

Humanities 195j
Spring 2004
Mon. 2:45-4:15 (sometimes longer)
and by Institute calendar
Humanities 102

Professor Liss
Humanities 214, x73541
Office Hrs: Mon., Th. 11-12

Humanities Institute Junior Fellows Seminar

The theme for the Spring 2004 Scripps College Humanities Institute is *Life Stories*. One might well ask, why are memoirs and biographies so popular? Why do people read them? Why do people write them? What do they tell us about individuals and our understanding of the individual, about time and place, and narrative and identity? Throughout the semester, we will examine different examples of life writing, including biographies and autobiographies in written form and on film. These works address the construction of the self, and the self in relation to family, culture and history. They also explore the relationship between memory and truth. Many of the authors we will read and who will come to speak have written both autobiographies and biographies and works of fiction and non-fiction; they also share an interest in the relationships of writing, reading, art, politics, literature, and life. As is the tradition at the Scripps College Humanities Institute, the program approaches these issues from a range of disciplinary and experiential perspectives, drawing on the expertise of historians and filmmakers, critics and activists, immigrants and exiles, anthropologists and artists.

Course requirements:

All Fellows will participate in a seminar that accompanies the lecture series. We will read texts recommended or written by the speakers in preparation for their visits. Fellows are expected to attend the weekly seminar and all other Institute events. Fellows will have opportunities to meet individually with the speakers.

Each student is expected to fulfill the following requirements throughout the semester:

- Read all of the assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss them
- Write weekly, two-page reading responses (due at the beginning of class)
- Make an oral presentation on one week's assignment to initiate and focus discussion. This presentation includes summarizing the argument or major concerns, presenting what is at stake (why does this work matter?), and posing questions for discussion. Because the readings focus directly on particular authors/speakers, you may find it useful to read about them and their work beyond the assignment. In order for these presentations to be productive and helpful, you should be as clear as possible about what you think the author's main concerns are and about your own analysis or reactions to them. You can assume that everyone else has done the assigned reading, so you won't need to summarize it.
- Write a response paper about the Institute events; this may include an interview with one of the speakers.
- Write a fifteen-page research paper on a topic of your choice related to the topics we discuss this semester. You must discuss your topic with me beforehand as noted in the schedule below. Students will present their work to the class at the end of the semester. Students may pursue a project in another format, equivalent in scope and rigor to a research paper, e.g. a video or an art project based on the readings for the semester, a memoir, autobiography, or biographical work of some kind.

Schedule of meetings and readings:

We will meet regularly on Mondays to prepare for the Institute events. The week after spring break we will need to meet from 2:45 to 5:30 as noted below; we will also have a longer meeting on April 12.

Students are required to attend Institute events. Most talks are on Thursdays either at 4:15 or at 7:00 p.m. On the Friday morning following these lectures we will meet separately with the speakers, most likely at 11:30 a.m. There is one film screening on Wednesday evening February 18, one evening lecture on Monday April 12, and a series of lunch talks. Details are included in the syllabus.

The readings are assigned based on what the speakers made available as of the first day of class. Changes or additions may be necessary. Books listed are available at Huntley bookstore. Xeroxed selections are available from Claire Bridge in the Humanities Institute office.

- Jan. 22 (Thursday):** Introduction to the class and to the program
 Reading: Vivian Gornick, The Situation and the Story (selections xeroxed)
 Daniel D. Dennett, “The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity” (xerox)
 Christian K. Messenger, “Semiotics and Alchemy: Biography Under Attack” (xerox)
 A quotation and two pictures (xerox)
- Jan. 26:** Robert Rosenstone, Visions of the Past (selections xeroxed)
 Rosenstone, “The Reel Joan of Arc: Reflections on the Theory and Practice of the Historical Film” (xeroxed)
 Reviews of *Frida* (xeroxed)
 [Film “Frida” to be screened Sunday, 1/25, 7 p.m. Humanities Auditorium]
- Jan. 29: Rosenstone: “In Praise of the Biopic: The Case of *Frida*” (4:15, Humanities 204)**
- Feb. 2:** Tobias Wolff, This Boy’s Life, pp. 3-144
- Feb. 9:** Wolff, This Boy’s Life, pp. 144-end
- Feb. 12: Wolff: “Saving Your Life” (7 p.m., Hampton Room)**
- Feb. 16:** Liza Dalby, The Tale of Murasaki, pp. xv-221
- Feb. 18: Sheila Ganz: “Unlocking the Heart of Adoption” (7 p.m., Boone Recital Hall)**
- Feb. 23:** Dalby, Tale of Murasaki, pp. 221-end
- Feb. 25: Lunch talk: Professor Gayle Greene, Scripps College, “The Insomnia Journals”**
- Feb. 26: Dalby, “Reconstructing Murasaki: A Writer’s Journey” (4:15, Hampton Room)**
- Mar. 1:** Mai Elliott, The Sacred Willow, Preface and front matter, pp. 3-242
- Mar. 8:** Elliott, Sacred Willow, pp. 243-end
Project topic statements due in class
- Mar. 11: Elliott: “Family and Memories” (7 p.m., Hampton Room)**
- >>SPRING BREAK<<**
- Mar. 22:** Azar Nafisi, Reading Lolita in Tehran, entire (class will meet until 5:30)
- Mar. 23: Lunch talk: Professor T. Kim-Trang Tran, “Call Me Sugar”**
- Mar. 25: Nafisi, “The Saving Power of Literature” (4:15 p.m., Hampton Room)**
- Mar. 29:** Gabor Kalman, “We Pretend” and “Liberated” (xeroxed) and other reading tba
- Mar. 30: Lunch talk: Professor Sheila Walker, Scripps College, “Hoochie Mamas and Chicken Heads: 'Life Stories' of African American Adolescent Girls”**

April 1: Gabor Kalman: “Keepers of Memory: Stories of Hidden Children,” a work in progress, 7:00 p.m. Boone Recital Hall

April 5: No class: revised project statements and project outlines due by 4 p.m.

April 12: Lawrence Weschler, Calamities of Exile, preface, pp. 137-193 and additional readings to be distributed later (class will meet until about 5:00)

April 12: Weschler, “Vermeer in Bosnia” (7 p.m., Hampton Room)

April 19: Lunch talk: Professor Cristanne Miller, Pomona College, “Sex, Freud, and the Retelling of Life Stories”

Project drafts due in my Humanities mailbox by 4 p.m.

April 26: Presentations

April 28: Lunch talk: Professors Dion Scott-Kakures and Cheryl Walker, Scripps College, “The Multiple Self”

May 3: Presentations

May 6: Presentations (reading day)

May 7: Senior grades due

May 13: Final papers due by noon in my Humanities mailbox