SYLLABUS, SUMMER 2015
WRITERS IN NEW YORK: CREATIVE NONFICTION (CRAFT SEMINAR)
CRWRI-UA.835.001

Professor: Saïd Sayrafiezadeh
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Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30-5:00
Location: Bobst Library, 70 Washington Square South, Room LL145

Course Description
This creative nonfiction craft class will be a combination of writing, reading, discussion and analysis. It will also ask—but maybe not answer—what exactly constitutes creative nonfiction? Using excerpts from contemporary memoir, reportage, essays, newspaper articles, film, song (and anything else that may have a compelling narrative), we’ll investigate how artists shape raw material; how they choose to end a story; how they employ dialogue; how they create drama; how tone and voice can enhance or distract from the story. We’ll also wrestle with the line between exaggeration and creative license. Together we will examine traditional storytelling elements like character, arc, pace—never mind that the pieces are nonfiction. We’ll also expand into the murkier realms of voice, tension, humor, sentimentality and cliché. Our class discussions will include fundamental writerly concerns regarding process, discipline and distraction, as well as how to be published, how to find an agent, how to deal with an editor. This class is not designed to analyze texts as literature, but as pieces created by working writers. The goal is for you to be able to understand what authors are doing behind the scenes in order to become strong and successful writers in your own right.

Course Reader
Course reader includes short stories, personal essays, memoir excerpts, magazine articles. Course reader is not needed for the first class, but please bring it for the second class.

It can be purchased at:
Unique Copy Center
252 Greene St.
212-420-9198
Price: $TK

Reading Schedule
Class 1, Tuesday, May 26) “World Trade Center, Spring 2001” by Bryan Charles; “The Willing Nanny” (New York Times); Coal Miner’s Daughter by Loretta Lynn

Class 2, Thursday, May 28) “Something that Needs Nothing” by Miranda July; “The Mistress’s Daughter” by A.M. Homes

Class 3, Tuesday, June 2) “We Miss You: A Study of Get-Well Letters from a Fourth Grade Class” by Lydia Davis; The Colossus of New York (excerpt), by Colson Whitehead
Class 4, Thursday, June 4) “Under the Table” by J.E. Buntin; *A Million Little Pieces* (excerpt) by James Frey

Class 5, Tuesday, June 9) “Notes From a Bystander” (draft) by Saïd Sayrafiezadeh; “Notes From a Bystander” (*McSweeney’s*) by Saïd Sayrafiezadeh; mrbellersneighborhood.com (various stories)

Class 6, Thursday, June 11) *Half a Life* (excerpt) by Darin Strauss; “Notes of a Native Son,” by James Baldwin

Class 7, Tuesday, June 16) *The Glass Castle* (excerpt) by Jeannette Walls; “That Crafty Feeling,” “Dead Man Laughing,” by Zadie Smith

Class 8, Thursday, June 18) “Edison, New Jersey,” by Junot Diaz; “Christmas in July” by Sloane Crosley

**Other Information**

Office Hours:
When: By appointment only. Email me to set up a time.
Where: An available table at Housing Works Bookstore Café, 126 Crosby Street.

FAQ: Since it’s a café, does that mean I have to buy a coffee?
Answer: No, you’re not obligated to purchase anything.

The evaluation of your work will be based on:

1) Your participation: Come on time to class. Come back from break on time. Arrive ready to talk and be engaged and be generous. Whatever you do, don’t text. Texting will lower your grade.

   FAQ: Will we get a break?
   Answer: Yes, there’s a 10-minute break
   FAQ: Can I eat during class?
   Answer: Yes.

2) Your supplies: No laptops, no tablets, no cellphones. Bring your course reader to every class. This is essential. We will be looking at specific lines, paragraphs, words of the stories we read—you can’t work from memory. Having the course reader counts as part of your class participation grade. Bring paper and pen to every class.

   FAQ: Do I really need the course reader or can I use library books?
   Answer: There are things in the course reader that you won’t find anywhere else. You’re also going to be writing notes in your course reader.

3) Your reading and responses: You will be required to read short work by published authors—provided in your course reader. Plus some odds and ends that I’ll distribute in class. You will
respond to each story—on a craft level—in a three-hundredish-word paper. This will differ from a standard literature paper in that you will address nuts-and-bolts storytelling techniques.

FAQ: What point size and font should I use?
Answer: Always double space. Always 12 pt. type, Times. Always include page numbers, and put word count at top of the first page.

4) Your outside assignments: There will be some small research assignments outside of the classroom.

5) Your final paper: A final paper of approximately 1500 words will be due by final class. Topic TBD.

6) Your etiquette: Please be thoughtful, constructive, considerate and engaged in class discussion.

7) Your electronics: We’ll be using old-fashioned paper. No cellphones in class. No laptops. No tablets. Turn everything off before coming into the classroom. You will have a break each class to do all the texting you want.

8) Your attendance: College policy is that students are expected to attend all class sessions for courses in which they are enrolled. Since this course meets twice a week for only 4 weeks, more than one absence will threaten your grade. After your first two absences, each additional one will lower your grade. Absences in excess of two weeks require withdrawal from the course. Please email me before class if you’re going to be absent.

9) Your grades: Your final grade for this course will be incorporated into your workshop grade. Workshop instructors will be responsible for assigning final grades with input from craft instructors. Your craft grade is in large part based on class participation and attendance.
   a. Class participation and attendance will count for 50% of your grade, this includes coming to class on time with the course reader (see above), as well as speaking aloud.
   b. Timely completion of your writing (personal responses, final paper, out-of-class assignments, etc.) will count for 50%.

10) Plagiarism: NYU takes plagiarism very seriously. I’m required to report any case of suspected plagiarism. Please don’t do it.

11) Warning: The literature we read for class may occasionally describe in unapologetic detail misogyny, racism, homophobia, sexual abuse, drug abuse, xenophobia, violence, etc. If you feel that you’d rather not read about certain subjects, please consider whether this is the class for you.

Changes in Syllabus:
The syllabus may be modified as deemed appropriate. Any changes will be announced in class.
FAQ: What if I have a question about something? Can I email you?
Answer: Yes. You should always feel free to reach out to me by email.