ENGL 350

Creative Nonfiction: Prose

Spring 2018 – MWF – 2:00-2:50p

**Professor:** Ross K. Tangedal, Ph.D.

**Meeting Place:** CCC 240

**Course Catalog Description:**

Art of nonfiction writing using literary devices to write about true events. The course explores creative nonfiction forms and includes class discussion of student work.



*“I would not have you descend into your own dream. I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world.”*

 **-Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*** (2015)

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*History is hard to know, because of all the hired bullshit, but even without being sure of "history" it seems entirely reasonable to think that every now and then the energy of a whole generation comes to a head in a long fine flash, for reasons that nobody really understands at the time—and which never explain, in retrospect, what actually happened.*

-**Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas***(1972)



*“In the stories we tell ourselves, we tell ourselves.”*

*-***Michael Martone, *The Flatness and Other Landscapes*** (2000)

*“Imagination, of course, can open any door - turn the key and let terror walk right in.”*

-**Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood*** (1966)

*“Unless we are willing to escape into sentimentality or fantasy, often the best we can do with catastrophes, even our own, is to find out exactly what happened and restore some of the missing parts.”*

-**Norman McLean, *Young Men and Fire***(1992)



 “*The ability to tell your own story, in words or images, is already a victory, already a revolt.”*

-**Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me***(2014)

***This is ENGL 350: Creative Nonfiction*.** This course is designed to introduce students to the genre of creative nonfiction, both in theory and in practice. We will read major pieces of creative nonfiction, including works by Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, Rebecca Solnit, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Norman McLean, and Michael Martone. Students will produce various short creative pieces covering major approaches (true crime, gonzo, memoir, etc.), as well as a medium-length midterm excerpt and a full-length final piece. We will have read-arounds, writing workshops, peer reviews, and conferences as the semester progresses.

Though “creative nonfiction” can be defined in many ways, this course takes as its research focus the long-form prose creative nonfiction work. Authors such as Ernest Hemingway experimented with the idea of creative nonfiction as early as the 1920s, and his two major nonfiction offerings in his lifetime (*Death in the Afternoon* and *Green Hills of Africa*) exist as a testament to that experimentation. However, beginning in the 1960s, authors began experimenting with a new kind of writing, one that effectively blended the fact-based approach of the best journalism with the nuances and style of fictional prose. Together, these forms became a new form. Some called it “creative nonfiction,” while others dubbed the movement the “New Journalism” or the “Nonfiction Novel.” Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, Tom Wolfe’s *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Joan Didion’s *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, and Hunter S. Thompson’s *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, still rank as some of the finest writing to come out of this new movement. But of course, to define creative nonfiction so narrowly is to miss the point. Rebecca Solnit’s *Men Explain Things to Me* is a gut-punch and rallying-cry for gender progress, while Ta-Nehisi Coates’s *Between the World and Me* exudes the breadth and weight of the best prose in a nonfictional frame to deal with race in America. Norman McLean’s *Young Men and Fire* is a tragedy from a writer’s writer, a man trying desperately to comprehend natural violence amidst the backdrop of aging and death. And Michael Martone’s *The Flatness and Other Landscapes* attempts to understand the places we come from, and why that matters. The ever-growing field of creative nonfiction continues to impact readers around the globe, and in this class we will read, we will write, and we will position our art as part of a conversation with the great pioneers of the form. **Welcome to Creative Nonfiction.**

**Books**

*In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote (1966)

*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972)

*Young Men and Fire*, Norman McLean (1992)

*The Flatness and Other Landscapes*, Michael Martone (2000)

*Men Explain Things to Me*, Rebecca Solnit (2014)

*Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015)

