

**Carleton University
Fall 2014
Department of English**

ENGL 4601A

Course Title: Contemporary Poetry Studies/Transnational Human Rights Poetry
Mon.: 2:30-5:30

Prerequisite: Fourth-year standing in Honours English or permission of the Department

Instructor: Brenda Vellino

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Office Hours: Tues., Thurs. 3:00-4:00 or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is situated within the emerging interdiscipline of human rights and literary scholarship. Our readings offer encounters with a wide range of transnational poetry situated in the political, historical, and human rights contexts to and from which they speak. Poets have been both primary and secondary witnesses to the traumas of contemporary history, thus poetry may act as a powerful testimonial form, a form of countermemory, and a form of social intervention. We will investigate the ways in which twentieth and twenty-first century poets have responded to state-inflicted political repression, genocide, crimes against humanity, forced exile, torture, illegal detention and disappearance, counterinsurgency campaigns, suspension of civil rights and the “slow violence” of climate change. We will also consider how they have participated in human rights and transitional justice movements, which seek to record, recognize, remedy, and redress major violations. The course will be divided into four sections: I. Genocides (Armenian, Jewish), II. State Terror: Russia, South America, the War on Terror, China/Tibet; and III. Apartheids, Occupations, Settler-Colonialism: South Africa, Israel-Palestine, Aboriginal Canada; IV. Global Climate Justice. Carolyn Forché makes strong claims for poetry of witness when she writes in her introduction to the course anthology, *Against Forgetting*: "These poems will not permit us complacency. They come to us with claims that have yet to be filled, as attempts to mark us as they have themselves been marked." We will consider whether and how poetry is an effective medium for witnessing pressing human rights issues by attention to the historical, social, and political contexts to and from which the poets respond. We will also explore the relationship between poetry and trauma, poetry and witness subjectivity, poetry and the body, poetry and public memory, poetry and history, and poetry and human rights law.

COURSE READING LIST: Only Inventory will be at Octopus Books, Bank & Third Ave. in The Glebe

*Please Order this online from Alibris, Abebooks, or Amazon: Carolyn Forché, ed. *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*. New York: Norton, 1993. If

anyone is challenged by this, please contact me and I will assist you in ordering. There are many copies available second hand.

*Dionne Brand. *Inventory* (2006).

*Excerpts from Armstrong, Jeanette and Lally Grauer, eds. *Native Poetry in Canada*. Broadview, 2001 (on reserve)

*Online publication: African Writers Abroad, eds. *No Condition is Permanent: 19 Poets on Climate Justice and Change*. London: Platform: 2010.

Course Reserve Articles: Chapters and/or articles will be taken from books that I have placed on reserve in the Carleton library.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

*Poetry Annotation and Worksheet: Due Class 2: 10%

*Participation Grade: 10%

*Three Reader Responses (1 - 2 pages): 5 marks each: 15%

*1 Short Seminar: 25%

*Essay Proposal: due by email: 5%

*Research Essay (10-12 pages): 35%

COURSE CALENDAR

Sept. 8: Paradoxes of Human Rights

*First Class Readings from Library Books on Reserve:

*Alexandra Schulteiss Moore and Elizabeth Goldberg. "Introduction." *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*. Routledge, 2012: 3-18. Library Reserve.

Wendy Hesford. Introduction: pages 1-14. Chapt. 2: pages 52-60. In *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminisms* (2011). Library Reserve.

*Jahan Ramazani. Chapter 2: "A Transnational Poetics." *A Transnational Poetics* (2009). Library Reserve.

*Create your own notes toward a global human rights time-line (focusing on about the last 200 years, including events, violations, struggles, defenders of human rights,

milestones) and bring to class for discussion. Include at least 5 human rights events, issues, and milestones from Canada in your notes.

***Readings and Human Rights timeline notes due in class. Please photocopy the readings, read actively by underlining and making notes, and bring to class for discussion.**

Sept. 15: Witness Poetics & Witness Positions

*Carolyn Forché, "Introduction," *Against Forgetting* (if the course anthology is not in, please get this from library reserve).

