Writing Cross-Culturally
WRTNG-UG 1230
Gallatin School, NYU
Fall 2015
12 Waverly Pl, Rm L114
M 06:20 PM-9:00 PM

Prof. Nancy Agabian
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Course Description:
In this course, students will create writing that traverses identities, borders and cultures, as well as genres, as they explore and deepen their understanding of issues of form, craft and ethics. The class will read and discuss a variety of texts that center around various modes of culture crossing, such as travel, tourism, and study abroad; immigration, expatriation and repatriation; and historical clashes and conflicts. Through an ongoing examination of structural and craft issues in the exemplary texts, students will make creative decisions to help write three main assignments dealing with themes of Memory, Identity and Conflict. We'll use our discussions of Memory to help focus on expository and reflective rhetorical strategies, Identity as a way to experiment with point of view and character development, and Conflict as a method for exploring structure and dramatic tension. In order to write cross-culturally about personal experiences, students will be encouraged to create texts along the spectrum between creative nonfiction and autobiographical fiction. Theoretical essays will help inform how we ethically position ourselves as writers observing cultures not (necessarily) our own in order to inform audiences and to challenge our own prejudices. Through it all, we'll consider how formal experiments across genres may help illuminate experiences and confront perceptions.

Objectives:
○ To become more adept as a critical reader of literary works, especially in identifying the success of an author to portray cultures subjectively and objectively.
○ To experiment with a wide variety of craft techniques in an effort to challenge yourself and to improve as a writer.
○ To research topics through interview, reporting, the internet, the library and other means to effectively inform your creative writing.

Course Materials:
● A standard notebook (8 1/2 x 11" pages) to write in during class sessions and/or a laptop
● A folder to keep all class handouts, exercises, drafts and graded assignments
● A recording device of your choice: digital recorder, mp3 player, your computer program, or a recording app on your phone.

Required books: Available at the NYU bookstore:
Nunez, Sigrid. A Feather on the Breath of God. Picador, 1st Ed.
Kincaid, Jamaica. A Small Place. FSG, 2nd Ed.
Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. Dictee. Univeristy of California, 2nd Ed.

Optional:
Thuy, Le Thi Diem. The Gangster We Are All Looking For. Knopf or Anchor ed.

Note: The rest of our course readings will be PDF excerpts, posted on our NYU Classes site.
Major Assignments:
- Memory (and coming-of-age): Reflection and exposition. 6-7 pages
- Identity (and movement): Point of view and character. 6-7 pages
- Conflict (and history): Structure and story. 6-7 pages

More information about the major assignments will be given closer to when they are due. You may use them to write three separate pieces or linked pieces over the course of the semester. Before you turn in an assignment for a final grade, a draft of it will be workshopped in class. You will then revise it based on the comments you receive; turn in your first draft (with comments) and the revised draft by the following session for a grade. Assignments that have not been workshopped will be deducted by one letter grade (e.g. a B assignment will receive a C). Late assignments will also be penalized, whether first or revised drafts, by 1/3 a letter grade for each day late. I won't accept an assignment more than a week late from the final due date.

Revision: Assignments may be revised after you receive a grade, and are usually due a week later. I will average together the first grade and the grade after revision. Writing is revision and encouraged.

Page length: In order to not limit creativity, your writing can go under or over the suggested limit by a page or two. You should produce at least 20 new pages of workshopped and revised writing during the semester. You can link assignments thematically to create one long exploration into a subject or community, or you can treat them as separate, stand alone pieces on different topics.

Supplemental assignments:

One Research Exercise: (300-600 words), typed double-spaced, hard copy or posted online
You'll need to do research for your final assignment on Conflict (and history) and this exercise will give you guidelines, structure, and opportunities for advice and feedback from the class. It will involve some or a few forms of research: interview, observation, and/or scholarly. You will turn in a brief, one-page report and an annotated bibliography. I'll hand out guidelines to help you conduct research, and I will ask you to report your findings in class.

Nine Reader Responses: one to two pages (300-600 words), posted online
Write a response to every set of readings, in answer to questions that I pose on NYU Classes under our Discussion Forum. Post these anytime during the week, until the deadline of one hour before our class meeting in order to receive credit. I will read these but won't comment unless you ask me to do so within the response. They'll help you to work through your ideas about the content of the readings and the elements of writing and to engage in our class discussion. Print them out and bring to class for your notes if you don't carry a laptop to class.

