about style/technique, about the larger ethical questions that we will be debating all semester. Each discussion question should include a corresponding page or chapter number that we can consult during our discussion. These discussion questions are **PROOF** that you have read the day's material critically and thoughtfully.

Final Reporting Project (2,000 words) For this project, the story is yours to find. If ever the cliché "endless possibilities" fits an assignment, it fits here. You may choose, for example, to write about an activity or a hobby, a place of business or a

building, a campus organization, a person of interest. Turn your reporter's eye on the ignored or forgotten, or turn it on something familiar but with an eye that sees beyond the surface or the already stated. As for the profile, as for any journalism, you are required to conduct research and interviews and there should be several degrees of separation between you and your story. This isn't a personal narrative, but you are required to immerse yourself in the story, to gather observations and other sensory details first-hand.

Grading Breakdown

Writing

Historical Recollection Narrative
(10%)

Lancaster Reporting Story (15%)

College Life Immersion Story (10%)

Final Project (25%)

Reading

Author Report (10%)

Critical Reception Report (10%)

Discussion Questions/Participation
(20%)

Attendance:

Regular attendance and participation is not only required but essential to our classroom community. If for some reason you must miss class, I ask that you notify me as far in advance as possible to let me know that you will not be there. E-mail notification is fine. You then need to speak to me or one of your classmates to clarify missed work and/or discussion. After three absences, your final grade will be lowered by one letter grade. After six absences, you will receive an "FA" (failure due to excessive absence) on your transcript. Also, please note that being present in class means being present in all senses; that means refraining from using mobile phones, tablets, and computers unless otherwise directed. Lastly, I ask that we treat each other with respect. We will live and let live except when it comes to academic dishonesty, missed deadlines, and general laziness. No one likes a slacker, and journalism is unforgiving when it comes to all three.

Academic Honesty:

I also ask that you take seriously your responsibility as a communicator, journalist and scholar and that you honor your own intellectual integrity. Plagiarism includes rewriting someone else's ideas in your own words, passing off a photograph or other work of art as your own, with or without manipulation, not properly attributing sources or honoring copyright, and submitting work under your name that has been created by someone else. It also includes inventing sources and quotes for stories. Violations of the University's Academic Honesty policy will result in failure of the course, and your infraction will be reported to the Academic Honesty Board. Please note that more than one reported violation may result in your dismissal from the university. If you are EVER tempted to cheat, stop—and see me first. I'd rather negotiate an extension than see you risk ruining your academic (and perhaps professional) career.

Resources:

I am happy to meet with you any any point during the semester, so please don't hesitate to see me if you ever have any questions or desire additional feedback on your work. You may also wish to take advantage of the Writing Center. The main Writing Center is located in Merion Hall 162; the satellite is located in PLC 128. (To make an appointment, go to sju.mywconline.com.)

For those of you who have or think that you may have a disability, the University will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities in accordance with state and federal laws. Contact Service for Students with Disabilities at (610) 660-1774 (voice) or (610) 660-1720 (TTY) as early as possible in the semester for additional information and so that an accommodation, if appropriate, can be made in a timely manner.