

HIST 485/665 Historical Non-Fiction

Fall 2019

Dr. Elena Razlogova

Mondays, 14h45-17h30 (we will meet at 15:00)

Professor Elena Razlogova

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Office hours: Mondays 18h-20h, or by appointment

Course Description

This course will teach students how to produce rigorous history for a broader public. Participants will begin by examining books, articles, podcasts, and graphic novels that have bridged the divide between academic and popular audiences. The main part of the course will teach strategies drawn from literary non-fiction, such as narrative structure, voice, and point of view. The course will include writing and storyboarding exercises, as well as audio recording and editing tutorials. It will provide opportunities to meet with local writers and learn how to pitch your writing to general-interest publications. For a final project, each student will produce either a non-fiction essay or a podcast episode.

Grading

10% - Book critique (5% written; 5% oral)

(Option: Present on Podcasting or Graphic Narrative instead)

20% - Peer critiques (approx. 2.5% per critique + overall dedication and care)

30% - Participation: attentive and vocal presence during the entire course, including discussions in class, workshops, and individual meetings with me

40% - Final Project Portfolio - a draft article or podcast on a historical subject and all assignments leading to the final draft.

Note

More readings will be added on writing and on podcasting for the workshops.

Schedule

Sept 9. Course Introduction: NonFiction for Historians

Brainstorm topics; share research already done; share favorite nonfiction book, magazines, podcasts, graphic novels

Sept. 16 What Is Historical Nonfiction?

Reading

“Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s Unlikely Path to the Supreme Court,” *New Yorker*, October 1, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/08/ruth-bader-ginsburgs-unlikely-path-to-the-supreme-court>.

“The Atomic Origins of Climate Science,” *New Yorker*, January 23, 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/30/the-atomic-origins-of-climate-science>.

Lopate, Phillip. “Introduction,” In *To Show and to Tell: The Craft of Literary Nonfiction*. New York: Free Press, 2013.

Pyne, Stephen J. “Introduction.” In *Voice and Vision: A Guide to Writing History and Other Serious Nonfiction*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011.

McPhee, John. “Draft No. 4.” *New Yorker*, April 29, 2013. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/04/29/draft-no-4>

Workshop Revising

Bring to class a printout of an introduction to a paper you already completed for another class. It would be best to use the paper you'd like to revise for this class, if you are doing that. If you can use a research paper, great, if not, just use any essay of your own that you are proud of. In class, you will revise your introductory paragraph in the style of Jill Lepore.

Sept. 23 No Class - Listen to Podcasts

Listen to one episode of each:

BackStory, <https://www.backstoryradio.org/>

Revisionist History, <http://revisionisthistory.com/>

- The Memory Palace*, <http://thememorypalace.us/>
99% Invisible (design), <https://99percentinvisible.org/>
More Perfect (Supreme Court, from RadioLab), <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolabmoreperfect>
The Last Archive, <https://www.thelastarchive.com>
Dan Carlin's Hardcore History, <https://www.dancarlin.com/hardcore-history-series/> -
 Note: his episodes can be long, so you don't have to listen to an entire episode, just up to an hour
 Explore more:
Serial (Season 1 especially) <https://serialpodcast.org/season-one>
S-Town, <https://stowncast.org/>
This American Life (a classic), <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/>
Longform Podcast (about nonfiction writing), <https://longform.org/podcast>
Secret Feminist Agenda (academic feminist podcast), <https://secretfeministagenda.com/>
 Listen and Read:
 "America's Complex History With Tobacco, From 'The Marlboro Man' To E-Cigarettes,"
WBUR (NPR), July 11, 2019, <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2019/07/11/tobacco-history>
 Caroline Kitchener, "A Female Historian Wrote a Book. Two Male Historians Went on
 NPR to Talk about It. They Never Mentioned Her Name. It's Sarah Milov," *The Lily*, July 14,
 2019, <https://www.thelily.com/a-female-historian-wrote-a-book-two-male-historians-went-on-npr-to-talk-about-it-they-never-mentioned-her-name/>
 Listen and Read:
Fresh Air (NPR), <https://www.npr.org/podcasts/381444908/fresh-air>
 Kerr, Jolie. "How to Talk to People, According to Terry Gross." *New York Times*,
 November 17, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/17/style/self-care/terry-gross-conversation-advice.html>
 Listen and Listen:
The Memory Palace, <http://thememorypalace.us/>
 Nate DiMeo Talks about producing *Memory Palace* on RadioLab, <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/memory-palace>
- Sept. 30 What Is Historical Podcasting?**
Listening
 See above.
Reading
 "A Beginner's Guide to Academic Podcasting," *Global Academy Jobs Blog*, January 21,
 2019, <https://blog.globalacademyjobs.com/a-beginners-guide-to-academic-podcasting/>
Workshop Working with Sound
 Bring to class a sound recording related to the subject of your final project (will say more
 on how to do it for pre-modern projects)
- Oct. 7 What Is Historical Graphic Nonfiction?**
Reading
 Selections: Art Spiegelman, *Maus*; Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, Alison Bechdel, *Fun
 Home*; Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza*
 Joshua Brown, "Of Mice and Memory," *Oral History Review* 16, no. 1 (1988): 91–109.
<https://www-jstor-org.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/stable/3674810>
 Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus*, selections.
 McPhee, John. "Structure." *New Yorker*, January 14, 2013. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/01/14/structure>
 Whynott, Douglas. "Some Thoughts on Nonfiction Book Structures," *Writer's Chronicle*,
 May/Summer 2008.
Workshop Storyboarding
 Bring to class 20+ index cards
- Oct. 14 Thanksgiving - No Class**