*Antony Rowland: Chapter 1: pages 1-13. from *Poetry as Testimony* (2014): library e-book

*Brenda Vellino: Draft of forthcoming Routledge book chapter: posted on CU-learn: "Beyond the Trauma Aesthetic: The Cultural Work of Human Rights Witness Poetries"

****Poetry Annotation and Worksheet Due in Class for discussion and submission: focus on the Margaret Atwood Poem "Notes Toward a Poem that Can Never Be Written.": <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/notes-towards-poem-can-never-be-written>**

*See Poetry Worksheet Template and Guidelines on CU-Learn.

Cluster I. Genocide Studies: Aftermath and Countermemory

Sept. 22: The Armenian Genocide: The Anti-Elegy as Countermemorial

*Download: "UN Convention on the Prevention & Punishment of the Crime of Genocide": <http://www.genocidewatch.org/genocide/whatisit.html>

*See "The Genocide Convention At Age 60" from *Crimes of War*: <http://www.crimesofwar.org/commentary/the-genocide-convention-at-60/>

***Contextual Readings On Reserve:** Adam Jones, "The Armenian Genocide," in *Genocide*, pp. 101-119

*Young, James E. "Introduction." *At Memory's Edge* pp. 1-11

*Ramazani, Jehan. "Introduction." *The Poetry of Mourning*, 1-31.

***Poems** from *Against Forgetting*: Siamanto and Tekeyan

*Poems from Peter Balakian's *June Tree*: "In Armenia, 1987," "The Oriental Rug," "The History Of Armenia," (handout).

Reader Response Due: A Group

Sept. 29: The Shoah/Jewish Holocaust:

***Contextual Readings On Reserve:** Adam Jones, “The Jewish Holocaust.” In *Genocide*, pp. 147-184.

***Holocaust Poets:** Nelly Sachs, Miklos Radnoti, Primo Levi, Paul Celan (from *Against Forgetting*).

***Reader Response Due: B Group**

Cluster II. Totalitarianism and State Terror

October 6: Stalin Terror Years:

***Contextual Reading On Reserve:** Adam Jones, “Stalin's Terror,” in *Genocide*, pp. 124-46.

***Russian Poets of the Stalin Terror years:** Akhmatova, Pasternak, Mandelstam, Serge (in *Against Forgetting*)

***Reader Response Due: A Group**

Note: October 13: No Class – Happy Thanksgiving!

October 20: Democracy Struggle in China and Tibet:

***Read Online:** Charter 08 for Reform and Democracy in China:
<http://www.charter08.eu/2.html>

***On Reserve:** Adam Jones, “Tibet under Chinese Rule.” In *Genocide*, “ 94-98.

Chinese and Tibetan Poets: Bei Dao in *Against Forgetting*.

*Handout of poems from Liu Xiaobo’s June 4th Elegies

*Tibetan Poet Tenzen Tsundue, Kora: on-line publication:
<http://www.friendsoftibet.org/download/kora.pdf>

Reader Response Due: B Group

Fall Break: October 27 – 31!

Nov. 3: Counterinsurgency Wars in Latin America

***Essay Proposal Guidelines in Class**

*See the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, 2006: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/ced/pages/conventionced.aspx>

*See “Death Squads” in *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know*:
<http://www.crimesofwar.org/a-z-guide/death-squads/>

***Chile:** Pablo Neruda, Ariel Dorfman; Nicanor Parra, *Against Forgetting*.

***El Salvador:** Claribel Alegria, *Against Forgetting* and Carolyn Forché “The Colonel” (HO)

Reader Response: A Group

Nov. 10: The War on Terror and the War on Illegal Migrants

*See The Iraq Body Count Project: <https://www.iraqbodycount.org/>

*The Diasporic Long Poem: Read Dionne Brand’s *Inventory*

Reader Response: B Group

Cluster III. Apartheid, Occupation, and Settler-Colonialism:

Nov. 17: Apartheid/South African Poets:

*UN “Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid,” 1973:
<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instate/apartheid-supp.html>

***Poems:** Black South African Poets Mphahlele and Sepamla (in *Against Forgetting*)

*TRC poems from Ingrid De Kolk *Seasonal Fires* (Hand Out)

ESSAY PROPOSAL DUE: Nov. 21 at 5:00 p.m. by email.

