American Literary Journalism
Fall 2013
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:15-3:05 pm
Building 240, Room 110

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Office Hours: Mondays, 3:05-5:00 pm; Wednesdays, 10-11 am

** Note: For students entering Stanford this year (under Stanford’s new Ways of Thinking/Ways of Doing breadth system), this course fulfills the Creative Expressions requirement.

Literary journalism merges the factual reporting of traditional journalism with the narrative techniques of fiction. This course will explore the development of this influential genre of writing in the U.S., engaging with the form’s most prominent practitioners, subjects, themes, and techniques from the late 19th century to the present. We will investigate questions of objectivity and subjectivity, tensions between fact and fiction, the relationship between form and content, and the history and methods of various approaches to representing places, people, events, and the presence of the journalist. In lieu of writing traditional literary papers, students will develop their skills as both critics and creators of literary journalism in frequent informal writing assignments throughout the quarter, culminating in an original work of literary journalism.

REQUIRED TEXTS


COURSE SCHEDULE

Monday, Sept. 23: Introduction

Wednesday, Sept. 25 [32 pages]

* Weekly post 1 due Sun. Sept. 29 at 10 pm – 500 words on: What is the difference between literature and journalism and why does it (or does it) matter? (Further instructions will be distributed in class.)
Monday, September 30 [72 pages]
Joseph Mitchell, from *Up in the Old Hotel*: “The Old House at Home” (1940), 3-22; “Up in the Old Hotel” (1952), 439-464

Wednesday, October 2 [68 pgs]
Joan Didion, from *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* (1968): “Where the Kissing Never Stops” (1966), 42-60; “Slouching Toward Bethlehem” (1967), 84-128

First hour: library visit about resources for researching periodicals

* Weekly post 2 due Sun, Oct. 6 OR Tues., Oct 8, 10pm

Monday, October 7 [71 pgs]
Joseph Mitchell, from *Up in the Old Hotel* “The Mohawks in High Steel” (1949), 267-290
Selections from Tom Wolfe, “Radical Chic” & “Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers” (1970) (handout)
Lafcadio Hearn, “At the Gates of the Tropics” (1877) (handout)

PEOPLE

Wednesday, October 9 [58 pgs]
Joseph Mitchell, from *Up in the Old Hotel* “Professor Sea Gull” (1942), 52-70; “Old Mr. Flood” (1944), 375-389
Lillian Ross, “How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?”/ Portrait of Hemingway, *(The New Yorker*, 1950) (handout)

* Weekly post 3 due Sun., Oct. 15 OR Tues., Oct. 17, 10pm

Monday, October 14 [94 pgs]
Joseph Mitchell, from *Up in the Old Hotel*: “Joe Gould’s Secret” (1964), 623-716

Wednesday, October 16 [81 pgs]

* Imitations due Friday, Oct. 18 at 10pm

* Weekly post 4 due Sun., Oct. 20 OR Tues., Oct. 22, 10pm

Monday, October 21 [99 pgs]
Gay Talese, “Frank Sinatra has a Cold” *(Esquire*, 1966) (handout)

PLOT
**Wednesday, October 23** [90 pgs]
John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (1946), 1-90

* Weekly post 5 due Sun., Oct. 27 OR Tues., Oct. 29, 10pm

**Monday, October 28** [49 pgs]
Hunter S. Thompson, “The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved” (1970) (handout)
Stephen Crane: “When Man Falls, a Crowd Gathers” (1894), “In the Depths of a Coal Mine” (1894), “Nebraska’s Bitter Fight for Life” (1895) (handout)

**Wednesday, October 30** [155 pgs]

* Weekly post 6 due Sun., Nov. 3 OR Tues., Nov. 5, 10pm

**Monday, November 4** [188 pgs]

**VOICE AND APPROACH**

* Proposals for the final project due Wednesday, Nov. 6, 10pm

**Wednesday, November 6**
Open class: readings TBD

* Weekly post 7 due Sun., Nov. 10 OR Tues., Nov. 12, 10pm

**Monday, November 11** [74 pgs]
Tom Wolfe, “The New Journalism” (1973) (handout)
Stephen Crane, “Opium’s Varied Dreams” (1896), 853-858 (handout)

**Wednesday, November 13** [78 pgs]

* Weekly post 8 due Sun., Nov. 17 OR Tues., Nov. 19, 10pm

**Monday, November 18** [152 pgs]

**Wednesday, November 20** [138 pgs]
* Monday, November 25, 10pm: partial drafts of final assignment due

Thanksgiving recess: November 25-29

* Weekly post 9 due Sun., Dec. 1 OR Tues., Dec. 3, 10pm

Monday, December 2

*Note:* The reading for the final week will be a work of literary journalism suggested and voted on by the class.

