

Carleton University
Winter 2021
Department of English Language and Literature
and
Graduate Program in Cultural Mediations (ICSLAC)

ENGL 5002W: Studies in Theory
CLMD 6103W: Issues of Cultural Mediation and Representation
Special Topic: Pandemic Persuasions, Passions, Politics

Fridays / 14:35 – 17:25
Location: *online via Zoom*

Format: *Synchronous*
Zoom link: will be emailed to the class

Instructor: Prof. Stuart J. Murray
Email: stuart.murray@carleton.ca
Office: *online via Zoom*
Office Hours: By appointment (please email me)
Zoom link: <https://carleton-ca.zoom.us/j/9677751956>
(to comply with FIPPA privacy legislation, sensitive discussions
will take place by phone or via Microsoft Teams)

I. Course description: This is a cross-listed course intended to be interdisciplinary and is open to the disciplinary perspectives and research interests that each student will bring to the course, collaboratively. In its efforts toward a plurality of critical voices, I have organized for two top feminist/queer scholars to attend our seminar and give a lecture and/or lead a discussion of that day's readings. **Calendar descriptions** are as follows. **ENGL:** Selected topics in literary and cultural theory. **CLMD:** This course will examine how works from different cultures or works in the same or different media from the same culture pose questions about the nature of representation, interpretation, meaning and affect. Emphasis will be upon the relation between social intelligibility and textual features.

Detailed description: This course aims to address the *human address* – the hailing, the location, the speaking and narrativization and performance – of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic through critical readings of theoretical and cultural texts. How might we read the (non)representational practices that surround illness and death in our moment? Aesthetic or anaesthetic, ours is a time when death is quietly cultivated and calculated by sacrificial economies and the rhetorics of war (e.g., “front-line” workers); indeed, there is a certain threshold of death that would seem to be socially and politically tolerable in the re-opening of

global economies. This differential power is summed up by Foucault as the power to “make live and let die.” Crucially, those we “let die” stand in relation to the lives that we “make live”; dying is the bloody secret of life, even as “letting die” is disavowed, refused, or quietly refigured as the collateral damage of an “invisible enemy.” Whether it is “slow death” (Berlant) wrought by quiet racialization and austerity, fast death in the digital mediascape and lonely I.C.U., or more coordinated ways of “letting die,” including war and ethno-racial violence (yet another pandemic “scene”), these deaths nevertheless speak to what Pope Francis has recently called our “throwaway culture.” Will COVID-19 change this?

This is not a course on memory studies or memorialization or trauma and witnessing. Our texts are more diverse and less disciplinary; they travel, sometimes promiscuously; and they invite questions of identity and the “public good” that are not tied to identity categories and to their rituals of representation, be they memory, memorialization, witnessing, or confession. Is there community post-identity or post-COVID 19? For example, will some communities – anti-vaxxers and perhaps racialized or Indigenous peoples – be skeptical of receiving the vaccine? How will they be judged? Is there a form of speech/writing that is not tethered to – sanctioned, policed, and in some cases prohibited by – our great idols: identity and “life”? And can we imagine the lives of those who identify otherwise or who experience in their communities the call of death rather than life? I am hoping that our discussions will permit an oblique but trenchant critique of identity politics, white liberalism (including its “humanitarian” guises), and the hypostatizations of possessive individualism, ego, self, interiority. To what extent are these forms of subjectivity false idols and tools of subordination, all the while packaged as freedom and “life itself”?

Readings have been dramatically scaled back from what I first imagined. In non-pandemic times, I would have included a wider range of competing perspectives from Black studies, queer studies, political theory, postcolonial studies, and so forth. In the pandemic version of this course, mindful of everyone’s time and levels of stress, I have not been able to stage these “conversations” (sometimes bitter battles) in weekly readings. Instead, I have opted to theorize a “frame” – the *address* of pandemic address and its/our diarization – and, through select readings, to explore how this provides a theoretically rich entrée into diverse experiences, including our own, in this long pandemic moment. And especially, I encourage you to engage and to bring to discussion perspectives that are meaningful to you. The in-class assignments reflect this invitation.

Course Delivery: Please note that the course will be delivered online as a synchronous course. **This course requires reliable high-speed Internet access and a computer with a cam as well as a working microphone.**

II. Preclusions: None.

III. Learning Outcomes [now a required syllabus component by our well-meaning Guardians]: Students will develop advanced knowledge of key theoretical terms toward a critical analytical understanding of pandemic politics and cultures, including protest culture. Moreover, students

learn to exercise active literary reading skills across distinct genres, including literary, sociocultural, historical, and political contexts. I would also add, emphatically (and with J.M. Coetzee, as you'll see) that the texts we read will make us better – and by better, Coetzee means more ethical. But I am told that this is not a “learning outcome” because it cannot be measured! (nonsense of course, for the failure of ethics and empathy is all too obvious and measured by the macropolitical economies of poverty, violence, and the sacrificial loss of life).