Nov. 24: Occupied Territory or Holy Land?

Contextual Readings: <http://www.crimesofwar.org/a-z-guide/arab-israeli-war/>

* “Collective Punishment in *Crimes of War*: <http://www.crimesofwar.org/a-z-guide/collective-punishment/>

*See “Disappearing Palestine maps:
http://www.palestineinformation.org/2b_disappearing_4_maps

***Poems:** Yehudi Amichai, Mahmoud Darwish (in *Against Forgetting*); See also Amichai's "Yom Kippur" and Darwish's "Identity Card" (handouts)

December 1: Our Home and Native Land? Native Canada Poetry

***Read Online** UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007:
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

*Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission:
<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution>

***Contextual Reading On Reserve:** Adam Young, "Genocides of Indigenous Peoples." In *Genocide*, pp. 67-77, 81-89.

***Poetry Readings:** Rita Joe, Marie Anneheart Baker, Jeanette Armstrong, Wayne Keon: Beth Cuthand, Louise Halfe, Marilyn Dumont, and Gregory Scofield: from Lally Grauer and Jeanette Armstrong, *Native Poetry in Canada* (on Reserve).

Dec. 8: Climate Justice Poetry online/spoken word

*On Climate Justice: <http://globaljusticeecology.org/climate-justice/>

*Online publication: African Writers Abroad, eds. *No Condition is Permanent: 19 Poets on Climate Justice and Change*. London: Platform: 2010: <http://platformlondon.org/publications/no-condition-is-permanent-poetry-african-writers-abroad-platform/>

Term Essay Due: in the English Department drop box, 18th floor Dunton Tower: **Dec. 12.**

Course Assignment Guidelines

Poetry Annotation, Worksheet, and Summary

Please do a detailed annotation of Margaret Atwood's "Notes Toward a Poem That Cannot Be Written" (circling key words and images, noting recurring patterns of words, phrases, space, line-ending, and sound patterning); then using the worksheet guidelines as prompts, fill in the matching sections in your worksheet. Finally, do a summary that makes connections between your insights from the worksheet and some aspect of the assigned essay readings for this class. Worksheet instructions and template on are on Cu-Learn.

**Also see "How to Read a Poem" at Poets.org for useful tips and guiding questions that give you windows into a poem: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/19882>

Submission: Please submit both your hand-annotated poem with your typed up worksheet in class on the due date.

Reader Response/Shadow Texts

The aim of this assignment is to provide you with an informal space to respond in-depth to a poem or set of poems every second week. Roger Simon in *The Touch of the Past*, suggests that an ethical way of creating a response to testimonial accounts of suffering is to create our own "shadow texts" which engage the unresolved or shadow questions raised by the primary text. Reading responses should be four to five paragraphs (1-2 pages). An alternative kind of response might be to create a drawing, painting, collage, or poem. Submission of a creative response should be accompanied by a one paragraph explanation of its connection to the poem(s).

***Submission:** All response papers are due in class on the day the readings are due. These will be due in alternating weeks depending on whether you are in A or B group.

Short Seminar

Each of you will be responsible for giving a **brief presentation (30 minutes)** based on a focus poem, followed by **ten minutes** of discussion. Primarily, you are responsible for a strong close reading of your focus poem, followed by a prepared discussion question for the class (which should be written out in your notes). Think of a way to bring the poem alive to your classmates through a good question or some other hook. You may use selected biographical, critical, or historical research to open up your poem. You must indicate your sources to the class orally and in a Works Cited attached to your seminar notes.

Essay Proposal

Your research essay will focus on a single poet from the course readings. Where available you should consult a complete collection of their work even if this means ordering it from interlibrary loans or getting it from Ottawa U.

All students should submit a **proposal** to me via email by Friday Nov. 21. This proposal should include a working thesis and plan of development that sets forth your preliminary argument. You should include a **Preliminary Annotated Bibliography with four sources including the primary source you will be using**. Creating an Annotated Bibliography involves giving a three to four sentence description of the resource's main points and a brief synopsis of its usefulness to your research. Any student needing extra help with conducting research on your topic should see me in my office hours.

