Spring 2-1-2018

LIT 522.01: Seminar in Comparative Literature: Historical Trauma

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University of Montana, Missoula

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LIT 522: Literature and Historical Trauma
Spring 2018, Tuesdays 6:30-9:20, Eck Hall 103B

Prof. Eric Reimer
Office: Eck Hall 226
Office hours: M 9-11, W 1-2, and by appt.

About the Course

Underpinned by questions and issues emerging from contemporary trauma theory and, more generally, by the ongoing discussions of historical interpretation, this course will focus on the representations of trauma and traumatic experience in literature and film. Our primary texts will in various ways focus on characters (and collectives) that have lived through or otherwise inherited traumatic events without really understanding them, and that find themselves both remembering and reordering in an effort to reconstruct the past. Through our reading and inquiry, we will undoubtedly come to understand how the literary imagination provides an expansive space for exploring the modalities of responding to trauma. We will want, too, ultimately, to consider that the cultivation of empathy may be essential in the writing of trauma and human misery. Some of our operative questions will include: What constitutes trauma literature? What is the relationship between traumatic experience and memory? What are the particular difficulties associated with the representation of trauma? How and when do horrific events become part of a history passed on to the future? To what extent can traumatic suffering be overcome, and what might be the means of doing so? What kinds of memorialization are most appropriate for those who have experienced trauma? What is the relationship between trauma and literary form? What do visual genres and technologies contribute to the process of remembering and bearing witness to trauma?

Texts

Morrison, Toni. *Jazz* (1992)
Walcott, Derek. *Omeros* (1990)
Woolf, Virginia. *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

Additional theoretical/historical readings will be required each week, and will be available on the course Moodle site.

Requirements
Class Participation 25%
One response/review paper (4-5 pp.) 25%
Analytical paper (17-20 pp.) 50%

The response/review paper will ask you either (1) to investigate a specific aspect of/angle on one or more texts of your choosing, or (2) to reconnoiter for a piece of scholarship (either an article or a book) related to our inquiry in this course and write a research review paper in which you both describe/review and converse with the chosen text, mindful of the contexts of our course inquiry.

The final analytical paper will be an open, thesis-driven investigation of your own creation; the best papers will attend to both primary and secondary texts and be immersed in the literary, historical, and critical contexts of the course. As part of the final paper and for our final class meetings, you will be asked to (1) submit an abstract (approx. 200 words) that describes the contours and argument of your paper and (2) briefly present your area of inquiry to the class.

The class participation component will hinge, of course, on your steady attendance, consistent preparation, and various contributions to our inquiry and conversations (whether in class, on the course Moodle site, etc.). Additionally, you and a colleague will sign up for one of the discussion leader (“DL”) slots on the schedule. On your scheduled day, the two of you will be responsible for starting and maintaining the class discussion about that week’s primary reading (i.e., the fiction or poetry). You should thus plan, as much as possible, to (1) do the reading early, in advance of your chosen slot; (2) meet (or at least conduct an email discussion) to organize your thoughts and questions, and (3) come to class ready to ask questions, encourage your colleagues to contribute, and generally help keep the discussion on track. You should be ready—by invoking specific examples from the text—to call attention to the important moments and issues in the week’s reading. The formal aspect of your duties may involve only about 12-15 of class time, but you should be prepared to prod the conversation throughout the class period.

Academic Honesty

All work which you submit for this class must be your own, and it must be written exclusively for this course. The unacknowledged borrowing of others’ words or ideas—whether from books, the internet, or other sources—constitutes the serious academic crime of plagiarism; if you fail to document properly those sources consulted for your writing, you risk an automatic failure for the entire course. If you have any doubts or questions about plagiarism or the University’s policy on it, please see me.

Special Needs

If you have a documented disability, or otherwise anticipate needing special accommodations in this course, please bring this to my attention as early in the semester as possible so that we have an understanding and can make arrangements.
Tentative Schedule

Jan 23  Introductions and contexts
Jan 30  Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*
Feb 6  Ondaatje, *The English Patient*
Feb 13  Trevor, *Fools of Fortune*
Feb 20  McGahern, *Amongst Women*
Feb 27  Phillips, *Crossing the River*
Mar 6  Walcott, *Omeros* (Books 1-111)
Mar 13  *Omeros* (Books IV-VII)
Mar 20  Trauma and film
Mar 27  NO CLASS: Spring Break
Apr 3  Morrison, *Jazz*
Apr 10  Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*
Apr 17  McCann, *TransAtlantic*
Apr 24  Research presentations
May 1  Research presentations, conclusions, evaluations

Supplemental Reading Schedule
All readings available on the class Moodle site

Jan 23  NONE
Feb 6  White, “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality”
Feb 20  Boland, “That the Science of Cartography is Limited,” “Outside History”
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Author/Abridged Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb 27</td>
<td>Clifford, “Diasporas”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 6</td>
<td>Walcott, “The Muse of History”</td>
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<td>Mar 13</td>
<td>NONE</td>
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<td>Mar 20</td>
<td>Heaney, “Casualty”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 27</td>
<td>NONE</td>
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<td>Apr 3</td>
<td>Gilroy: ”Jewels Brought From Bondage: Black Music and the Politics of Identity”</td>
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<td>Apr 10</td>
<td>Sontag, excerpts from <em>Regarding the Pain of Others</em></td>
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<td>Apr 17</td>
<td>Muldoon, “The Sightseers”; Longley, “Ceasefire”</td>
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<td>Apr 24</td>
<td>Butler, ”Violence, Mourning, Politics,” from <em>Precarious Life</em></td>
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<td>May 1</td>
<td>NONE</td>
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