IV. Texts: Required texts will be made available online. However, please note that the following should be acquired (I will speak more to these texts in the first seminar).

Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage, 1991).

J.M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2008).

Maggie O'Farrell, *Hamnet* (London: Headline, 2020). Ebook also available through Tinder Press; I'm hoping that the paperback will be out in time for the week in which this is assigned.

(You may also wish to acquire a copy of Defoe; I have referenced the Project Gutenberg version below, but who needs more screen time, right?).

V. Course calendar: Please note that the home-study components of each week must be completed prior to our synchronous Zoom meeting. This includes reading and viewing online content, etc.

Below please find a summary of weekly course texts. Full details and links to content will be made available online (details in the first seminar).

1. Jan. 16, 2021 Why War?

In advance of the first class please read (short!):

“Why War? An Exchange of Letters Between Freud and Einstein,” available online:

<https://www.transcend.org/tms/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Why-War-Freud.pdf>.

A tweet by Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson (including the linked screenshot), Mar. 15, 2020, <https://twitter.com/JimWatsonOttawa/status/1239257579634786306>.

2. Jan. 22, 2021 Biopower: Discipline and Biopolitics

Michel Foucault, *“Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), Lecture of 17 March 1976, 239–264.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), “Panopticism,” 195–209.

Dionne Brand, “On Narrative, Reckoning and the Calculus of Living and Dying,” *Toronto Star*, July 4, 2020, <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/books/2020/07/04/dionne-brand-on-narrative-reckoning-and-the-calculus-of-living-and-dying.html>.

Giorgio Agamben, “The Invention of an Epidemic,” *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*, “Coronavirus and Philosophers” (2020), <http://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/>.

Giorgio Agamben, “Clarifications,” Mar. 17, 2020,

<https://itself.blog/2020/03/17/giorgio-agamben-clarifications/>. [A clarification on Agamben's earlier statement, above].

3. Jan. 29, 2021 The Suicidal State

Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 754–780.

Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1991), 203–230.

Neil Balan, "Pandemic Time and War Time, All Out of Joint," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 41 (2020): 79–87.

4. Feb. 5, 2021 Painting a Picture

Boccaccio, *The Decameron: Selected Tales*, ed. and trans. Don Beecher and Massimo Ciavolella (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2017). Selections will be uploaded to Ares and available through MadOdrum Library, link TBA.

Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), "Passe-Partout," 1–14.

5. Feb. 12, 2021 Diary

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year: Being Observations or Memorials of the most Remarkable OCCURRENCES, As well PUBLICK as PRIVATE, Which happened in LONDON During the last GREAT VISITATION In 1665. Written by a CITIZEN who continued all the while in London. Never made publick before* (London 1722), ebook Project Gutenberg (1995), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/376/376-h/376-h.htm>.

* Be sure to do a little research about the history of this book: how it was published, the scandal over its "authorship," the veracity of its account, etc.

READING WEEK

6. Feb. 26, 2021 Of a Bad Year

J.M. Coetzee, *Diary of a Bad Year* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2008).

7. Mar. 5, 2021 Plague

Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Vintage, 1991).

8. Mar. 12, 2021 Skeptical Care

Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth: The Government of Self and Others II: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983–1984*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 141–176.

LeBron James, "LeBron James Speaks on BLM: 'When You're Black, It's not a Movement; It's a Lifestyle'," NBA on ESPN, YouTube.com, July 23, 2020,

<https://youtu.be/T6CkKIObfws>.

Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004),

“Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government,” 460–479.

9. Mar. 19, 2021 Protest, BLM, MMIW

Readings TBA

SPECIAL GUEST

Christine Garlough is Professor in the Department of Women’s and Gender Studies at UW-Madison. Her research constellates around feminist politics, performance, art, and activism working primarily with grassroots feminist activists in India and the U.S. who re-envision vernacular culture for political purposes and explore how care, as a political concept, can contribute to contexts of social change.

<https://gws.wisc.edu/staff/garlough-christine/>

10. Mar. 26, 2021 Care, For Death

Jill H. Casid, “Handle with Care,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (winter 2012): 121–135.

Jill H. Casid, “Photography’s Wild Performativity in Capital’s Necrocene,” *Photography and Culture* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17514517.2020.1754658>.