Research Essay

***Contextualized Close Reading:** The body of your paper should demonstrate insightful, **contextualized** close engagement with a major theme or question raised by your chosen poet in three focus poems. Contextualized close reading means giving attention to poetic, biographical, historical, social, political, and human rights contexts as these enhance your understanding of the poems under discussion. You may get ideas for themes or questions by going back over course readings on the human rights paradoxes, representation of the body, witness, genocide, countermemory, and anti-elegy. Feel free to refer to course readings as part of your research. ***Essays should cite a minimum of four secondary sources in addition to your primary text.**

***Interdisciplinary Thinking: Connecting Human Rights and Poetry:** This assignment will also require interdisciplinary comparative study of your poem and an alternative memorial project such as an NGO, museum, memorial space, documentary, or website. The last two pages of your essay should be devoted to this interdisciplinary component. How do the poetic project and the activist oriented alternative remembrance project, responding to the same context, differ and converge? The aim of this assignment is to consider the way poetic human rights projects have points of convergence with, divergence from, and contributions to the intersecting field of human rights interventions and practices. Enabling questions students might be encouraged to ask include the following: How do these poetic and other remembrance sites disrupt or reinforce my present knowledge, sense of self, sense of world, sense of cultural or communal inheritances/values? What kind of work are they doing in (counter) public spheres? Do these remembrance practices contest former or current remembrance practices? How do these representations address and/or interrogate the aftermath legacies of human rights violations? Do they operate to contain and bring closure or to open up questions and possibilities of response?

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance and Participation: Active participation is essential in a seminar class. I define class participation as both physical and mental presence in class, preparedness, engagement in discussion, and willingness to take risks. **Please read all the contextual readings and assigned poems with pencil in hand, underlining and annotating and bring your text to class. This is essential for being prepared for seminar discussion.**

You may have two allowable absences for sickness, emergencies or appointments. Subsequence absences will negatively affect your grade. Students who miss 50% or more of classes will not pass the course. If you must be absent, extend the courtesy of letting me know that you will be absent and the reason for your absence.

Essay Submission: Never submit an essay by sliding it under my office door and always keep a copy of any work you submit.

Late Assignment Policy: Essay extensions must be arranged with me (for difficult circumstances only) in advance of the due date. Essays handed in late without prior arrangement will not receive any comments.

Plagiarism: We all know the drill by fourth year. All ideas not your own even if paraphrased or from a website must be properly referenced using MLA citation practices. **Please ensure that all sources (including biographical and internet) you use in reading responses, seminars, and essays are properly credited.** Grey areas of plagiarism sometimes arise from confusion about proper citation when putting things in your own words or paraphrasing. If you change a word or two in a critic's sentence, this is *not* acceptable paraphrase. Put altered words in brackets and put the whole sentence in quotes. Please see me if you are at all unsure about citation practices. If I suspect that an essay or portion of an essay has been plagiarized, I am required to submit the essay to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. The penalties for plagiarism are very severe, ranging from failure in the course to expulsion from the university. **See "How Not to Plagiarize: www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html**

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

For Students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations should register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students. After registering with the PMC, make an appointment to discuss your needs with me. See www.carleton.ca/pmc

For Religious Observance: Students requesting academic accommodation on the basis of religious observance should contact their instructors for alternate dates and/or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known. Instructors will make accommodations in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student.

For Pregnancy: Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity Services to complete a *letter of accommodation*. The student should also meet with the instructor to discuss accommodations required.

STUDENT SERVICES

Writing Tutorial Service: If you know your writing needs improvement, do consider free tutoring with this service. Contact the Centre for Applied Language Studies, 215 Paterson Hall, 613- 520-6632. See www.carleton.ca/wts

Carleton Health and Counselling Services offers confidential consultations with medical doctors, lab testing, and emotional support for difficult times from Monday to Friday, 8:00- 4:00. They are located in the Carleton Technology Building on the east side of campus. Check out their website at www.carleton.ca/health or call to make an appointment at 613-520-6674.