

**DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES
AND CULTURAL STUDIES**

<https://uofa.ualberta.ca/modern-languages-and-cultural-studies>

2018-2019 C LIT 358: Great Themes in Art and Literature: Nonfictional Identities in Tension
(Fall Term)

Instructor: Russell Cobb	Time: 11:00-12:30 TR
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Course Prerequisite: N/A

Course-based Ethics Approval in place regarding all research projects that involve human testing, questionnaires, etc.?

Yes No, not needed, no such projects approved

Community Service Learning Component:

Optional

Past or Representative Evaluative Course Material Available

- Exam registry – Students' Union
<http://www.su.ualberta.ca/services/infolink/exams>
- See explanations below
- Document distributed in class
- Other (please specify)
- NA

Additional mandatory Instructional fees (approved by Board of Governors)

Yes No

Course Description and Objectives:

It is a universal desire for humans across cultures to narrativize their identities. We tell stories about our ancestors, our nations, and our traditions across generations and cultures to explain who we are as individuals. Sometimes all these identities fit together like fingers in a glove, and sometimes they rub against one another, creating tension and outright conflict. This course examines works of literary nonfiction in which two or more identities clash within one author in a narrative structure. In the works we will study, nation butts up against race, sexuality conflicts with religion, and political idealism

conflicts with individual desires. The texts represent a way to, if not solve these conflicts, at least give us readers a way to think through them and discuss how conflicted identities impact our own personal narratives. And that is what we will do in the course: analyze how different writers narrate different identities.

Objectives. Successful students will be able to do the following:

- Define and discuss key terms and concepts in literary theory as it relates to nonfiction. (Terms such as bildungsroman, subaltern studies, critical race theory, etc.)
- Recognize the stylistic differences between different genres of life writing: memoir, autobiography, autoethnography, epistolary, testimonio, manifesto, etc.
- Improve writing and research skills in scholarly and popular modes of writing
- Produce a work of depth that showcases a student's creative production in literary nonfiction

Texts (all required):

Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. Bantam Press
Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*. Spiegel and Grau Press.
James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*. Vintage Press.
Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press.
Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*. Graywolf Press
Giocanda Belli, *The Country Under My Skin: A Memoir of Love and War*. Anchor Press

Optional readings:

Mary McCarthy, *Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood*
W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*.

All other secondary readings will be scanned and held in a Google Drive folder. **You MUST print them out and bring them to class on the assigned day.** Sorry trees, but you can recycle the paper later. Failure to bring readings physically to class will negatively impact your participation mark.

Grade Distribution (see “Explanatory Notes”):

Term Work 100% No final exam

Explanatory Notes on Assignments:

Four informal writing prompts (20%)

(5% each) to be marked check, check plus, check minus. The default mark here is a check (80%) which is a good, solid response with references to texts in question. Superbly thought-provoking and very well written responses may receive a check plus, but these marks will be rare. Check minus (60%) will be given to responses that meet the word count but are sloppily written and/or not referring to the texts in question.

Two formal papers (40%, 20% each)

Paper 1: Analytical paper that addresses one identity across two authors. (1800-2000 words) Rough draft will be assessed a mark, with the student able to improve that mark by up to 10% with significant revisions.

Paper 2: Creative nonfiction with critical reflexion. In this paper, student will adopt the style (not the words) of an author studied to narrate their own “identities in tension.” (1600 word max.) This will be accompanied by a (500 word) critical reflexion on the author’s paper using the concepts developed in class.

Presentation (15%) For the presentation, students will pair up to discuss a how a reading or readings relate to a pointed question detailed in the daily work schedule.

Class Participation (15%)

This grade evaluates physical presence in class as well as engagement with discussion and lecture. For example, if you don’t even bother to bring our texts to class, this grade will suffer. Students will evaluate their performance on the last day of class.

Pop quizzes (10%)

Pop quizzes will be given to assess whether students are keeping up with the reading. These quizzes may or may not be announced. Students can drop either: One pop quiz or one informal writing assignment at the end.

Required Notes:

Policy about course outlines can be found in the [Evaluation Procedures and Grading System](#) of the University Calendar.