Oct. 21 Point of View - Election Day*Reading*

Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (scan)

Boynnton, Robert. "Introduction." In *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*. New York: Vintage, 2005.

Talese, Gay. "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold." *Esquire*, April 1966. <http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a638/frank-sinatra-has-a-cold-gay-talese/>

Reiken, Frederick. "The Author-Narrator-Character Merge."

Workshop Point of View

Bring an expository paragraph from your final project. You will practice telling this story from different points of view.

Oct. 28 Making Scenes*Reading*

Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* (scan)

Baxter, Charles. "On Defamiliarization," in *Burning Down the House*

Clark, Roy Peter. "Cinematic Angles." In *Writing Tools*

Workshop Scenes

Bring a photograph or drawing related to your research. You will write a scene based on it.

Nov. 4 Experimental writing*Reading*

Queyras, Sina. *My Ariel* (selections)

Nelson, Maggie. "'A Sort of Leaning Against': Writing with, from, and for Others." In *The Writer's Notebook II: Craft Essays from Tin House*, edited by Christopher Beha, 83–103. Tin House Books, 2012.

Visiting writer Sina Queyras will come to talk to you about her writing and research process.

Workshop Experimental writing

Bring to class a rough draft of a paragraph from your project, and a favorite poem. You will revise your paragraph in the style of your favorite poet in class.

Nov. 11 Voice*Reading*

Šukys, Julija. *Siberian Exile* (scan)

Gornick, Vivian. Everything up to "The Memoir." In *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

Clark, Roy Peter. "Voice," in *Writing Tools*

Workshop Self-reflexive historical writing

Bring a scene from your project. You will revise it, bringing yourself into the narrative.

Nov. 18 Incorporating Abstraction*Reading*

Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water* (scan)

Clark, Roy Peter. "Ladder of Abstraction," in *Writing Tools*

Workshop Incorporating Abstraction

Bring an analytical/theoretical paragraph from your project. You will revise it in class.

Nov. 25 No Class—Work on Your Projects**Dec. 2 Draft Critiques****Dec. 3 Make-up Day - Draft Critiques**

We will use this meeting for any remaining draft critiques if necessary.

Dec 9. Final Draft & Portfolio Due

Your Portfolio should include your Final Project, all other written assignments, and all your critiques of your peers' work.

Major Assignments**Book Critique**

The purpose of a book critique is to generate discussion in class, therefore it cannot be made up after the fact. The written part can be counted only if it was presented in class on the day when the book was assigned.

Come to class having read the entire book, with the book in hand or on your e-reader/computer. You will report on the book and will lead the discussion of the book excerpt read by everyone.

Come to class with four points to make about the book. Please pick one concrete example from the book (including page numbers/e-reader location to help us find it in class) to illustrate each point you make. These points should consider writing style, structure, argument, and one other aspects of the book, including:

1. **Required** Argument. In what way is the author's main argument advance our understanding of the subject?
2. **Required** Structure. How does the structure of the book help us to understand its argument?
3. **Required** Writing style. How does the writing style help convey the argument and the feeling of the historical moment?
4. Theoretical approach. How is the book effective in applying its theoretical framework?
5. Research methodology. How is the book effective in using primary sources?

