

Carleton University
Fall 2013
Department of English
ENGL 4709A: STUDIES IN AMERICAN LIT. II
CONTEMPORARY U.S. LITERATURE
Wednesday 11:30-2:30
Location: Please confirm location on Carleton Central

Franny Nudelman
franny_nudelman@carleton.ca
1814 Dunton Tower
613 520-2600 x1773
Office Hours: Thursday 11-1, and by appointment

WRITING IN CRISIS: CONTEMPORARY U.S. LITERATURE

In this course we will consider U.S. writers who respond to the urgent crises of contemporary life, among them climate change, global poverty, and war. They describe massive systemic changes in technology, climate, and political organization from the vantage point of individuals who are affected by those transformations. In particular, all the texts we will read narrate the dislocations, voluntary and involuntary, that result from rapid change: the long, treacherous walk of the Sudanese "lost boys" in Dave Eggers' *What is the What*; the disturbed flight patterns of monarch butterflies in Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*; the lives of Mumbai slum dwellers displaced by urban industry in Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. Some of these authors have migrated to the U.S. and reflect on this experience in their writing; others have traveled in order to better understand subjects that take them beyond the territorial boundaries of "American" experience. Throughout, we will consider the role of literature in grappling with social crises, shaping our knowledge of--and responses to--the world around us.

TEXTS

Fiction

Teju Cole, *Open City* (2011)
Dave Eggers, *What is the What* (2006)
Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior* (2012)

Non-Fiction

Katherine Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity* (2012)
Elizabeth Kolbert, *Field Notes from A Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (2007)
Shailja Patel, *Migritude* (2010)

Criticism

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011)

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003)

Books for the course are available at *Octopus Books*, 116 Third Avenue.

Film

Jennifer Baichwal, *Payback* (2011)

Renzo Martens, *Enjoy Poverty* (2009)

Films will be available through the library for viewing in advance of class.

CLASS FORMAT

The writers on this syllabus deal with relatively uncharted territory, trying to formulate literary approaches to problems that they do not yet fully grasp. In keeping with this subject matter, we will take an exploratory and open-ended approach to the texts we study. Our seminar will be collaborative, and we will establish key terms and concepts through the process of discussion and exchange. Thus your active and thoughtful participation in our discussions will be vital to our success. If you are not comfortable speaking in class, or do not like this kind of student-driven format, this may not be the class for you.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

In addition to attending all classes and participating actively in discussions, over the course of the semester you will give a brief (15 minute) presentation to the class on one of our texts; keep a journal; write 2 essays (one 5 pages, and one 10-12 pages). Half of your final grade will be based on your class participation (attendance, discussions, presentation), and half will be based on your writing for the course (journal and 2 essays).

NO LAPTOPS OR CELL PHONES

Please note that our classroom will be device-free. The only students allowed to use laptops in the classroom will be those with special permission from the Paul Menton Centre.

ACCOMMODATIONS

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website
http://www.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/student_guide.htm

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website

http://www.carleton.ca/equity/accommodation/student_guide.htm

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodation in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Documented disabilities could include but are not limited to mobility/physical impairments, specific Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/psychological disabilities, sensory disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and chronic medical conditions. Registered PMC students are required to contact the PMC, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that I receive your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations. If you only require accommodations for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodations to PMC by the last official day to withdraw from classes in each term. For more details visit the PMC website:

http://www.carleton.ca/pmc/students/acad_accom.html

PLAGIARISM

The University Senate defines plagiarism as presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas, or the work of others as one's own.

This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else
- using ideas, quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgement in an essay or assignment
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works, and/or failing to use quotation marks
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. In cases of suspected plagiarism, the Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student. Penalties may include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, suspension from a program, suspension from the university, expulsion from the university. See the Section on Academic Integrity in the Student Conduct Portion of the Undergraduate Calendar.

CLASS SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER

11 Introduction

18 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

25 Dave Eggers, *What is the What*
OCTOBER

2 Finish *What is the What*
Renzo Martens, *Enjoy Poverty*

9 Teju Cole, *Open City*

16 Shailja Patel, *Migritude*

23 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*
Five-page essay due in class

FALL BREAK

NOVEMBER

6 Finish *Slow Violence*
Katherine Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*

13 Elizabeth Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*

20 No Class

27 Barbara Kingsolver, *Flight Behavior*

DECEMBER

4 Jennifer Baichwal, *Payback*
Journals due in class

FINAL ESSAY (10-12 pages) DUE BY NOON, DECEMBER 9