Student Responsibilities:

Academic Integrity:

The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.governance.ualberta.ca) and avoid any behaviour that could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.

All students should consult [the Academic Integrity website](#). If you have any questions, ask your instructor.

An instructor or coordinator who is convinced that a student has handed in work that he or she could not possibly reproduce without outside assistance is obliged, out of consideration of

fairness to other students, to report the case to the Associate Dean of the Faculty. See the [Academic Discipline Process](#).

Learning and Working Environment:

The Faculty of Arts is committed to ensuring all students; faculty and staff are able to study and work in an environment that is safe and free from discrimination and harassment. It does not tolerate behaviour that undermines that environment. The Department urges anyone who feels that this policy is being violated to:

- Discuss the matter with the person whose behaviour is causing concern; or
- If that discussion is unsatisfactory, or there is concern that direct discussion is inappropriate or threatening, discuss it with the Chair of the Department.

For additional advice or assistance regarding this policy you may contact the [Office of the Student Ombuds](#). Information about the [University of Alberta Discrimination and Harassment Policy and Procedures](#) is described in [UAPPOL](#).

Territorial Statement:

The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

University of Alberta Sexual Violence Policy:

The Sexual Violence Policy was approved by GFC in June 2017. It plays a vital role in ensuring a safe and respectful learning and working environment.

As defined in the policy, **sexual violence** is any sexual act or act of a sexual nature, or act targeting sexuality, whether physical or psychological, committed without consent. **Sexual violence** is a complex and serious problem in society and on university campuses. Sexual violence can affect individuals of all gender identities, gender expressions, and sexual orientations, as well as those from all ages, abilities, racial, cultural and economic backgrounds. Through this policy, the University of Alberta recognizes its responsibility to reduce sexual violence in the University community. The university aims to do so by fostering a culture of **consent** and support through education, training and policy. The University recognizes the possible effects of trauma on those who have experienced sexual violence and supports the efforts of individuals to seek support and recover.

To read the policy in more detail, please visit:

<https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Policies/Sexual-Violence-Policy.pdf>

Recording of Lectures:

Audio or video recording of lectures, labs, seminars or any other teaching environment by students is allowed only with the prior written consent of the content author(s) or as a part of an approved accommodation plan. Recorded material is to be used solely for personal study, and is not to be used or distributed for any other purpose without prior written consent from the content author(s).

Attendance, Absences, and Missed Grade Components:

Regular attendance is essential for optimal performance in any course. In cases of potentially excusable absences due to illness or domestic affliction, notify your instructor by e-mail within two days.

Regarding absences that may be excusable and procedures for addressing course components missed as a result, consult sections [Attendance](#) and [Examinations](#) of the University Calendar. Be aware that unexcused absences will result in partial or total loss of the grade for the “attendance and participation” component(s) of a course, as well as for any assignments that are not handed-in or completed as a result. Deferral of term work is a privilege and not a right; there is no guarantee that a deferral will be granted. Misrepresentation of facts to gain a deferral is a serious breach of the Code of Student Behaviour.

In this course, attendance is evaluated by your presence in the classroom, your active participation in classroom discussions, and presence in online forums. Sleeping, texting, and facebooking in class will reduce your participation grade. Every absence after two unexcused absences results in a 10% reduction of the class participation segment of the course. Participation will also be assessed by preparation for discussion and will be self-assessed at the end of the course.

Policy for Late Assignments:

Students who consult in advance with an instructor regarding contingencies preventing the timely completion of an assignment may, at the discretion of the instructor, be granted an extension once throughout the course with no penalty. **Late excuses will not be accepted for any reason. Assignments handed in late will be deducted 10% per each working day they are handed in late.** For example, if a paper is due on Tuesday, but you hand it on Thursday, that will incur a 20% deduction.

Disclaimer:

Any typographical errors in this syllabus are subject to change and will be announced in class and posted on eClass.

Student Resources:

The best all-purpose website for student services is: <https://www.ualberta.ca/current-students>.

Accessibility Resources: (1 – 80 SUB)

The University of Alberta is committed to creating work and learning communities that inspire and enable all people to reach their full potential. Accessibility Resources promotes an accessible, inclusive, and universally designed environment. For general information to register for services visit the [Accessibility Resources](#) webpage.

