

Literary Reportage & the Novel
English 8320: Studies in Twentieth-Century American Literature
Prof. Samuel Cohen
University of Missouri
Fall 2013
F 1-3:30, Tate 114D
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The Course

This course will examine the loosely defined genre known as literary reportage (or literary journalism) historically and in the context of its relationship to the novel. We will read journalism and fiction from the eighteenth century to the twenty-first, examining the ways in which the two have informed each other; we will also read about the history, criticism, and theory of literary reportage and the novel and about the particular works and writers on whom we will be focusing. Coursework will include short presentations and a seminar paper.

The Texts

James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Mariner)
 James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Beacon)
 Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (*Prose and Poetry*, Library of America)
 Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (Penguin Classics)
 Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
 Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time* (Scribner)
 John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (Vintage)
 Camden Joy, *Lost Joy* (TNI)
 Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
 Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History* (Plume)
 Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (Vintage)
 Joe Sacco, *Journalism* (Metropolitan)
 David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster and Other Essays* (Back Bay)
 (& a ton of shorter pieces and secondary reading, to be distributed electronically)

Seven Things You Should Know

1. This is a graduate seminar, and as such is intended to be a discussion (hence the big long table instead of those little chair-desk things). You will need to take part in the discussion for this class to work, or we will spend a lot of time staring at each other. You will also need to take part to earn an A in the class. I also have an annoying rule about not eating in class that I'm going to stick to no matter how annoying people think it is.

2. You will print out and bring to class all of the assigned secondary reading for that day's meeting, with scribbles all over it indicating that you've taken notes. If you are one of those electronic people who take electronic notes with their electronic gadgets, you will show me your system so that I can be impressed by your electronicness.
3. You will give a presentation of no more than fifteen minutes on one meeting's secondary reading. Presentations must not be read, though you can have notes (but no handouts, please); think of your presentation as your chance to teach.
4. You will write a seminar paper built on original research (following MLA style). Paper topics must be approved in advance in a meeting with me; if you cannot make my office hours, we will set up an appointment at another time.
5. You will present your seminar paper during our last meeting (for this reason, *papers must be handed in at this last meeting*). Presentations should summarize the argument of the paper, detail the evidence and logical support, and can be made from notes but should not be read aloud.
6. Your grade for the course will consist of your participation in class discussion (20%), your presentation on secondary reading (20%), your seminar paper (50%), and your paper presentation (10%). (Note: I will be availing myself of the +/- grading option.)
7. If you need accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please inform me immediately. Please see me privately after class, or at my office. To request academic accommodations (for example, a note taker), students must also register with Disability Services, AO38 Brady Commons, 882-4696. Another resource, MU's Adaptive Computing Technology Center, 884-2828, is available to provide computing assistance to students with disabilities.

Schedule

Factual Fiction, Fictional Fact

Aug 23 Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*
 Lennard Davis, "News/Novels: The Undifferentiated Matrix," & "Daniel DeFoe:
 Lies as Truth," *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*

The Old New Journalism

Aug 30 Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*
 Stephen Crane, "An Experiment in Misery" & "The Men in the Storm"
 Alfred Kazin, "Introduction," Signet *Maggie*; John Hartsock, "Locating the
 Emergence of Modern Narrative Literary Journalism," *A History of
 American Literary Journalism*

Bullshit Detecting

- Sep 6 Ernest Hemingway, *In Our Time*
 Ernest Hemingway, "Japanese Earthquake" (*Toronto Daily Star*)
 Shelly Fisher Fishkin, "Introduction" & "Ernest Hemingway," *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America*

And Our Fathers That Begat Us

- Sep 13 James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*
 Jason Arthur, "Specific Soil: James Agee and the Poverty of Documentary Work" *Violet America: Regional Cosmopolitanism in U.S. Fiction Since the Great Depression*; Thomas Larson, "Lives Nurtured in Disadvantage: James Agee and Walker Evans's *Cotton Tenants*" (*LARB* 2 June 2013)

The New Yorker at Midcentury

- Sep 20 John Hersey, *Hiroshima*
 A.J. Liebling, "100,00—Count 'Em—1,000" & "The Tonsorial Election"; Joseph Mitchell, "Mazie," "Professor Sea Gull"; Lillian Ross, "How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?"
 Ben Yagoda, "'We've Got to Have More Journalism,'" "The Making of a Classic," & "The Information Man," from *About Town: The New Yorker and the World That It Made*
 "Postscript: Joseph Mitchell" (*The New Yorker* 10 June 1996)

Another Country

- Sep 27 James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*
 Mary McCarthy, "Artists in Uniform" & "Unsettling the Colonel's Hash" (*Harper's*), "Report from Vietnam I. The Home Program" (*The New York Review of Books*)
 Franny Nudelman, "'Marked for Demolition': Mary McCarthy's Vietnam Journalism" (*American Literature* 85.2 June 2013)

- Oct 4 No class (ASAP5)

New Journalism I

- Oct 11 Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*
 Gay Talese, "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" (*Esquire*)
 Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *The New Journalism*; Robert Boynton, Introduction, *The New New Journalism*

New Journalism II

- Oct 18 Norman Mailer, *Armies of the Night: History as a Novel, The Novel as History*
 Jimmy Breslin, "It's an Honor" (*New York Herald Tribune*), John McPhee, "The Search for Marvin Gardens" (*The New Yorker*)
 Louis Menand, "Norman Mailer in His Time" (*The New York Review of Books*)

Small Books

- Oct 25 Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*
 Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*
 John Taylor, "Holier Than Thou" (*New York Magazine*)

Rock Criticism +

- Nov 1 Camden Joy, *Lost Joy*
 Howard Hampton, "Let Us Now Kill White Elephants: Lester Bangs" & "Dueling Cadavers: The Mekons contra *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*," *Born in Flames: Termite Dreams, Dialectical Fairy Tales, and Pop Apocalypses*; Jonathan Lethem, "Prelude I: Talking Heads Have a New Album, It's Called Fear of Music," *Fear of Music*; Greil Marcus, "Prologue," *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll Music*; Ellen Willis, "The Velvet Underground," Greil Marcus, ed., *Stranded: Rock and Roll for a Desert Island*
 Robert Christgau, "A History of Rock Criticism," *Reporting the Arts II* (National Arts Journalism Program, Columbia University School of Journalism)
- Nov 8 No class (MMLA)

Wallace & c.

- Nov 15 David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster*
 David Foster Wallace, Chapters 1 & 9, *The Pale King*; Dave Eggers, "Impressions" (*McSweeney's*)
 Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel" (*The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*)

State of the Art

- Nov 22 Joe Sacco, *Journalism*
 Eula Biss, "Time and Distance Overcome," from *Notes from No Man's Land: American Essays*; John Jeremiah Sullivan, "At a Shelter (After Katrina)"; Wells Tower, "Desperately Seeking Mitt" (*GQ*)
 Amy Kiste Nyberg, "Theorizing Comics Journalism" (*International Journal of Comic Art* 8.2, Fall 2006)
- Nov 29 No class (Thanksgiving break)
- Dec 6 Presentations
 Papers Due