Your four points should be typed up (one cogent paragraph per each point) and numbered (1, 2, 3, 4). At the top of the page, put your name, date, and the bibliographic information about the book (see Style Guide). Proofread, spellcheck, double-space, include page numbers, and use standard font and margins. I will grade this assignment for analytical insight, writing style, and formatting (see Style Guide).

Each of you will have 5 minutes in class (no more—I will time it) to summarize your points. I will grade your presentation for analytical insight, articulate spoken argument, and ability to complete your presentation on time.

If you are nervous about talking, for this first assignment only, you can read from the prepared text. For timing, please note that 1 double-spaced page in 12pt Times/Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins usually takes 2 minutes to read aloud. All other critiques (see below) must be spoken, not read.

How to Read a Book

Paul N. Edwards, "How to Read a Book, v. 5.0." <http://pne.people.si.umich.edu/PDF/howtoread.pdf>

List of Books for Review

Thompson, Heather Ann. *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and Its Legacy*. New York: Pantheon, 2016.

Recommended for students who are interested in a study focused on a particular event or person. This is also a work of activist scholarship. Reviewed widely in glowing terms, including four times in the New York Times. Nominated for numerous book awards.

Boo, Katherine. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*. New York: Random House, 2014.

Recommended for students who are interested in non-Western subjects. This book is a work of journalism and is contemporary rather than historical, but it is assigned in literary journalism courses as a model work. Award-winning as well.

Šukys, Julija. *Siberian Exile: Blood, War, and a Granddaughter's Reckoning*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

Recommended for student who are interested in family/autobiographical historical writing and ethical/narrative problems related to the genre.. The author is a prize-winning creative nonfiction writer and an excellent historical researcher. The author may join discussion.

Queyras, Sina. *My Ariel*. Toronto: Coach House Books, 2017.

Recommended for students who are interested in poetry and experimental writing. Author is a prize-winning poet teaching at Concordia and may join for discussion.

Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. New York, N.Y.; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009.
Recommended for students who are interested in non-Western subjects and using the devices of fiction for historical writing. Professor Wilson Jacob uses this book in teaching.

Peer Critiques

To Authors Presenting their Drafts *Your drafts are due to your classmates and me by email, four days before the start of class when they are discussed. Don't be late. Your deadlines are obligations to other adults. Finish editing and revising far enough ahead of time that you can accommodate computer or printer snafus.*

To Critics: *The purpose of a peer critique is to generate discussion in class that is helpful in revisions, therefore it cannot be made up after the fact. The written part can be counted only if it was presented in class on the day when the draft is discussed. Emailed comments, however helpful, don't count toward the grade.*

Come to class with a printout of the article under review with your written comments. Use our book discussions as a guide for evaluating your peers' essays. Your suggestions should be concrete:

1. **Required** Argument. Does the author's main argument advance our understanding of the subject? How? How can the argument be strengthened by rewriting, more secondary reading, or further research?
2. **Required** Structure. Does the structure of the article help us to understand its argument? How? What alternative structure might work better?
3. **Required** Writing style/Sound design. Does the writing style/sound design help convey the argument and the feeling of the historical moment? How? How can it be improved to convey better?
4. Research methodology. Is the article effective in using primary sources? How? What additional research is required?
5. Theoretical approach. Is the article effective in applying its theoretical framework? How? Can the author incorporate theory in a more accessible and creative way?

Your four points should be typed up (one cogent paragraph per each point) and numbered (1, 2, 3, 4). At the top of the page, put your name, date, and the bibliographic information about the book (see Style Guide). Proofread, spellcheck, double-space, include page numbers, and use standard font and margins. I will grade this assignment for analytical insight, writing style, and formatting (see Style Guide).

Each of you will have 5 minutes in class (no more—I will time it) to summarize your points. I will grade your presentation for analytical insight, articulate spoken argument, and ability to complete your presentation on time.

Final Draft & Portfolio

Your final draft (15-20 pp) should revise the article you brought in the beginning of class for a nonacademic audience. Your revisions should reflect all the readings and workshops done during the semester. It should be formatted as a submission to a particular journal of your choice.

Your podcast should be at least 10 minutes long and contain at least three of the following multiple elements—your voice, music, sound effects, interviews, documentary sound excerpts. It should be accompanied by at least 3-page (double-spaced) statement where you explain the contribution of your piece in terms of theoretical analysis, archival/oral history work, and podcast aesthetics. You might want to refer to a history podcast that you used as a model to help explain your approach.

Your portfolio will include all the writing you did during the semester. See assignments in the Schedule.