SPECIAL GUEST

Jill H. Casid is Professor of Visual Studies in the Departments of Art History and Gender and Women’s Studies at the UW-Madison. A theorist, historian, and practicing artist, she is currently at work on a two-book project on *Form at the Edges of Life*. Since the publication of *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minnesota, 2005) which received the College Art Association’s Millard Meiss award, she continues to write on postcolonial, queer and feminist approaches to landscape while pursuing work on the history and theory of photography and the materializing effects of imaging with *Scenes of Projection: Recasting the Enlightenment Subject* (Minnesota, 2015) and approaches to the global with *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn* (Yale, 2014).

<https://arthistory.wisc.edu/staff/jill-h-casid/>

11. Apr. 9, 2021 Hamnet

Maggie O’Farrell, *Hamnet* (London: Headline, 2020). Ebook also available through Tinder Press.

12. Apr. 14, 2021 Last Class, TBD, but I’m thinking of some kind of celebration – if students have ideas or wish to organize some creative Zoom-y event, please let me know!

VI. Evaluation:

50% Essay(s) or Essay Equivalent(s), such as a Creative-Scholarly Project(s):

In these pesky pandemic times, I am granting the widest possibly leeway for your scholarly (and creative) practices, and I encourage you to take the opportunity to experiment. You might, for

example, write your own “Diary of a Bad Year” – a scholarly-creative project that isn’t simply an academic essay or analysis, but adopts the language of the diary or “confessional” and/or sets out to “frame” this narrative, or comment on it, in a scholarly fashion, perhaps even as an additional assignment. You may also suggest a Digital Humanities project. I’m always happy to discuss your ideas for assignments in a scheduled office hour or if you hang back after class. I particularly encourage PhD students to develop work that might later be incorporated into the dissertation project. You need not comment on a specific text or texts studied in the course, but projects should be resonant with course problematics.

The end goal is that you will write a total of 15-20 pages this semester (double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt font, max. margins 2.5 cm or 1 inch, consistently using the bibliographic style of your own choosing – I’m not an MLA Style fetishist).

The total 15-20 pages can be submitted in one, two, or up to three distinct pieces of writing. The choice is yours.

Deadline(s): Again, it’s up to you, but the final assignment must be emailed to me by **April 18, 2021 at midnight**.

All assignments should be emailed to me, and I always acknowledge receipt by return email (so if my spam filter has eaten something and you don’t hear, please ping me!).

Assignment Weighting: Obviously, if you choose one assignment, it will be weighted at 50% of the final grade. For more than one assignment, the total of 50% will be pro-rated on the total pages written (e.g., two 10-page essays would be 25% + 25%; a 6-page essay and a 12-page essay would be 17% and 33%).

25% Seminar Presentation (is situated in a particular week’s readings)

I’m imagining a presentation of 10-15 minutes followed by a 15-minute moderated discussion on the texts we have read for that week (in weeks where there is more than one text you are free to choose just one or more). Rather than summarize the text, reflect on how it resonates in our particular socio-historical context: how can this week’s course reading(s) be deployed to help make sense of – or to question or critique – what continues to unfold as a cultural, epistemological, affective, somatic (etc.) pandemic object?

No “props” or PowerPoint expected, though I’m happy to share control of Zoom so that you can do this.

15% Show-and-Tell (relates to course problematics generally – not the week’s readings!)

Bring a cultural artifact to class discussion – perhaps an example of an artistic/creative response to the pandemic or a relevant event that is in the news. Be creative, be controversial, have some fun with this. Show-and-Tell will kick off each week’s class as a kind of ice-breaker. I’m imagining an informal presentation that moderates a discussion of 10-15 minutes total.

So then, you ask, what are our general “course problematics”? Good question! These will emerge – and perhaps transform – as we collectively engage course texts across the semester, and this is an occasion for you to help direct our discourse (and desire). Above, I say that I have organized the course around the frame of the “frame” – the address of the pandemic “address.” Who speaks the truth of the pandemic or of pandemic experience? How? And how have various media been mobilized to privilege or sideline particular voices? The “diary” is one such form: confessional? truth-telling? yarn-spinning? fear-mongering? But you need not limit yourself to this!

Sign up [HERE](https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/yujva) for Seminar Presentation and Show-and-Tell:

<https://www.wejoinin.com/sheets/yujva>.

10% Participation

Active participation is appreciated. Zoom isn’t ideal, but it too is our current “frame.” I look forward to meeting each of you in the flesh.

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

VII. Statement on Plagiarism

The university’s Academic Integrity Policy can be found at:

<https://carleton.ca/secretariat/wp-content/uploads/Academic-Integrity-Policy.pdf>.

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or 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 or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another’s data or research findings;
- 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 form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>.

VII. Requests for Academic Accommodation

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 click [here](#).

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 click [here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520- 6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. 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.

<https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>