

Fall 2015

## ENGL 6240

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*University of New Orleans*

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## English 6240: Introduction to Nonfiction Literature

LA 226

T/Th: 4:30-5:45

<b>Instructor:</b>	Dr. Doreen Piano	<b>Office Hours:</b>	T/Th: 1-2, 3:30-4:30, W 2-4 & by appt.
<b>Section</b>	601		
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### Course Description

This course focuses on non-fiction writing genres such as reportage, memoir, ethnography, biography, travel writing, and archival; all are written by novelists and poets who have chosen nonfiction genres to explore a particular person, event, or culture; to bear witness or be a critical observer of an historical era or time period; to reconstruct an historical event or a particular place for personal and/or political reasons; or to examine relevant social issues pertaining to the writer's identity and/or politics. In light of these writers' primary genre of expression, we'll consider their motives for writing nonfiction, examining issues not only related to form and content but also investigating purpose and audience. In other words, we will attempt to answer the question: How does nonfiction represent specific kinds of experiences, social issues, or historical events better than poetry and/or fiction? Is it to generate interest or outrage about an issue, bring to light a submerged event or history, deliver a social critique, or reveal an intimate knowledge of a particular subject? We'll also consider ethical issues that all nonfiction writers must consider such as the relation that the writer has to her subject related to issues of accountability, representation, and credibility; truth claims associated with the re-construction of historical fact and/or specific events; and the veracity of sources used for research, whether they be archival, memory-based, observational, or representational.

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Define key concepts central to non-fiction literature: memory, experience, representation, and agency as well as narrative elements that are similar to fiction;
- Recognize the generic features of a wide range of non-fiction texts—classic and contemporary--that reveal a spectrum of experiences;
- Develop a critical understanding of the historical and literary significance of nonfiction lit (known as the 4<sup>th</sup> genre), its relation to narrative/story-telling elements, subjectivity and selfhood;
- Understand how writers use nonfiction literature as a representational practice that engages with different audiences as forms of resistance, community-making, and politics;
- Analyze a broad range of texts both through close reading and an understanding of the text's cultural and historical context;
- Identify different sources that non-fiction writers draw from to create their literary work from interviews and observation to archives, personal experience, and secondary sources.
- Engage in a critical study of a particular non-fiction genre, using secondary sources and/or engage in your own nonfiction project that engenders a particular kind of self-representational practice.
- Learn how to use various interactive technologies to participate in an online learning environment;

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## Required Course Texts

Paul Auster *The Invention of Solitude*

Thomas King *The Truth about Stories*

Haruki Murakami *What We Talk about when We talk about Writing*

Jesmyn Ward *Men We Reaped*

James Baldwin *The Fire Next Time*

Mark Doty *Still Life with Oysters and Lemon: On Objects and Intimacy*

Diane Ackerman *The Zookeeper's Wife*

Sarah Schulman *The Gentrification of the Mind*

Edwidge Danticut *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*

Gabriel Garcia Marquez *News of a Kidnapping*

George Orwell. *Homage to Catalonia*

In addition, essays will be available through Google Docs under Class Readings OR via URLs as noted in the reading calendar. (For this week, I have uploaded the essay for next week in Moodle and Google docs)

## Attendance and Preparation

This is an interactive discussion-based class that will require multiple forms of participation (written and verbal) as expected in a graduate-level course. A basic assumption of graduate seminars is that we learn not only from the professor and course readings but also from each of our classmates. All of the ideas generated in class will come from the materials we've read, so give yourself enough time to read and annotate the texts. Be open to the texts you are reading whether you agree with the author's conclusions or beliefs. Learn to take on an attitude of critical yet passionate detachment in which you can form a position on the readings once you have come to understand their subtleties.

Your participation will involve being not only an active member of the class but also a good listener. *Become aware of your own capacity to interrupt others, speak for lengthy periods of time, or make quick judgments that have no bearing on the text.* Class time will be spent doing close readings of the text, making judgments based on information the author has provided, articulating our own intellectual and emotional responses, and discussing themes sometimes in relation to supplementary readings. Responding to texts emotionally and personally is acceptable; however, a successful interpretation of a text stems from close reading or textual analysis that is informed by your own particular set of beliefs and the historic moment in which the text is being read.