Workshop on final project

Wednesday, December 4

Workshop on final project

* Final projects due Wednesday, Dec. 11, 12pm

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and participation (20%)

Weekly writing (20%) 

This course will involve near-weekly informal writing (generally 250-350 words, though you may write more), which must be posted on the Coursework forum/blog by 10pm the evening before class. These will not be individually graded but will receive weekly feedback, and will count toward your participation grade. I will give instructions for some posts, but other weeks you will have an open opportunity to respond informally to our readings. You may skip posting the week of your presentation. If you complete all posts (8 of 9 possible weeks), your grade for this portion will be a minimum of 85%, with higher grades given for excellent posts.

Review essay and presentation (10%)

Students will select one class session in which they will (a) present to the class on the publication history and/or critical reviews of the course reading(s), (b) lead a portion of the discussion, and (c) write a 3-page review essay on one of the readings and its reviewers. All of these elements of the assignment should use digital and traditional archives of periodicals as a major component of research. (Further details will be distributed in class.)

Imitation (10%)

Students will select a moment (300-400 words) from one course reading and re-write it in the style of two different journalists. For example, how might Joan Didion rewrite a scene from Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*? As part of this assignment students will also write 500 words about their formal and thematic considerations and choices in writing the imitations.

Final assignment (40%)

Students will write a 7-10 page original work of literary journalism and a 3-4 page essay situating it in the formal and historical traditions of American literary journalism. As part of the final assignment, you must submit a proposal (due Nov. 6) and a substantial draft (due Nov. 25).
COURSE POLICIES

Participation: A seminar is by its very nature collaborative, and its success depends on the thoughtful preparation and active, respectful participation of each member of the class. In this course, strong participation involves doing all of the required reading (which I’ve tried to keep manageable: very rarely more than 200 pages per week, usually closer to 150 pages, and sometimes less than that), reading and thinking about the writing posted by your classmates on Coursework each evening before class, and coming to class both prepared with comments and questions and open to engaging thoughtfully and courteously with your classmates’ ideas. Debate is essential to any intellectual discussion, so you should feel free—and in fact encouraged!—to disagree with me and with each other. But please do so respectfully.

Attendance: You may miss one class during the quarter without any penalty to your grade and for any reason. You do not need to explain this absence to me but you do need to let me know via email by 10am on the day of the class that you will miss. Beyond that one allowed absence, unexcused absences will have substantial negative impact on your grade. Also, please arrive to class on time. Repeated tardiness will lower your attendance and participation grade.

Readings: Please bring each session’s readings to class. Readings not in the main course texts will be distributed in class as handouts.

In-class informal writing: Expect to do some informal writing in many classes. Bring paper and a writing utensil to each class.

Extensions: Because written assignments often directly inform our class sessions, in this course I will not give extensions on written work except in the case of documented medical or family emergency, about which you should contact me as soon as possible. Although I’m sympathetic to how overloaded you might become with course and extracurricular responsibilities, all members of the class must follow the same schedule of deadlines. The penalty for assignments submitted after the deadline is the lowering of the assignment grade by one third of a grade for each day it is late. (An A paper will get an A- if one day late, a B+ if two days late, etc.)

Grading: You will have an opportunity to contribute to a grading rubric for written assignments.

Transparency: If there is any point in class or in an assignment when it’s unclear why we’re doing something, please ask me. There’s always a reason, and I try to make the course as well as class time as transparent and collaborative as possible.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY HONOR CODE:

Please re-read Stanford’s Honor Code and follow it carefully. Academic integrity is integral to scholarship, to education, and to the university as a whole. It is never okay to represent the work or language of others as your own.

The Honor Code is the University’s statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work:
The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:
1. that they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2. that they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.
2. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.
3. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk. Phone: 723-1066; http://studentaffairs.stanford.edu/oae.