

Carleton University

TENTATIVE COURSE DESCRIPTION

Fall 2017

**Department of English Language and Literature
and
PhD Program in Cultural Mediations**

ENGL 5002 / CLMD 6903: The Humanitarian Apparatus: Feeling Good, Between Post-Truth and Other Fictions

Time: TBA

Location: TBA

Instructor: Professor Stuart J. Murray

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Office: 1820 DT

Office Hours: TBA, by appointment, and virtually via Skype

“Now, as we know, there’s that great famous quote, ‘poetry makes nothing happen’—books don’t make things happen, but they make a few readers ... or maybe more than a few, I don’t know how many, feel not as alone in the world and in their predicaments.”

— Edna O’Brien

“For the first time, more than 60 million people cannot safely go home. That is 1 in every 113 people in the world. The number jumped from 59.5 million in 2014 to 65.3 million last year, according to a global trends report released Monday by the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.”

— *The Washington Post*

“Humanitarian intervention is a biopolitics insofar as it sets up and manages refugee camps, establishes protected corridors in order to gain access to war casualties, develops statistical tools to measure malnutrition, and makes use of communication media to bear witness to injustice in the world.”

— Didier Fassin

Tentative Course Description

This course addresses the rhetorics of humanitarianism, and the ways that humanitarian “feelings”—the feel-good desire to address, redress, or alleviate human suffering—are fostered and mobilized as biopolitical forms of governance, the means by which the biopolitical State increasingly manages and regulates the lives of populations, both at home and abroad. Where should we place literature and literary tropes in the context of humanitarianism and biopolitics? Are the feelings inspired by literature complicit with wider systems of injustice, or might they offer critical tools? How might these feelings be distinguished from a politics of post-truth, and the feel-good “truthiness” of the lie? Situated firmly in our contemporary moment, and reading a selection of literary texts and theory, I hope to explore a distinctly rhetorical understanding of the ways that humanitarian feelings underpin contemporary politics, lending it a moral *raison d’être*. Can we account rhetorically for what Didier Fassin calls “humanitarian reason,” a sort of ontology that has come to be taken for granted, and that organizes political—and sometimes violent—State interventions under the aegis of humanitarianism and in the name of life itself? As Fassin notes, humanitarianism is a biopolitics “in that it takes as its object the saving of individuals, which presupposes not only risking others but also making a selection of which existences it is possible or legitimate to save.” Humanitarian feelings, then, are at the very heart of decisions over who will be made to live and who will be allowed to die. Warning: This course might not make you “feel good.”

Course Requirements and Evaluation¹

1. Seminar Presentation: 20%

The critical presentation of a text or texts from the assigned weekly readings, comprising:

- a. 20-minute presentation: Make a high quality, carefully prepared presentation (PowerPoint, hand-outs, props, etc. are optional). Come prepared with a text, aim for 2,500 words but practice and time it out. Avoid reading your text; this is not an academic conference presentation, but intended to generate discussion.
- b. Assume your audience has carefully read the text(s). Present an overview of the author’s *purpose*: the claim(s), the controversies, the style of the text(s), the literary and/or rhetorical (persuasive) devices that are used, etc. Evaluate the “evidence” for the author’s claim(s); you may also engage the author’s critics. Then focus! Take time to analyse—perform a close reading of—one or two issues or passages that you find especially significant, revealing, suggestive, i.e., not just *what* the text is saying, but *how*. I encourage you to be creative.
- c. 15–30 minute discussion: Engage class questions and prompt discussion. The spirit of the seminar presentations is *collaborative*, not *competitive*.

2. Research Presentation: 20%

To be presented on **TBA** or **TBA**, a text or selected texts and theme as chosen by you, as an opportunity to “workshop” your emergent Research Paper. It will be a critical engagement with or an application of a key text or texts. I encourage you to locate a

¹ 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.

“site” (object, text, social/political movement, controversy) in the world, however you wish to define this, whether real, political, literary, filmic, etc.:

- a. Based on your research for the final Research Paper, select one short text or object (maximum of one chapter or journal article, or just a selection – aim for 10–15 pages). **Distribute this text at least one week before your Research Presentation, email me and I will upload it to the Course Readings section of our course website.**
 - b. Please note, your text can be visual, filmic, a social movement, etc., so you might have to be creative in how to share this, either in PDF format, as web link, etc.
 - c. The presentation itself is meant to facilitate the collaborative space of the classroom and to help with the production of a better final Research Paper for each participant. You will have 15 minutes to present. At the very least, you should bring to class an outline of your presentation to share with co-participants in the seminar, but the more you write down and can share with the class the better. To be clear, you should aim for roughly 2,000 words of *written prose* per presentation, though you may present this prose in less or more formal ways during the presentation. The goal is to move your research along and, ultimately, words on a page are more important than words spoken in class. In your presentation, do not summarize the text you have selected; rather, develop your thesis and support this with textual evidence. **Argument = Claim + Textual Evidence.**
 - d. 15–30 minutes, discussion/collaboration: encourage participation and an open exchange of ideas and constructive criticism.
3. **Research Paper (20–25 pp.): 60%**
Due **TBA**, submitted via email to stuart.murray@carleton.ca:
- a. This will normally be the workshopped and refined version of your Research Presentation, in polished essay format, in MLA, APA, or Chicago format.
 - b. I am available to discuss your ideas throughout the course.
 - c. I will send a return email confirming that I have received your essay and can open it.

4. **Attendance and Active Participation**

Attendance and participation are required and expected throughout the course; three or more unexcused absences will result in failing the course. That said, if you're ill please stay home, take care of yourself, and send a brief email to let me know.

The Fine Print

Assignment Lateness Policy

Submit all assignments on or before the due date unless special arrangements have been made with me prior to the deadline. Late assignments will be reduced by one grade per day (including Saturdays and Sundays). E.g., from B+ to B for one day, B+ to B- for two days, etc. Over weekends, email the paper and present a hard copy to the department essay drop-box on Monday.

Academic Integrity and Academic Offences (e.g., plagiarism)

The University Senate defines plagiarism as “*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one’s own.*” Carleton University’s Academic Integrity Policy can be accessed at <http://www2.carleton.ca/studentaffairs/academic-integrity>.

Academic Accommodation (official University text below, but please come see me or email me for any concerns you may have throughout the semester)

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term because of disability, medical considerations or religious obligations. Please review the course outline promptly and 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.

Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations 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 your Instructor receives your Letter of Accommodation, no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first assignment requiring accommodations.

You can visit the Equity Services website to view the policies and to obtain more detailed information on academic accommodation at <http://carleton.ca/equity/accommodation>.