Creative Non-Fiction: Introduction

Instructor: mia susan amir

Course Description and Objectives:

Creative Nonfiction is an exciting form that embraces several sub-forms. In this course we will focus our exploration on memoir, the personal essay, lyric essay, and narrative journalism.

We will be reading a great deal over the next 8 weeks, because learning to write is in fact the work of learning to read (writing and the world) at the level of craft. We will approach writing as wrighters; as students of form and shape; as builders of vessels that match the need and demand of the stories we long to tell – and perhaps, the waters we long to send them out into.

We will be writing, at least as much as we will be reading!

Through intensive engagement with assigned readings, peer work, embodied creative exercises, prompts that draw from fiction, poetry and theatre, and lively craft discussions, we will:

• get to know ourselves as writers;
• explore some big questions about the nature of “truth”, memory, history, the imagination, and the social, political, cultural, and even spiritual role of memoir;
• strengthen our techniques in telling the stories that make and/or provoke us; and
• generate some honest, compelling, and well crafted writing!

We’re here to explore our creative edges, to learn from each other, to be surprised by what we know, to uncover what we do not. We’re here to enter uncharted territory. We may find ourselves in moments of hard disagreement. It is possible that those moments will be the most important in our learning, particularly if consistently approach each other’s work and thinking with generosity and dignity.

Instructor Availability:

I will always endeavour to respond to questions within 24 hours. I will also check in on our discussion forum regularly throughout the week, and will participate in those conversations.

I will provide detailed feedback on the material you submit to the assignment folders. Please be patient. It can often take a week, but sometimes longer, to return assignments to you. I read your work very carefully to provide feedback that is helpful and thoughtful as possible.
Course Schedule

1. Opening (Week 1)
   - Overview of course
   - Student introductions
   - What does “creative nonfiction” mean?
   - Why does story matter?
   - Setting learning and creative goals
   - Initial excavations of the content of our lives

2. Memoir (Weeks 2 & 3)
   - The challenges, ethics and responsibilities of writing from life
   - Memory and the question of “Truth”
   - Creating a character out of the self, and others
   - Point of view
   - Descriptive writing: conveying emotion and story through the body and the senses
   - The language of landscape
   - World-building and context setting
   - Scenes and narrative bridges

3. Process, Risk, Revision (Week 4)
   - Exploring our writing habits and process
   - The necessity of vulnerability and risk
   - The generative work of failure
   - Tools for revision

4. Personal Essay (Week 5)
   - Voice
   - Time
   - Pacing
- Story selection
- Weaving idea through story

5. Position, Imagination, Impact (Week 6)
- Tools for imaginative inquiry
- Excavating the archive
- Self and story in historical context
- Political and healing properties of CNF
- Workshop

6. Lyric Essay (Week 7)
- Imagery, metaphor, sound, rhythm
- Gaps, personification, juxtaposition, montage
- Structure
- Workshop

7. Literary Journalism (Week 8)
- Research
- Interviewing techniques
- Maintaining forward momentum
- Sending your work out

***NOTE: This schedule is subject to change. Students will be notified of changes on the discussion forum or by email.***