Six Writing Exercises: one to two pages (300-600 words), hand-written or typed double-spaced, hard copy or posted online
On the weeks when you don't have drafts of writing assignments or the research exercise due, you will turn in a passage of experimental writing. You can develop these pages on your own, or they can be derived from the writing exercises that you will do in class, but they should help you work your way into your assignments. If you find you're blocked, I've listed extra writing prompts in the syllabus as suggestions. You get to choose the one passage of writing you would like to turn in. The exercises are meant to help you regularly develop writing for the assignments; I will read them and comment briefly to advise you on what/how to develop.
Peer reviews: These are the written comments you give to your peers on their writing during workshops. The number will be determined by our workshop arrangements.

Supplemental assignments will help you develop your writing for the major assignments. They won't be graded, but you'll receive a point of credit for each. The more you do, the better grade you will receive. I won't accept these supplemental assignments more than a week late.

**Participation:** Contributions to class discussions, comments during peer workshops, and reading aloud of writing are very important to this course. First of all, I'm really curious to learn what you're thinking. Speaking in class makes you a more active learner, and your discoveries and questions help other students with their interviews, research and writing. Your discussion also helps me understand your progress through the material, so that I can shape the course to your benefit. Verbal feedback during workshop sessions helps you to become a better editor of your own writing.

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend every class. Missing more than two classes will affect your grade, as will habitual lateness. Arriving late or leaving early for more than ten minutes, on two occasions, will count as an absence. If you miss more than four classes, you'll fail the course. There are exceptions for illness and family emergencies, so please inform me of any circumstances that prevent you from coming to class. If you can, let me know ahead of time if you know you will be late or absent.

**Etiquette:** Turn off noisy electronic devices before you arrive to class and put them away so as not to get distracted from the real human beings interacting directly with you. You can use a laptop or tablet during class to read texts, write, take notes, or look up information, but don't let your attention stray outside our frame of discussion and from our common tasks.

**Academic Integrity Policy:** As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please 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).

**Incomplete policy:** A grade of Incomplete will be granted in this course only if you have already completed the vast majority of the work for the semester. If you find yourself at the end of the semester unable to finish the work for this course because of unexpected and unforeseeable circumstances, such as health problems or a family emergency, you must fill out a form called Request for a Grade of Incomplete and bring it to me by our last class meeting.

**Final Grade Breakdown:**
- Memory: 25%
- Identity: 25%
- Conflict: 25%
- Writing Exercises, Research Exercises and Reading Responses: 15%
- Participation: 10%
Schedule: Subject to change with our progress as a class. Please contact me if you're absent or miss part of a class session to find out what you missed and to confirm assignments. **In-class** activities planned for each date are listed. Homework (HW) is listed under the date it is due. Readings can be found in the Resources section on our NYU Classes site. The questions for Reader Responses will be posted on the Forum section on NYU Classes. Writing Exercises and Major Assignments may be turned in as hard copies in class or electronically on NYU Classes.

**MEMORY (and coming-of-age)**

1. **September 14: Introduction**  
   **In-class:** Introductions and overview of course. Brief excerpts from *Imaginary Homelands* by Salman Rushdie and *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. Discussion and exercises on showing vs. telling and fractured memories.

2. **September 21: Showing vs. Telling**  
   **HW due:**  
   **Reader Response:** “Shul/School” by James McBride; “Relations” by Eula Bliss; “Heaven-Hell” by Jhumpa Lahiri; “The Summer of Young Uncles” and “The Old Italian” by Bushra Rehman  
   **Writing exercise:** Develop one of the exercises from class. **Extra prompt:** Remember in writing the first time you became aware of “the other”.  
   **In-class:** Discussion and exercises on reflections of coming-of-age in terms of racial identity.

3. **September 28: Setting**  
   **HW due:**  
   **Reader Response:** *A Feather on the Breath of God* by Sigrid Nunez; “Palm” excerpt (pp. 36--77) from *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* by Le Thi Diem Thuy; brief excerpts from *A Map of Home* by Randa Jarrar, and “Ayki” by Peter Najarian  
   **Writing Exercise:** Develop one of the exercises from class. **Extra prompt:** Compare and contrast two important places: one from the present, the other from the past. What unites them?  
   **In-class:** Discussion and exercise on place, setting and immigration in fiction.  
   **Handout:** Memory Assignment

4. **October 5: Voice**  
   **HW due:**  
   **Reader Response:** “Miss Lora” by Junot Diaz; “Coming Home Again” by Chang-Rae Lee; brief excerpt from *Sarah* by JT Leroy; and “The Highway of Lost Girls” by Vanessa Veselka  
   **Writing Exercise:** Develop one of the exercises from class. **Extra prompt:** Narrate the first time you left home, using two different emotional registers.  
   **In-class:** Discussion and exercise on voice, tone, mood, and crossing domestic cultural zones.

