Gallatin School New York University  
First-Year Research Seminar  

**War Stories**  
FIRST-UG 753  

Monday/Wednesday: 2:00:00 PM to 3:15:00 PM  
1 Wash Pl, Room 401  

Dr. Rowena Kennedy-Epstein  
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Office Hours: Monday, 3:30-4:30  
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**Course Description**  

Simone Weil writes that “the true hero, the true subject, the center of the Iliad is force,” and that force “is the very center of human history.” From the Iliad to the war on terror, from the Bhagavad Gita to the journalism of the Spanish Civil War to Rebecca West’s amnesiac solider to the last lines of Myung Mi Kim’s epic poem on the Korean war, the centrality of force is persistent in our texts and rhetoric. This course will examine how war is written about, documented and represented. We will ask whether representations and narratives of war lead to desensitization and the continuation of violence, or if they give voice to the victims and critique the systems that cause conflict. This class will explore writing from the classical to modern periods, examining the ways in which writers represent war to expose injustice, advocate for peace, incite and condemn violence, draw the boundaries of nation and gender, and collapse the public and private. The texts we will read are at times openly argumentative or activist, while at others lyric and psychological; as writers, students will respond to each work through various rhetorical and critical modes, employing argumentation, comparative analysis, close reading, and epistolary forms. Students will prepare for a final investigative paper by developing research questions that locate a text in light of the conflict it was written to address.  

**Writing and Assignments**  

Over the course of the semester you will write three short essays and a final research paper (handing in a draft and a final version of each); you will also present on your final research paper. In addition, you will write short reading responses on the class blog throughout the semester.  

1) The *Close Reading Essay* (3-5 pages) will be a comparative reading of two poems. You can choose from Wilfred Owen’s *Dulce et Decorum Est*, Muriel Rukeyser’s *Poem*, and Carolyn Forché’s *The Colonel*. The assignment is meant to provide you
the opportunity to think about the ways in which form and meaning are constructed in a text, but also about the ways in which the historical and political circumstances surrounding a work inform its creation. How does Owen’s experience in the trenches of WWI inform the shape of the poem, its language and imagery? How does Forché’s experience as a journalist and activist inform her documentation of the war in El Salvador? What kind of history is Rukeyser constructing in her poem? How are we meant to read their works, formally and politically?

2) For the Methodological Essay (3-5 pages), you must apply a theoretical model or concept to one of the texts we have read in the course thus far. You will need to explain the article or theory, presenting its main arguments, and show how it can illuminate aspects of the text that might not otherwise be visible.

3) The Documentary Essay (3-5 pages) will be partly of your own making. Like the authors we will be reading, you will be asked to find materials about a specific event relating to war (contemporary or historical)--newspaper articles, photographs, sound clips, etc.--and build your own narrative around the documents. This paper can be a critique, a defense, a call to action, but it must utilize archival and research skills, along with the descriptive, creative, and scholarly skills that are necessary to interact with and explicate the primary source materials.

4) The final Research Paper (8-10 pages) will utilize all the concepts and skills you’ve developed in the previous three papers: close reading, theoretical and historical analysis, and the ability to extrapolate complex ideas from your research. We will spend numerous classes building toward this final paper, working on formulating generative research questions, developing a thesis, and finding historical, theoretical, and scholarly sources. As you work towards the first draft of your paper you will also make an annotated bibliography of at least five sources that will be included in your final paper and presentation on this research. I will provide a more detailed description of this assignment during the semester.

5) You will be asked to write five short Reading Responses (around 500 words), on texts of your choosing, over the course of the semester on the NYU Classes website. I will set up the forum so that you can respond to each other as well.

Grading

| Essay 1 | 15% |
| Essay 2 | 15% |
| Essay 3 | 15% |
| Essay 4 | 25% |
| Responses | 10% |
| Participation and presentation | 20% |
See the attached grading rubric for guidelines on writing practices and grading.

**Absences, Lateness, and Classroom Expectations**
Because participation in class is crucial, you should attend every class on time. If for any reason you think you may miss class, please let me know as soon as possible. More than two absences will jeopardize your grade. Lateness is unacceptable and disrupts learning and focus for both you and your fellow students. While this may seem obvious, cellphones must be turned off, and no texting is allowed in the classroom. If I see you using your cellphone, iPhone, Blackberry, etc. during class, I may ask you to leave and mark you absent.

