SYLLABUS - ANG 6185
Later 20th Century U.S. Literature: Constructing the “I” in American Literature and Popular Culture

Professor Caroline Brown
Autumn 2016
Course Meeting Times: Friday, 1-4pm
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Course Description
Creative nonfiction and life writing—including the memoir, the personal essay, literary journalism, and “faction”—have become increasingly popular literary formats. Why? What do they do, say, reveal, or permit that have made them so resonant for contemporary audiences? What do they authorize? How, when, and where do they withhold? This course, “Later Twentieth Century US Literature: Constructing the ‘I’ in American Literature and Popular Culture,” will use forms of narrative self-construction in order to examine both American identity and its relationship to aesthetic innovation. By reading a cross-section of American authors who write on (or revise) shared topics and exploring the diverse autobiographical genres they produce, “Later Twentieth Century US Literature” seeks to gain insight into how individual subjectivity can be used to map cultural shift and aesthetic engagement. We will thus read nonfiction, fiction, and poetry; analyze visual culture; and, view a classic of American cinema. Rather than a course on creative nonfiction or life writing, this seminar will engage in a dialogue about how writers participate in larger conversations: with other writers and artists; with cultural systems and ideological frameworks; with family, legacy, and the self.

Required Texts (Available at UdeM Bookstore)
Truman Capote | In Cold Blood
Ta-Nehisi Coates | Between the World and Me
Edwidge Danticat | Brother, I’m Dying
Joy Harjo | Crazy Brave
Barack Obama | Dreams from My Father
Viet Thanh Nguyen | The Sympathizer
Ann Patchett | Truth and Beauty
Helen Prejean | Dead Man Walking
Claudia Rankine | Citizen

[Lucy Grealy’s Autobiography of a Face is currently out of print. A digital version will be available via Studium.]

Course Objectives
(1) A primary objective of this course is for us to be conscious of how we engage in critical inquiry and, in the process, claim space as scholars. There is no prescribed way to be an academic. This course will function as a workshop in which students actively create their own strategies for intellectual engagement with complex texts and issues.
(2) Central to this process is reading. It's necessary to read for class. Read critically and on time, both the primary work and assigned scholarly text(s).
(3) Discussion is the most obvious manifestation of the life of the mind in the university classroom. It’s also essential in the creation of a community of thinkers. In order to create a healthy environment,
it’s important to treat others with respect while feeling that we have the right and responsibility to question and challenge other thinkers and writers.

(4) Each class participant is expected to lead a seminar session. The sign up sheet will be passed around during the second week of class. Participants will sign up for one seminar session, which is a two-part assignment.

(5) During the semester, students will lead a session on one of the following writers/directors: Truman Capote, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Francis Ford Coppola, Edwidge Danticat, Lucy Grealy, Joy Harjo, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Barack Obama, Ann Patchett, Sister Helen Prejean, Claudia Rankine. (Depending on the number of students in the class, only one should sign up per session, two students maximum.) Leading the seminar is basically setting that day’s agenda. This can occur in any number of ways, including responding to or challenging specific issues within a text or brought up by other scholars. Your presentation should be from 20 to 30 minutes; another 20 minutes will be allotted for class discussion. You have flexibility in how you lead the discussion and should not feel obliged to reference or rely on the supplemental works that I have chosen for that day. However, whatever approach you take, you need an argument. Spend time creating one. It should be clear and succinct. Be daring here—but realistic. (You have less than an hour.) Paper #1 is a self-assessment due the week following your oral presentation. There are three segments to this portion of the assignment: (1) Pedagogical Goals: what you were hoping to achieve in your discussion; (2) Methodology: your approach, argument, scholarly supports; (3) Self-Assessment: evaluate your argument and the conversation created. What did you plan? What did you accomplish? What could you have revised? (Feel free to discuss your concerns, worries, and/or developing perspectives with me by at least the week before you lead discussion.)

(6) Your final paper should be 15 to 20 pages (apart from the works cited section and end notes). Once again, good research is an imperative in dialoguing with a text on several levels. Your bibliography should consist of 5 to 10 sources. Create a solid and compelling argument that can sustain your interest for that much time. Rather than just the last hurdle to your final grade, it might be worthwhile to approach this endeavor as the foundation for what might become a journal article, conference paper, or larger project. If so, what’s already been done in the field? How will your work contribute to a greater understanding of the text and the issues surrounding it, whether during the era of its creation or subsequently? How does the text under examination address/inform/reveal the interests, ambivalence, obsessions, and conflicts of a specific era, including our own? Use prior seminar sessions as a way to gain insight into your own analysis.

(7) Paper #1 and paper #2 should analyze different works.

Course Mechanics

• Class participation is a must. It improves the quality of discussion (and is graded for both content and frequency).

• All essays must be typed. Each should be double-spaced and have a one-inch margin. Please use a standard font. Remember to title your essays and include page numbers. Staple all pages together.

• Plagiarism, the uncredited use of another’s words, research, and thoughts, is forbidden. Please document your sources appropriately.

• You are responsible for collecting any materials or assignments handed out during an absence.
Course Requirements

- Participation 10%
- Oral Presentation and Self-Assessment 30%
- Final Essay (15-20 pp) 60%

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (9/2) Introductions

The Death Penalty: Spiritual Redemption as Political Imperative
*Giorgio Agamben, Homo sacer (excerpts)

WEEK 2 (9/9) In Cold Blood (Truman Capote)

WEEK 3 (9/16) Dead Man Walking (Sister Helen Prejean)

Black Masculinities: Fathers and Sons
*Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”

WEEK 4 (9/23) Dreams from My Father (Barack Obama)

WEEK 5 (9/30) Between the World and Me (Ta-Nehesi Coates)
*James Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook,” The Fire Next Time

The Vietnam War and the Racial Gaze: Revising Revisions
*Diana Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas (excerpts)

WEEK 6 (10/7) Film: Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola; 202 minutes)

WEEK 7 (10/14) The Sympathizer (Viet Thanh Nguyen)

WEEK 8 (10/21) Directed Reading

READING WEEK: October 28, 2016
Love and Friendship: Women’s Writing and Authorial Self-Construction
  *Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”

WEEK 9 (11/4) *Autobiography of a Face* (Lucy Grealy)

WEEK 10 (11/11) *Truth and Beauty* (Ann Patchett)

When the Personal Is Political: the Memoir as Social Engagement
  *Gillian Rose, “Women and Everyday Spaces”
  *Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (excerpts)

WEEK 11 (11/18) *Crazy Brave* (Joy Harjo)

WEEK 12 (11/25) *Brother, I’m Dying* (Edwidge Danticat)

The Postmodern Self: Creating Conversations Across Genres
  *bell hooks, “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination”
  *Peggy Phelan, “Broken Symmetries: memory, sight, love”
    (from *Unmarked: the politics of performance*)

WEEK 13 (12/2) *Citizen* (Claudia Rankine)
  Visual Artists: Lorna Simpson, Carrie Mae Weems, Glenn Ligon

PAPER #2 (DUE: FRIDAY, December 16, 2016)