The Academic Success Centre: (1-80 SUB)

[The Academic Success Centre](#) offers a variety of workshops on effective study and exam strategies. There are in-person and online sessions available for a modest fee.

The Centre for Writers: (1-42 Assiniboia Hall)

The [Centre for Writers](#) offers free one-on-one writing support to students, faculty, and staff. Students can request consultation for a writing project at any stage of development. Instructors can request class visits and presentations.

Health and Wellness Support: There are many health and community services available to current students. For more information visit the [Health and Wellness Support](#) webpage.

Office of the Student Ombuds:

The [Office of the Student Ombuds](#) offers confidential interviews, advice and support to students facing academic, discipline, interpersonal and financial difficulties.

Grading:

Assessment of the individual course components may be in the form of numerical marks or letter grades. The final letter grade will be based on "a combination of absolute achievement and relative performance in a class" (University Calendar, [Evaluation Procedures and Grading System](#)). The University Grading Procedure mandates that "a student's level of achievement of the goals/outcomes of a course, their grade, and the descriptor of that grade must be aligned" (<https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/>). The following guidelines have been adopted by the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies:

“MLCS Undergraduate Grading Scale”

Descriptor	Letter Grade	Grade Point Value	%
Excellent. A+, A or A- is earned by work which is superior in content and form and demonstrates an exceptional grasp of the subject matter. The grade of A+ designates work that far exceeds course expectations. Grades in the A range are normally achieved by a small number of students.	A+	4.0	97-100
	A	4.0	93-96
	A-	3.7	90-92
Good. B+, B or B- is earned by work that demonstrates a thorough comprehension of the course material and a good command of relevant skills. Grades in the B range are normally achieved by the largest number of students.	B+	3.3	87-89
	B	3.0	83-86
	B-	2.7	80-82

Tuesday, September 4

Agenda

Discuss the topic, assignments, readings

Introductions/expectations

- What we hope to accomplish

- a. Understand how and why writers represent identity
- b. Gain a theoretical and methodological toolset for analyzing how identity is portrayed.
- c. Work comparatively in the analysis across cultures
- d. Attempt to forge your own narrative of identity
- e. Support through critique and claps your classmates' writing

To be read/completed by class time

Thursday, September 6

Agenda

- Plunge into the question of identity through the Borges text. Lecture and discussion about the Self in Porter.

To be read/completed by class time

“Borges and I” Jorge Luis Borges. (Google Drive)

This is a short reading, but you need to answer address these questions:

Is this fiction/nonfiction? What are the identities being portrayed?

“Rewriting the Self,” Roy Porter (Google Drive)

Tuesday, September 11

Agenda

- Continue on the themes in “Rewriting the Self” by Roy Porter (Google Drive).
- Begin addressing the question of identity Baldwin (day 1)
- Talk about informal writing assignment due on Tuesday Sept. 18. How should it be hosted? Must be public. Topic TBD

To be read/completed by class time

Scan over “Rewriting the Self” by Roy Porter again. It’s a dense text.

Does Porter adhere to the traditional way of narrating the discovery of the Self in Western thought? Do you?

Read to p. 47 (at least) of James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time (day 1)

Make a list of the identities Baldwin is interrogating here. Now think about how he portrays them: Does he use journalistic reporting, memoir, poetry, cultural criticism? Take notes!

Thursday, September 13

Agenda

- Discuss guidelines and rubric for first paper.
- Baldwin, day 2. Discuss how and why *The Fire Next Time* still matters. What might be different this time around.
- Quiz #1?
- Discuss possible questions for informal writing #1

To be read/completed by class time

- Baldwin, day 3
- Read to p. 82 at the very least in Baldwin. Continue thinking about how he portrays different identities
- Read this essay on “Why James Baldwin’s *The Fire Next Time* Still Matters”

<https://daily.jstor.org/feature-james-baldwin-fire-next-time/>

Tuesday, September 18

Agenda

- Baldwin, day 4

Informal writing assignment #1 due. Topic: TBD.

