

Honors 392G, Ghosts That Haunt Us: Memory, Identity, and Micro Histories

Instructor: Visiting Assistant Professor Jyl Lynn Felman
Meeting Times: Spring 2005, Tues 2:30 – 5:50 pm
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Description

Acknowledged or unacknowledged ghosts reside in the mundane landscapes of daily human life: looking in the mirror when we brush our teeth; sitting at the family dinner table; or opening a car door on the passenger side. We can choose to embrace or deny their presence. When ghosts arrive unexpectedly --without the reception of a warm welcome--the possibility of unknown consequences exists. But we can not prepare ourselves emotionally for their potentially terrifying and disruptive arrival. After “a visitation” our lives may change for ever and the social history of the world-at-large must be reconsidered.

The question of “haunting” ghosts as opposed to “happy” ghosts is the primary preoccupation of this course. We will be concerned with our emotional inability to confront those personal/political ghosts of the past which lead to the creation of historical state sanctioned fictions. For it is always the ghosts who live in the shadows of tortured memory that inform/deform the official nation/state narrative and impact the lives we live/don't live.

In this course we will read ghost stories that arise from the gap between documented personal and political histories and the memories of those voices erased from “the official family and/or governmental record.”

We will examine poetry, plays, short stories, novels, memoirs, and films from a variety of disciplines as well as current events to create a meaningful context for understanding the role ghosts play in creating voice, narrative identity and metaphor.

The readings explore the ways individual identities are constructed and de/reconstructed simultaneously, while reflecting the difficult negotiation between self and community, past and present; history and memory.

The course is designed to take advantage of current events, guest lectures/performances, and arts programming on/off campus throughout the semester.

Course Requirements

1. Students are expected to come to class having carefully read the material assigned for that day and to engage in serious discussion. Students will be required to develop one or more questions for WEB CT weekly on line discussion. Based on assigned readings students will be asked to initiate the WEB CT on line class discussion. Students are required to write and post their weekly responses for the purpose of active engagement with the entire class. **Postings are due by 9:00 pm Monday. Students are required to read all weekly class postings. A missed posting counts the same as a missed written assignment.**

Class and on-line participation is 33% of the final grade.

2. A series of short pieces --one to five pages-- written outside of class will be required as well as weekly in-class writing. Students will write their own personal and political ghost stories in the form of micro, macro, and personal narrative her/histories.

Hard copy written work counts for 33% of the final grade.

3. The midterm will be a video or performance viewed outside class with take-home question(s) to be completed in partners. An essential part of the midterm is to facilitate students' ability to discuss the theories stressed in class with their peers and to develop their own original ideas. Or, the midterm will be an in class oral improvisation based on the theories.

4. The final consists of original student performances based on the readings and theories studied throughout the semester.

The final and midterm will be evaluated together and equal 34% of the final grade.

Written work must include student's name/email/phone, with all pages numbered and stapled together!!! No paper clips.

Assigned readings and discussion topics are fluid and may be revised or changed completely depending on the direction the course takes.

A Note On Course Books:

Please bring to class a copy of the book assigned for the week. We will be using the text in class. I know that the cost of books has gone up, up, up and away!! I have tried to keep the price down. If you can not afford to purchase any/or all of these books you may take out a copy from one of the following local libraries or the UMASS New England Colleges Library loan system: Amherst College, Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, Hampshire, Jones Library in the center of Amherst, and Forbes Library in Northampton.

Plan ahead and request copies through the local Five College inter-college loan system!! Request books through the Du Bois Library reserve system.

Course Format: Or What Is She Doing Now?

Feminist Pedagogy

We will use the multiple-lens approach of race, gender, class, and sexuality to interpret and deconstruct the readings. The course will be taught utilizing feminist pedagogical theories which de centers the classroom away from the professor and towards the students themselves. Student agency and voice are essential to the success of this class.

No more slinking back and hiding from class discussion. Feminist pedagogy is up close and personal and utilizes performance theory to engage the whole person: mind, body, and heart. Listening well and critically, negotiating silence in the classroom without fear while simultaneously synthesizing course material are all part of the rigorous demands of active learning.

Feeling nervous or uncomfortable in class is most often a sign that you are being asked to consider new ideas. Feminist pedagogy engages the physical not just the cerebral. On occasion this makes for stormy class sessions that eventually end in exhilaration. That is the art of a good education.

