**Creating Art from Real Life**

GESM 110g: Seminar in the Arts

Dr. Mike Bunn

This is a combination literature & creative writing course serving as an exploration of the ways authors draw upon real-life events to produce creative texts. We will analyze a range of texts (short stories, essays, songs, reality TV, etc.) that either overtly—or implicitly—blur the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. The texts will challenge our understandings of these two genres, and questions guiding our analysis will include:

What do we make of “fiction” that is based on the lives and experiences of actual people?

What expectations do the two genres create for an audience?

What is at stake when narratives blur the distinction between reality and fiction?

What can this inquiry tell us about our own ability to tell personal stories through art?

The careful analysis of contemporary creative texts will complicate our notions of “truth” as the primary distinction between fiction and nonfiction. We will examine recent debates regarding false memoirs, particularly the uproar surrounding James Frey’s supposed memoir *A Million Little Pieces*. We will read fiction and nonfiction concerning identical topics—often written by the same author—to learn how genre can shape the portrayal of subject matter.

As students, you will draw from your own life to learn more about the creative process and about the different requirements and expectations involved in producing fiction and nonfiction. You will write both a fictional and a nonfictional account of **the same** event in order to produce a short story and a personal essay based on something that actually happened to you. This will help you understand the particular demands that fiction and nonfiction place on writers and to realize your own affinities for and frustrations with working within each genre.

We will do all of this work—half of it literary study and half of it creative writing—in an attempt to identify what makes fiction and nonfiction distinct genres (despite their many narrative similarities), and in order to understand the particular demands that each genre places on artists and audiences.