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LIT 521.01: Seminar in American Literature

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AMERICAN LITERATURE SEMINAR: INTERSECTIONS: GENRE, HYBRIDITY, AND IDENTITY

Spring 2019

LIT 521.01, CRN 34462, TUESDAY 6:30-9:20

INSTRUCTOR: CASEY CHARLES

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Office LA 216. Office Hours: Tu 1-2; Th 1-4 and by appointment

Phone 243-2762

I am interested in examining the parameters of genre in relation to the way identity and difference have become sources of literary expression. Classification of types of writing—from poetry to prose to drama (from fiction to nonfiction) may well be related to categories of the self. Gender, ethnicity, religion, class, orientation, nationality (what Bomberg calls the “Who am I” functions of writing) arguably partake of the same kind of ideological foregrounding as the “genre function.”

What is the value of Aristotle’s notion of categorization? What are its problems and/or benefits in reference to modes of cultural expression? Against the backdrop of these larger philosophical questions, the course examines a set of exemplary texts—some exploring boundaries through hybridity—which represent identity through the use of various genres, such as short story, novel, graphic novel, memoir, essay, drama, and poetry.

Students will be encouraged to explore subgenres—both fiction and nonfiction, both creative and analytic—through their own research, since the course can only cover some central generic types, leaving out other modes such as film, digital platforms (blogs, for example), performance, multimedia, flash and fan fiction, epistles, and graphics

In addition to reading some essays on modern genre theory, our reading list includes

Required Texts:

Westover and Whelan, *Uneducated* (memoir)

Sanders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* (novel)

Arceneaux, *I Can’t Date Jesus* (essays)

Chee, *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel* (essays)

Bechdel, *Are You My Mother?* (graphic nonfiction)

Jess, *Olio* (poetry)

Long Soldier, *Whereas* (poetry)

Family Resemblances (selections from this hybrid anthology)
Butterworth, *Ferryman* (drama)
Williams, “Chaunt” (short story)

Ground Rules:

- [Students with disabilities will receive accommodation.](#)
- This classroom adheres to the principles of nondiscrimination based on sexual or gender orientation as set forth by [UM Allies](#).
- More than two unexcused absences during the semester will lead to a failing grade.
- Please consult the [University of Montana website](#) for deadlines in regard to drop/add, fee payment, and other administrative concerns.
- Students must turn in all assignments at the beginning of the day when the assignment is due. I do not accept late assignments unless the student contacts me with a reasonable excuse *before* the beginning of the class when the assignment is due.
- Students must come to class prepared to ask and answer questions.
- Please contact me at any time if you have questions about the assignments or how you are doing in the class.
- At least one conference with the professor during the course is required.
- Some materials in the course call for a trigger warning—hereby given.

Assignments and Grades:

- **One-third** of the grade will reflect the performance on response papers (1-2 pages), threads (discussion responses on Moodle), and participation as well as attendance. Students will introduce their research to the class in short presentations to be scheduled.
- **Two-thirds** of the grade will reflect the following¹:
 - 50% first analytic essay or creative work (10-15)
 - 50% second analytic essay or creative work (10-15)

Outcomes:

- A working knowledge of the various theoretical approaches to the analysis of generic representation, including some familiarity with the various schools of thinking about genre and gender
- The acquisition of the analytic skills needed to apply theory to text
- The ability to undertake a close reading of text and context in the service of a theoretical perspective

¹ Students can only write one creative work out of the two assignments. Both essays may be analytic.

- Development of the writing skills needed to organize and present an extended critical analysis of a literary work.

SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Jan 15

Fiction (Short):

Joy Williams, “Chaunt” (short story)—Moodle
Family Resemblance, Flash Fiction 299-302, Keret 329-336
 Bawarshi, “The Genre Function”—Moodle

Jan 22

Fiction (Long):

Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo* Part One
 John Frow, *Genre* (selections)—Moodle

Jan 29

Saunders, *Lincoln*—finish
 Wayne Booth, “Distance”—Moodle

Feb 5

Fiction (graphic memoir)

Bechdel, *Are You My Mother: A Comic Drama* 1-4
Family Resemblance, “Introduction to Hybridity” xix-xxxiii

Feb 12

Bechdel—finish
 Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”—Moodle

Feb 19

Drama

Butterworth, *The Ferryman*
 Bamberg, “Who Am I?": Narrative and Identity—Moodle

Feb 26

Nonfiction (memoir)

Westover, *Educated* Chap 1-20

Family Resemblance 113-116; Maggie Nelson 141-147

March 5

Westover, *Educated* finish

Family Resemblance Gregory Orr 148-158

March 12

Epistolary

Family Resemblance 53-56, Julie Marie Wade, 57-69, Joy Ladin 101-116

Pound, "River Merchant's Wife: A Letter"—Moodle

Richard Hugo, Letters (selected)—Moodle

Derrida, "The Law of Genre"—Moodle

March 19

Poetry (and History)

Tyehimba Jess, *Olio* 1-100

FIRST ESSAY DUE

March 25-29 SPRING BREAK

April 2

Olio finish

Family Resemblance 159-162, Mark Jarman 182-191

April 9

Layli Long Soldier, *Whereas*

Aristotle—Moodle

April 16

Nonfiction (lyric essay)

Michael Arceneaux, *I Can't Date Jesus: Love, Sex, Family, Race, and Other Reasons I've Put My Faith in Beyoncé*
Beebe, *Ideology of Genre* (selections)—Moodle

April 23

Alexander Chee, *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel* "The Curse,"
"The Rosary," "The Autobiography of my Novel," "The Guardians"
Family Resemblance 3-6, Julie Carr 7-14

April 30

Brian Blanchfield, "On the Leave"—Moodle
Family Resemblance, Kathleen Ossip 39-52, Ander Monson 269-277

May 6

SECOND ESSAY DUE NOON MONDAY MAY 6