“Real” learning as opposed to “robotic” learning can be disconcerting causing us to sweat in our seats! Sometimes we laugh in the “wrong” places or talk too much because emotionally messy feelings come up unexpectedly. Bravo to the students who take the risk to delve into unknown and confusing worlds. Fasten your seat belts and enjoy the ride!

**Videos (or excerpts) will be watched in class and/or reserved for viewing at the library (or students' homes) in groups of four or five. Active engagement is required from all participants at all times.

During the semester we will consider the following ghostly questions:

What is history?
 What is fiction?
 What is memory?
 What is fact?
 What/who is a ghost?

Do ghosts talk? And/or How do our ghosts talk to us? Do ghosts lie?
 What does it mean to be haunted by a ghost?
 What is the relationship between identity and memory?
 What is a macro her/history?
 What is a micro her/history?
 What is your official her/history?
 What is an official state narrative?

What is your metaphor
 What is narrative identity?
 What is the relationship between metaphor and narrative identity?

What is your narrative?
 What is "the narrative" of the United States?
 What/who are your ghosts?

What/who are the ghosts present in the world today?
 What/who are the ghosts currently haunting the United States?
 What/who are the ghosts currently haunting your family narrative?
 What is the difference between a personal ghost and a political ghost?

What is the language of ghosts?
 How do we recognize the presence of ghosts in the past, present; and in recorded her/history?
 How do we recognize the presence/absence of ghosts in our own lives?

What function do ghosts play in creating national narrative identity?

H392G GHOSTS: BOOKS

All books are available for purchase at Food For Thought Books in downtown Amherst.

1. Autobiography of a Face, Lucy Grealy; Houghton Mifflin Company, 223 pp.
2. Brutal Imagination, Cornelius Eady, G. P. Putnam and Sons, 126 pp.
3. You Don't Miss The Water, Cornelius Eady, Carneige–Mellon, 33pp.
4. Strange Fruit: The Biography of a Song, David Margolick; Harper Collins, 138 pp.
5. The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina, Alicia Partnoy; CleisPress, 136 pp.
6. Cravings, Jyl Lynn Felman, Beacon; 192 pp.
7. The Angel of Memory, Marjorie Agosín; Wings Press, 188 pp.
8. Maus I: My Father Bleeds History, and Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began Art Spiegelman; Pantheon Books, 295 pp.
9. The Gangsters We Are All Looking For, le thi diem thuy, Anchor Books, 160 pp.
10. The Laramie Project, Moises Kaufman, Tectonic Theater Project pp.
11. In The Shadow Of No Towers, Art Spiegleman, Random House, 66 pp.

Course Schedule

Week One

Feb. 1

Introduction

- A. What is a ghost?
- B. The Language of Ghosts
- C. Haunting, Visitations, and Ghostly Encounters
- D. What is Feminist Pedagogy?

Section One: History, Post Memory, and National Identity

Week Two

Feb. 8

The Ghosts of 9/11

- A. Political Ghosts
- B. Personal Ghosts
- C. The Uses and Abuses of Ghosts

D. Rememorizing Memory

Assignment: Read: In The Shadows of No Towers
By Art Spiegleman

Meet with partner outside class to discuss the reading before writing.

Write five paragraphs about "No Towers" on the WEB CT. Questions will be given out in class.

Write a hard copy first and then post on WEB CT a personal memory that haunts you.

It is important to incorporate your classmate's comments and class discussion in your response, as well as referring directly to the assigned reading.

****Please bring a photo of you with your family to class!!!**

Week Three **Section One: History, Post Memory and National Identity** cont.

Feb.15

When Words Fail Ghosts Appear

- A. Lost Voices
- B. Recovered Voices
- C. History and the Erosion of Memory
- D. Confronting Absence
- E. History and the Erasure of Identities

Video: "The Pawn Broker"

Assignment: Read: Maus I and II
By Art Spiegelman

Answer WEB CT discussion questions. Draw your own graphic text about a historical even that impacted your entire family and changed your understanding of the world. Meet in partners to discuss the event and the text before drawing/writing. Compare notes and ideas. Be creative: You can cut images out of magazines and newspapers. Anything goes!

The graphic text is to consist of 6 to 9 frames.

Respond to WEBCT Maus questions on line.

Week Four **Section One: History Post Memory and National Identity** cont.