## Class Assignments

The following assignments will determine your grade. I will have more in-depth information about each of the assignments posted on Google Docs in Assignments folder

### Bi-Weekly Discussion Posts/Responses (5 pts per post/5 pts for responses)

Each week, the class members will alternate between providing brief posts to my discussion question/s and responding to the posts each T/Th (in conjunction with the readings due on that day). Initial posts are due on Tuesday with responses by Wednesday/Thursday with responses by Friday. Located in a folder in Google docs called Bi-Weekly Discussions.

### Research Fetch (rolling due dates) (15 pts.)

For each writer we study, one person will be responsible for finding a suitable, relevant supplementary material that should be sent to the class Google group email with a brief introduction of the material's

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relevance. Occasionally we will have two RFs due to class size. You may assign any kind of background material from interviews, YouTube excerpts of the writer speaking, or podcasts but keep them limited to 30 minutes or a short critical article. The research fetch will involve a brief presentation and discussion.

Midterm Exam (25 pts.). Long and short essays that cover the texts and major concepts through Week 8.

Required Meeting/Conference (5 pts).

Major 'Writing Project (more details to follow)

This project will start around midterm and include the following:

- Proposal (10 pts)
- Exploratory Bibliographic Essay (20 pts)
- Draft/Peer Review (10 pts)
- Final Essay (50 pts)

## **Class Policies**

### Late Work.

Late work in this class will not be accepted without a VALID excuse. This means serious illness or family emergencies only. All late assignments will be penalized  $\frac{1}{2}$  a grade *per day* (not class) until the assignment is turned in. This policy includes missing class on a due date. Additionally, exams cannot be made up or turned in late without a VALID excuse. Please let me know if you foresee conflicts with due dates and do not email me any assignments without my approval.

### Excessive Absences.

No more than two absences (or one absence for classes over 2 hrs. long) will be tolerated in a graduate seminar. More than this will result in your final grade average penalized a full letter grade. If there is any reason that you will miss more than two classes this semester, please let me know so I can evaluate how it will affect your performance in the class.

### Grading.

Your final grade in this class will be based on individual grades given on each of the assignments in addition to an assessment of your participation in class, attendance, and preparedness. Contributing to class discussion, making an effort to engage with the texts and your classmates, asking significant questions of the texts you read are all qualities of an advance student of English Studies. Your written work should reveal an engagement and comprehension of the course themes and readings, an intellectual curiosity of the ideas we encounter through careful reading and analysis and an understanding of academic conventions in written communication.

### Written Work

All written work in this class must be properly cited (if using outside sources) and formatted. Please use MLA formatting: this includes not only citation style but also document design—margins, page numbers, heading, title—and in text/bibliographical style. Consult the latest edition of the handbook. If formatting is not heeded, your document will be penalized  $\frac{1}{2}$  a letter grade.

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### Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the Student Code of Conduct for further information. The Code is available online at <http://www.studentaffairs.uno.edu>.

### Accommodations

It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities should contact the Office of Disability Services as well as their instructors to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. For more information, please go to <http://www.ods.uno.edu>.

### Verification for Online Students

To ensure academic integrity, all students enrolled in distance learning courses at the University of New Orleans may be required to verify their identity when completing exams or other high-stakes assignments. At the discretion of the faculty member teaching the course, verification may include on-campus proctored examinations, off-site or online proctored examinations, or other reasonable measures to ensure student identity. If students cannot attend an on-campus proctored exam, UNO partners with ProctorU, a live, online proctoring service that allows students to complete exams from any location using a computer, webcam, and reliable internet connection. Verification measures for this course are identified below and any fees associated are the responsibility of the student.

### Final Thoughts.

Please do not hesitate to email me if you are having difficulty in this class. I want to make sure that all of you succeed and will help you in any way I can. However, I also assume that you will put your best effort forth intellectually by being open to the texts we discuss, by questioning and grappling with the key concepts, and by developing a passionate detachment that requires vigilant reading and writing practices.

## **Key for Readings**

All essays are in Google docs in Course Readings folder.