5. **October 13 (note: this is a TUESDAY! No class on Monday the 12th)**  
   **HW due:**  
   **First draft of Memory Assignment**  
   **In-class:** Workshop of Memory Assignment  
   **Brief reading and discussion:** on language/diction and Amy Tan's “Mother Tongue”
IDENTITY (and movement)

6. October 19: Point of View

**Final Draft of Memory Assignment:** Turn in with peer comments on first draft.

**Reader Response:** *A Small Place* by Jamaica Kincaid; “Summer in Samarkand” by Elif Batuman; Chapter 1 and 2 of *The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway; Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 3—28) of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* by Gertrude Stein

**In-class:** Discussion and exercise on point of view and repats & ex-pats

Collection of Final Draft of Memory Assignment.

7. October 26: Character

**HW due:**

**Reader Response:** Chapter 1 of *Out of Place* by Edward Said; “Prologue and “Tuzla” excerpts (pp. 3--68) from *The Stone Fields* by Courtney Brkic; “Have You Enjoyed Your Life” excerpt (pp. 3—26) from *Brother I'm Dying*, and “The Other Side of the Water” by Edwidge Danticat.

**Writing Exercise:** Develop one of the exercises from class. **Extra prompt:** Make a list of qualities of a mother or a father. Now place that character in exile or travel: show one or more quality in transformation.

**In-class:** Discussion and exercise on the elements of character and exile. Mid-term Evaluation: Stop, Keep, Start.

Discuss Handout: Identity Assignment

8. November 2: Scene, Dialogue and Summary

**HW due:**

**Reader Response:** Excerpt (pp. 1—28) of *Stories I Stole* by Wendell Steavenson; excerpt (pp. 46--79) from *Cleopatra's Wedding Present* by Robert Tewdwr Moss; Chapter 3 and 4 (pp. 34—69) of *On the Rez* by Ian Frazier; and Chapter 1 (pp. 3--18) of *Random Family* by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc

**Writing Exercise:** Develop one of the exercises from class. **Extra prompt:** A conversation between two people: a local and a visitor.

**In-class:** Discussion and exercise on dialogue scenes of encounter, conflict and violence

9. November 9

**HW due:**

**First draft of Identity Assignment**

**In-class:** Workshop of Identity Assignment. Brief reading and discussion of Vivian Gornick's “The Situation and the Story” and Handouts: Research Exercise and Conflict Assignment.
CONFLICT (and history)

10. November 16: Structure
HW due:
**Final Draft of Identity Assignment**: Turn in with peer comments on first draft.
**Reader Response**: “Arts of the Contact Zone” by Mary Louise Pratt; “Impressions” by Stephen J. Shalit; Preface and Ch 1-3 (pp.xiii—33) of What is the What by Dave Eggers; excerpt (pp 2—40) from A Tale for the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki; excerpt (pp. 1—55) from The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot

**In-class**: Discussion and exercise on structure and the contact zone.

11. November 23: Plot
HW due:
**Reader Response**: “Oedipus in Samara” by Lawrence Weschler; “The Soccer War” by Ryszard Kapuscinski; “How to Kill Yourself and Others in America” by Kiese Laymon; Chapter 18 (pp. 211—222) of Open City by Teju Cole

**Research Exercise**: Conduct research to inform your Conflict Assignment
**Writing Exercise**: Develop one of the exercises from class. Extra prompt: Flashback on a moment of history that you remember. Now quickly research the details of it, and respond to what you've learned.

**Note**: Turn in either Writing OR Research exercise, depending on your progress

**In-class**: Discussion and exercise on plot and war/conflict.

Brief reports on Research Exercise.

12. November 30: Nonlinear narratives
HW due:
**Reader Response**: Dictee by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha; “Entering into the Serpent” by Gloria Anzaldua; Part I (pp. 5--18) of Citizen by Claudia Rankine; Prologue and Chapter 1 of “The Fear of Large and Small Nations” by Nancy Agabian

**Research Exercise**: Conduct research to inform your Conflict Assignment
**Writing Exercise**: Develop one of the exercises from class. Extra prompt: Take a page of writing about cultural conflict (could be yours or someone else's), photocopy it, cut it up in pieces randomly, read and respond in writing to each part.

**Note**: Turn in either Writing OR Research exercise, depending on your progress

**In class**: Discussion and exercise on historical violence and nonlinear/experimental narrative.

Brief reports on Research Exercise.

13. December 7
HW due:
**First Draft of Conflict Assignment**

**In-class**: Workshop of Conflict Assignment. Individual consultations.

14. December 14
HW due:
**Final Draft of Conflict Assignment**

**In-class**: Course evaluations. Presentation of one assignment from the semester. Partay!