Discuss responses to informal writing

Wrap up discussion on Baldwin and compare to Ta-Nahisi Coates

- Watch this clip of Coates:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGwaRufpipc&list=PLFFybuQ07YCX13RLAdhRiEBDYwca8jQlj>

To be read/completed by class time

- Finish *The Fire Next Time*.
 - Start the first few pages of *Black Skin/White Masks* by Franz Fanon
-

Thursday, September 20

Agenda

Fanon, Day 1

- Compare how Baldwin and Fanon approach racial identity. Throw in the question of language and nation.
- Writing exercise TBD

To be read/completed by class time

Read at least to Chapter Three (p.43) of *Black Skin/White Masks*. Start working comparatively between Fanon and Baldwin.

Tuesday, September 25

Agenda

Fanon, day 2

- More comparative work on Baldwin and Fanon.
 - Workshop comparative questions. Which ones work, which ones don't. Bring me your questions about formal paper #1
 - Presentation #1 on the concept of Nation in Baldwin in Fanon (these presenters get a 10% bonus for going early and first!)
-

To be read/completed by class time

Read Fanon, *Black Skin/ White Masks*. Try to finish book, but make sure you focus on Chapters Three and Four

Read Drabinski on Fanon and Baldwin. (Google Drive)

Come up with a comparative question to write about in a formal way regarding Baldwin and Fanon.

Thursday, September 27

Agenda

Fanon, day 3

Workshop papers in class (bring two copies)

Quiz.

To be read/completed by class time

Rough draft of paper #1

Tuesday, October 2

Agenda

Rodriguez, day 1

Start reading Hunger of Memory, Richard Rodriguez. Intro to him in class.

Discuss papers.

To be read/completed by class time

Hand in Paper #1

Thursday, October 4

Agenda

Rodriguez, day 2

Discuss Richard Rodriguez and the issues of identity.

To be read/completed by class time

Read Prologue and Chapter One in Richard Rodriguez. There are so many identities in conflict/tension here. Make a list of at least three to discuss in class.

Tuesday, October 9

Agenda

Rodriguez, day 3

To be read/completed by class time

- Rodriguez, Chapter 2
-

Thursday, October 11

Agenda

Rodriguez, day 4

To be read/completed by class time

Tuesday, October 16

Agenda

Coates, day 1

To be read/completed by class time

Thursday, October 18

Agenda

Coates, day 2

To be read/completed by class time

Tuesday, October 23

Agenda

Coates, day 3

To be read/completed by class time

Thursday, October 25

Agenda

Professor away at conference.

To be read/completed by class time:

Email or share draft of paper #1 by end of class time

Tuesday, October 30

Nelson, day 1

Agenda

To be read/completed by class time

Thursday, November 1

Nelson, day 2

Agenda

To be read/completed by class time

Tuesday, November 6

Nelson, day 3

Agenda

To be read/completed by class time

Thursday, November 8

Nelson, day 4

Agenda

To be read/completed by class time

November 13-15: Reading Week

Tuesday, November 20

Agenda

Gioconda Belli and Nicaragua.

Lecture on Nicaragua

To be read/completed by class time

Belli, *The Country under My Skin*, up to Chapter 20, p. 149 at least.

Thursday, Nove Thursday, November 22

Agenda

To be read/completed by class time

Read to Chapter 31, p. 212 at least in Belli

Tuesday, November 27

Belli, Day 3

Agenda

Presentation: Gender and Travel Writing: How Does Gender Affect (or not) Travel Writing?

Reading:

Susan Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender"

Belli, up to Chapter 32 at least, p. 225

Thursday, November 29

Agenda

Quiz #5 (remember you can drop one)

Belli, day 4

Informal writing #4: How does privilege shape how we think about travel writing?

To be read/completed by class time

Finish Gioconda Belli's *The Country Underneath My Skin*

Hand in informal writing #4.

Tuesday, December 4

Agenda

Workshop final papers

To be read/completed by class time

Draft of final paper

Thursday, December 6

Agenda

Last discussions, recaps of class.

Bring one food item that reflects your identity

Do class participation evaluation

Ask me any final questions. **Professor AMA**

I will also be in office all day Monday, December 10 for any final drop-in consultations.

Turn in final papers by midnight, December 11.