**Assignments**

Market Report 1p. 5%

Query Letter 1p. 5%

Peer Reviews 2pp. each 15%

Midterm Piece 5-7-pp. 15%

Response Papers 2-3pp. each 15%

Final Piece 10-12pp. 25%

Participation --- 20%

**Grading Scale:**

 **A** 100-93% **B+** 89-87% **C+** 79-77% **D+** 69-67%

 **A-** 92-90% **B** 86-83% **C** 76-73% **D** 66-65%

  **B-** 82-80% **C-** 72-70% **F** 64-0%

**Class Policies:**

1. **Discussion Etiquette**: On day one we will establish our discussion ground rules as a class. Some things to consider:
	1. Our readings will bring up controversial subject matter. As college students and newly minted members of the academy, I expect you to hold yourself with professionalism, good humor, and respect. Degrading others’ opinions, stances, or remarks for any reason at any time will not be tolerated.
	2. I want you to disagree with each other. I want you to disagree with me. But disagreement does not mean denigrating, teasing, or hurting one another. Let’s be adults.
	3. I want your voice to be heard, and to some that means speaking with me outside of class rather than in class discussions. I am always available for a good chat. Communicate!
2. **Attendance:** ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY. It is extremely difficult for me to do my job if you are not here. Not only will I be unable to give insight and experience to the class, but your classmates will not be able to help you develop ideas and techniques. **I allow five unexcused absences throughout the semester**. This is NOT negotiable. If you do not attend my course you will not pass. Period. If you are on an athletic team, you are required to show me documentation from your coach of the days you will be absent. Athletes who miss class because of away games are required to turn their work in prior to leaving for their event.
3. **Preparing for Class:** At the end of each class period I will assign either a reading from the text or a short writing assignment (or both). You are expected to read the assigned texts carefully and thoroughly. DO NOT come to class if you haven’t read the text. You will only hinder the discussion.
4. **Late Work:** All homework is to be turned in ON TIME. No late work will be accepted. Again, NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED. **NOTE:** You must turn in all assignments to pass the class. Failure to turn in any assignment as scheduled will result in an ‘F’ for the class. Late papers will not be accepted.
5. **Tardiness:** I expect you to be on time to class. I begin and end class promptly. I will NEVER keep you over class time. Excessive tardiness will result in absences, and since we only have fifty minutes a day together, we need to stay on course. Be on time.
6. **Plagiarism:** Use of the intellectual property of others without attributing it to them is considered a serious academic offense. **Cheating or plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the work or for the entire course.** If you think you might be plagiarizing, you probably are.Don’t be the person who cheats. If you are having problems come talk to me about what we can do to help you avoid the cardinal sin of writing. For more detailed information regarding Academic Misconduct please consult: <http://www.uwsp.edu/dos/Pages/Academic-Misconduct.aspx>.
7. **Electronic Devices/Video**: Electronic devices are distracting and their use while others are speaking is impolite; unless you are asked to use them for a class activity, turn off your cell phones, laptops, Ipads, etc., and put them away. Laptops are not allowed unless we are workshopping, and you must have an Accommodations Request requiring use for a disability. Take notes with pencil and paper. I like pencils, and I like paper. To respect the privacy of those in the class, students may not make audio, video, or photographic recordings of lectures or other class activities without written permission from the instructor. Anyone violating this policy will be asked to turn off the device being used. Refusal to comply with the policywill result in the student being asked to leave the classroom, and possibly being reported to the Dean of Students.
8. **Accommodations:** If you require special accommodations for any reason please let me know. I will do my best to facilitate and arrange the proper accommodation.
9. **Emails**: Email is both a blessing and a curse. Please respect the fact that I am teaching several classes per semester, which means that I will do my very best to respond to your emails within 24 hours during the week (48 hours over the weekend). However, I will not recap entire class periods for you via email (stop by my office instead for some coffee and a chat), nor will I repeat information available on this syllabus or in a class handout (consult course materials before shooting off that email about essay page count). Also, I firmly believe in correspondence etiquette. Email may be informal, but I expect your messages to be polite and respectful. Include a salutation (Dear Dr. Tangedal, Hello Professor Tangedal) and conclusion (sincerely, best, thanks,). Be a pro. If your tone becomes an issue, we will have a talk.
10. **Office Hours**: I hold office hours for your benefit**. Come see me any time.**

**Course Schedule**

**M-1/22-**Course Introduction

**Part I. Bodies**

**James Baldwin, *Between the World and Me* (2015)**

**Rebecca Solnit, *Men Explain Things to Me* (2014)**

**W-1/24**-**Reading Day**

 **F-1/26-**Coates,Part I

 **M-1/29**-Coates, Part II

**W-1/31**-Coates, Part III

 **F-2/2**-Solnit, “Men Explain Things to Me”, “The Longest War”

 **M-2/5**-Solnit, “In Praise of the Threat”, “Cassandra Among the Creeps”

 **W-2/7**-Solnit, “#YesAllWomen: Feminists Rewrite the Story”

 **F-2/9**-Read Around

**M-2/12**-Read Around; **Response #1 Due**; **Market Report Due**

**Part II. America**

**Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1972)**

**W-2/14**-**Reading Day**

 **F-2/16**-Part I, Chs. 1-8

 **M-2/19**-Part I, Chs. 9-12

 **W-2/21**-Part II, Chs. 1-6

 **F-2/23**-Part II, Chs. 7-14

 **M-2/26**-Read Around

**W-2/28**-Read Around; **Response #2 Due**

 **F-3/2**- Peer Review 1; **Query Letter Due**

 **M-3/5**-Peer Review 2

 **W-3/7**-Peer Review 3

**Part III. Home**

**Michael Martone, *The Flatness and Other Landscapes* (2000)**

**F-3/9**-**Midterm Piece Due**; “The Flatness”, “Future Tense”, “The Proper Levels of Vacuum”

 **M-3/12**-“Why the Windmill?”, “Stories We Tell Ourselves”

**W-3/14-Reading Day**

 **F-3/16**-“Flyover”

 **M-3/19-**“Manufacturing Place”, “The Night Shift”

**W-3/21**-Read Around

 **F-3/23**-Read Around; **Response #3 Due**

**Part IV. Terror**

**Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (1966)**

 **M-4/2**-*In Cold Blood*

 **W-4/4**-*In Cold Blood*

 **F-4/6**-*In Cold Blood*

**M-4/9**-*In Cold Blood*

 **W-4/11**-**Reading Day**

 **F-4/13**-*In Cold Blood* + clips from *Capote* (2006)

 **M-4/16**-Read Around

 **W-4/18**-Read Around

 **F-4/20**-Read Around; **Response #4 Due**

**Part V. Fire**

**Norman McLean, *Young Men and Fire* (1992)**

 **M-4/23**-*Young Men and Fire*

 **W-4/25**-*Young Men and Fire*

 **F-4/27**-*Young Men and Fire*

 **M-4/30**-*Young Men and Fire*

 **W-5/2**-*Young Men and Fire*

 **F-5/4-**Read Around

**M-5/7**-Read Around; **Response #5 Due**

 **W-5/9-**Conferences

 **F-5/11-**Conferences

**Finals Week**

 **R-5/17-Final Piece Due** (12:30p)-Final Read Around and Synthesis