Feb. 22

- A. The Language of Ghosts
- B. History meets Memory While Amnesia Floats
- C. Who is Billie Holliday and why does she matter?
- D. Ghost Writers

Video: **“Strange Fruit” or “Beloved”**

Assignment: Read: **Strange Fruit: The Biography Of A Song**

By David Margolick

Listen to a recording of Billie Holliday singing “Strange Fruit.” Write a song with seven verses (four to six lines each) AND a refrain about a historical event that was left out/misrepresented/distorted by the “national narrative” that you were taught in school; and whose ghosts linger in the “subconscious of the American People.” You may use the melody from another song or make up your own. Extra credit if you sing it to the class! Seriously.

Week Five **Section Two: His/Her Story, Post Memory, and Personal**
Mar. 1 **Identity: History Indicts and The Body Remembers**

- A. Family Visitations and Lost Bodies
- B. Making Peace With Family/Historical Ghosts
- C. Is Ghost Memory Static?
- D. Mourning and Memory

Video: “In The Rivers Of Mercy Angst”

Assignment Read: Brutal Imagination and
You Don’t Miss The Water
By Cornelius Eady

Write a hard copy letter (two – three pages) to Cornelius Eady about the impact his work had on you. Post letter on WEB CT.

Write one poem about a member of your family to be read in class in the style of Cornelius Eady.

Week Six **Section Two: His/Her Story, Post Memory, and Personal**
Mar. 8 **Identity cont.**

Dis/ease and Disintegrating Selves

- A. In The Absence of A Face
- B. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- C. The Corpus and The Ghost

View "Still Here: Bill T. Jones"

Assignment: Read: **The Autobiography Of A Face**
By Lucy Grealy

Meet partner outside class to discuss the reading before writing.

Write and post five paragraphs discussing "Face" and the relationship between the body and the memory.

Write three hard copy pages of a memory of when you were very sick or in a lot of pain. Make sure to describe the illness, how you felt and what your body does or does not remember. What metaphor represents this time in your life?

Make a collage of Lucy's face.

Week Seven
Spring Break
Mar. 15
No Class
Self Evaluation: Five Pages
Questions for discussion given out in class.

Week Eight
Mar. 22
Section Three: Migration and Memory
A. A Place Called Home
B. Lost Languages and Haunted Houses
C. Her/history and Narrative Identity

Video
Assignment: TBA
Read: Angel Of Memory
By Marjorie Agosin
Post five paragraphs on the WEB CT on the relationship between ghosts, language personal identity in "Angel."
Begin to sketch out your ghost story. Bring three hard copy pages to class discussing your narrative identity and how it relates to social history. Meet in partners to discuss your narrative identity before writing.

Week Nine
April 5
Section Three: Migration and Memory cont.
Personal and Political Ghosts
A. National Fictions

- B. Personal Frictions
- C. The “Absence” of History or Where Is The Historical Record And Who Gets to Write It?

Assignment: Read: The Little School: Tales of Disappearance and Survival
By Alicia Portnoy
Make a mask from a brown paper grocery bag:
Directions In class ...

Week Ten
April 12

**Section Three: Migration and Memory cont.
Personal and Political Ghosts**

- A. Migration and Missing Narratives
- B. Memory: The Self As Re-Membered Subject
- C. Dreaming In A Lost Language

Assignment: Read: The Gangsters We Are All Looking For
By le thi diem thuy

Write a hard copy three page letter to le thi diem thuy about the impact her work had on you. Post one copy on the WEBCT and bring one to class to read out loud.

Week Eleven
April 19

Section Four: Collective Ghosts

- A. Living With Ghosts
- B. When Memory Speaks Who Listens
- C. Metaphor as Memory and Social Herstory
- D. Queer History Meets Memory
- E. Past, Present, and Future Ghosts

Assignment: Read: The Laramie Project by Moises Kaufman
Write: TBA

View “The Laramie Project”

Week Twelve
April 26

Section Four: Collective Ghosts cont.

- A. Re Writing National and Family Narratives
- B. Micro and Macro Her/istories

Assignment: Read: Cravings
By Jyl Lynn Felman

Post five paragraphs responding to Felman’s voice and narrative identity. Ask a question for the next writer to respond to.

WEEK Thirteen: SCHEDULE CHANGE FOR LAST TWO WEEKS OF CLASS!!!!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS !!!!

This is the FINAL!! Make any changes to your schedule NOW!!!!
SCHEDULE CHANGE FOR LAST TWO WEEKS OF CLASS!!!!!!!

**The last two classes will meet on Tuesday, May 3rd, from 3 -9 w/dinner.
There will be NO CLASS on the official last week of classes, May 10th.**

Week Thirteen

May 3

La Grande Finale: Student Performances
See description under Course Requirements.

C'est Fini !!!