	<b>Reading and Assignments Calendar*</b>
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Introduction to Nonfiction Literature</b>  Syllabus; overview of class; What is Nonfiction Literature? Expectations and objectives of the class. Student Info Sheet (in class)
<b>Week 2</b>  T 8/25	<b><i>Remembering/ReTelling: The Role of Memory in Nonfiction</i></b>  Hampl, Patricia. <i>Memory and Imagination</i> (Google); Lee, C. <i>Magical Dinners</i> ; Twain, M. <i>How to Make History Dates Stick</i>

Th 8/27	Auster, Paul <i>The Invention of Solitude</i>
<b>Week 3</b>	<b><i>Remembering/ReTelling: The Role of Memory in Nonfiction</i></b>
T 9/8	Hampl, Patricia. <i>Other People's Secrets</i> (Google); Auster (cont) Research Fetch: _____
Th 9/10	Ward, Jesmyn. <i>Men We Reaped</i>
<b>Week 4</b>	<b><i>Telling Other People's Stories</i></b>
T 9/15	Ward, Jesmyn. <i>Men We Reaped</i> (continued) Research Fetch: _____
Th 9/17	Beller, Thomas. <i>Don't Call It Katrina</i> (Google docs) Bascom, Tim. Picturing the Personal Essay. ( <a href="#">LINK</a> )
<b>Week 5</b>	<b><i>Telling Other People's Stories—The Use of Archives and Interviews</i></b>
T 9/22	Ackerman, D.—The Zookeeper's Wife
Th 9/24	Ackerman, D.—The Zookeeper's Wife Research Fetch: _____
<b>Week 6</b>	<b><i>Writing History/Reporting Events</i></b>
T 9/29	Marquez, G.—News of a Kidnapping
Th 10/1	Marquez, G.—News of a Kidnapping Research Fetch: _____
<b>Week 7</b>	<b><i>Writing History/Reporting Events</i></b>
T 10/6	Orwell, George. <i>Homage to Catalonia</i> .
Th 10/8	Orwell, George. <i>Homage to Catalonia</i> . Research Fetch: _____
	Midterm Dispensed
<b>Week 8</b>	<b><i>Rewriting /Challenging History</i></b>
T 10/13	King, T. <i>The Truth about Stories</i>
Th 10/15	Mid-Semester Break—No Class
	Midterm Due 10/13
<b>Week 9</b>	<b><i>Rewriting /Challenging History</i></b>
T 10/20	King, T. <i>The Truth about Stories</i>

	Research Fetch: _____
Th 10/22	Baldwin, J. <i>The Fire Next Time</i> <i>Final Project Proposal due 10/20</i>
<b>Week 10</b>	<b>Research Week/Online Discussion</b>
T 10/27	Baldwin, J. <i>The Fire Next Time</i> Research Fetch: _____
Th 10/29	Workshop Day. Exploratory Biblio Peer Review (NO Discussion Post)
<b>Week 11</b>	<b>Rewriting /Challenging History</b>
T 11/4	Schulman, S. <i>The Gentrification of the Mind</i> <i>Exploratory Biblio due 11/4</i>
Th 11/6	Schulman, S. <i>The Gentrification of the Mind</i> Research Fetch: _____
<b>Week 12</b>	<b>Writing about Writing</b>
T 11/11	Campo, R. <i>A Case of Mistaken Identities</i> (Google); Murakami, H. <i>What I Talk About</i>
Th 11/13	Murakami, H. <i>What I Talk About</i> Research Fetch: _____
<b>Week 13</b>	<b>Writing about Art</b>
T 11/18	Cole, T. <i>Dappled Things</i> ( <a href="#">LINK</a> ); Doty, M. <i>Still Life with Lemon</i>
Th 11/20	Doty, M. <i>Still Life with Lemon</i> Research Fetch: _____ <i>Exchange Drafts 11/20</i>
<b>Week 14</b>	<b>Exile and Place</b>
T 11/25	Ruffins, Maurice. <i>St. Claude Artery</i> ; Woolf, V. <i>Street Haunting</i> ; Milosz, C. <i>Notes on Exile</i> (all on google) <i>Peer Review of Drafts Due 11/25</i>
Th 11/27	Thanksgiving Holiday—No Class
<b>Week 15</b>	<b>Exile and Place</b>
T 12/1	Milosz, C. <i>Notes on Exile</i> ; (Google) Danticut, E. <i>Create Dangerously</i>
Th 12/3	Danticut, E. <i>Create Dangerously</i> Research Fetch: _____
<b>Finals</b>	

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Week	
T 12/8	Final essays/presentations due