Style Guide

Each of your written assignments should be formatted as follows:

Title

Your name

Date

Page numbers

12-point Times/Times New Roman font 1-inch margins

Double-spaced

Spellchecked

Proofread for grammar and punctuation Citations formatted in the Chicago Style

Writing Tools

Dictionaries and Reference

More on this in class.

The Oxford English Dictionary Online, <http://0-www.oed.com.mercury.concordia.ca>

Use for etymology, earliest usages, multiple usage examples. (McGill must subscribe too.)

Merriam-Webster Online, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>

Sometimes better for modern usage than OED. Free online. Includes Thesaurus.

Rodale, J. I. *The Synonym Finder*. Revised edition. New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 1986. (or a more recent edition).

The best thesaurus out there.

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913)

An old dictionary, to be used for inspiration and revision.

For directions on how to use this dictionary, read McPhee, John. "Draft No. 4." *New Yorker*, April 29, 2013. (assigned for March 2) <http://jsomers.net/mcphee-draft-no-4.pdf>

For directions on how to download on your computer or install on your smartphone, see <http://jsomers.net/blog/dictionary>

Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style* (1918), <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>

Free online. Or buy a later edition.

Chicago Manual of Style Online, <http://0-www.chicagomanualofstyle.org.mercury.concordia.ca/16/contents.html>

Citation, formatting, and usage. (McGill must subscribe too)

Writing Software

Scrivener, <https://www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.php>

Software created especially for longform creative writing: allows you you to write in chunks of prose, then move them around in revision. Includes index card view that helps brainstorm narrative structure. Includes templates for novels, screenplays, research papers. You can use it for organizing source files and notetaking as well as writing. Mobile version too stripped down for my taste.

Ulysses, <https://www.ulyssesapp.com>

Simpler version of the above. Doesn't have index card view. But its mobile version organizes notetaking brilliantly, with keywords and saved searches—allows me to work on my writing at all times.

Zotero, <https://www.zotero.org>

A free open-source research tool to keep track of your sources and format footnotes. Indispensable for large-scale archival research.

Scanner Pro, <https://readdle.com/products/scannerpro>

Turns your smartphone into a portable scanner. This or any analogous app will greatly simplify your archival research.

GoodReader, <https://goodreader.com>

PDF reading & annotating tool.

Calibre, <https://calibre-ebook.com>

The best free desktop ebook reader.

Marvin, <http://appstafarian.com>

The best iOS book reader.

Audio Software and Guides

Audacity

<https://www.audacityteam.org/>

Audacity: Guide for Beginners (You can find more tutorials on YouTube)

<https://youtu.be/aCisC3sHneM>

Post-production and Audio Platforms

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/03/01/the-simple-guide-to-academic-podcasting-postproduction/>

Introduction to Oral History and Interviewing (Concordia Oral History)

<http://storytelling.concordia.ca/toolbox/webinars/introduction-oral-history-and-interviewing>

Stitcher - Podcast Listening app

<https://www.stitcher.com/>

Reading Material

More on this in class. These are meant for inspiration as well as practical advice. You may want to subscribe to the first seven sites on Twitter.

“The Art of Nonfiction” interviews, *Paris Review* (all online, link to the first one), <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5601/joan-didion-the-art-of-nonfiction-no-1-joan-didion>

Longreads, <https://longreads.com>

Longform Podcast, <https://longform.org/podcast>

Open Culture, <http://www.openculture.com/>

Monoskop, <https://monoskop.org/Monoskop>

Aaaaarg, <http://aaaaarg.fail>

Libgen, <http://gen.lib.rus.ec>

Letters of Note, <http://www.lettersofnote.com>

“Readings.” *Toronto Writing Workshop*, April 12, 2016. <https://torontowritingworkshopblog.wordpress.com/readings/>

A Diagrammatical Dissertation on Opening Lines of Notable Novels,

<https://www.popchartlab.com/products/a-diagrammatical-dissertation-on-opening-lines-of-notable-novels>

“David Foster Wallace’s Mind-Blowing Creative Nonfiction Syllabus.” *Slate*, November 10, 2014. http://www.salon.com/2014/11/10/david_foster_wallaces_mind_blowing_creative_nonfiction_syllabus_this_does_not_mean_an_essayists_goal_is_to_share_or_express_herself_or_whatever_feel_good_term_you_got_taught_in_h/

Writing Advice

“(i) Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.

(ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.

(iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.

(iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.

(v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.

(vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.”

George Orwell

“Substitute 'damn' every time you're inclined to write 'very;' your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.”

Mark Twain