**Academic Integrity**
Any deliberate borrowing of the ideas, terms, statements, or knowledge of others without clear and specific acknowledgment of the source is intellectual theft and is called plagiarism. It is not plagiarism to borrow the ideas, terms, statements, or knowledge of others if the source is clearly and specifically acknowledged. Students who consult critical material and wish to include some of the insights, ideas, or statements encountered must provide full citations in an appropriate form. You can consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html](http://www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html) for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

**Texts:**
You can buy the books below at the NYU Bookstore; all other texts will be on the NYU Classes website.

- Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*
- Simone Weil, *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*
- Alice Notley, *The Descent of Alette*
- Sophocles, *Antigone* (trans. Fagles)
- Rebecca West, *Return of the Soldier*
- Theresa Cha, *Dictee*
- Myung Mi Kim, *Commons*
- Art Spiegelman, *Maus 1 and 2*

**Syllabus**

**Week 1**
Mon, Jan 27  Introduction
   In-class reading: Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est*
   Carolyn Forché, *The Colonel*
   Muriel Rukeyser, *Poem*
   In-class writing: close reading

Wed, Jan. 29 No Class
Research Treasure Hunt (groups of 2):
Using the NYU Library (with the help of a librarian, if needed), find a book on the topic of “war and literature.” Check the book out and bring it to our next class. Also, on the electronic database JSTOR, please find and read Judith Butler’s article “Photography, War, Outrage.”

**Week 2**

**Mon, Feb. 3**
Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

**Wed, Feb 5**
Woolf, excerpt from *Three Guineas*, war propaganda
In-class: seeing vs. reading about atrocity

**Week 3**

**Mon, Feb 10**
*The Iliad*, Book 1
Simone Weil, *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*
**Draft: Close Reading Essay Due (3-5 pages)**

**Wed, Feb 12**
Alice Notley, *The Descent of Alette*
*Homer’s Art*

**Week 4**

**Mon, Feb 17**  NO CLASS

**Wed, Feb 19**
Sophocles, *Antigone*
**Close Reading Essay Due**
Secondary Source on Antigone (undecided)
Benjamin, *On Violence*

**Week 5**

**Mon, Feb 24**
De Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*

**Wed, Feb 26**
Mary Rowlandson, captivity narrative

**Week 6**

**Mon, March 3**
Rebecca West, *Return of the Soldier*
Marina MacKay, *The Lunacy of Men, The Idiocy of Women*

Wed, March 5
Paul Fussell, from *The Great War and Modern Memory*
Eliot, *The Waste Land*
Mirrlees, *Paris: A Poem*
**Draft: Methodological Essay Due (3-5pages)**

**Week 7**

Mon, March 10
Muriel Rukeyser, *Mediterranean and Elegies*
Orwell, from *Homage to Catalonia*
Auden, *Spain*

Wed, March 12
Martha Gellhorn and Nancy Cunard, reportage
Jessica Berman, *Commitment and the Scene of War*
**Methodological Essay Due**

**Week 8**
Spring Break

**Week 9**
Mon, March 24
A visit to NYU Tamiment

Wed, March 26
Small group project on the archive
Photo-collages of Hannah Höch

**Week 10**
Mon, March 31
Aimé Césaire, from *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*
Fanon, from *Black Skin/White Masks*

Wed, April 2
H.D, *Trilogy*, Book 1
from *The Diary of Anne Frank*

**Week 11**
Mon, April 7
Spiegelman, *Maus 1*
Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann*
Draft: Documentary Essay (3-5 pages)

Week 12

Mon, April 14
Theresa Cha, *Dictee*

Wed, April 16
Myung Mi Kim, *Commons*

*Documentary Essay Due*

Week 13

Mon, April 21
Michael Herr, *Illumination Rounds*

Wed, April 23
Joan Didion, *El Salvador*

Week 14

Mon, April 28
Research Presentations

Wed, April 30
Research Presentations

*Annotated Bibliography Due*

Week 15

Mon, May 5;
Research Presentations

Wed, May 7
Writing Workshop

*Draft of Research Paper Due*

Week 16

Mon, May 12
Makeup day / Film: TBA

*Final Paper Due:*