

COLI 214B.001: Literature and Society: Writing in the Wake of Disaster

Fall 2009

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Meeting Times: TR 10:05am-11:30am

Office Hours: Thursdays 12:00pm-4:00pm

Office Location: LNG 204

Course Summary

In this course we will examine the relationships between literary and social practice, in terms of issues pertaining to fiction, testimony and witnessing. Moreover, we will also consider the questions of memory, identity and history. Furthermore, we will take up the question of the role of literature and of writing itself in the context of the great upheavals and catastrophes of the 20th century. We will undertake these issues and questions in the specific context of French literature and philosophy from the interwar period to the literature of the post-war era. In doing so, we will read more contemporary theoretical texts in order to further our analysis and interpretations of these issues. We will read literary texts by authors such as Georges Bataille, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, and Raymond Queneau; we will read both the literary and theoretical writings of Maurice Blanchot and others, and finally, theoretical works by Giorgio Agamben, Edmond Jabès and Jacques Derrida. Throughout this course, our principal *leitmotif* will be the idea of “the disaster,” developed in Blanchot's “The Writing of the Disaster” – in its various forms and valences – and by means of developing an understanding of this *leitmotif*, we will seek in our literary texts a literary practice of “writing in the wake of disaster.”

Expectations and Responsibilities

Active class participation is essential to success in this course. Therefore, regular attendance and participation are expected, and correlatively, lively discussion and active questioning is encouraged, as opposed to passive listening. It is your responsibility to notify me if you will be unable to attend class. Excessive unexcused absences, absent meeting with me during office hours to discuss the readings, will detrimentally affect your grade. I expect written assignments to be turned in on time, although extensions may be granted in specific circumstances. These assignments will require active engagement with the texts and questions at hand. You are responsible for completing the assigned readings at the appropriate times, and I expect you to visit me during office hours at least once during the semester to discuss a paper topic or text or particular interest. You may contact me via email at any time, and by phone at any reasonable hour.

Grading and Assignments

Grades will be issued on the basis of class participation and two written assignments, due at the middle and end of the semester. Although participation in class is essential, if you are uncomfortable speaking in class or have missed a class, this component may be made up with discussion during my office hours: you should be able to verbally demonstrate an understanding of the texts and issues at hand, not only in writing. Lectures will be digitally recorded and made available online for your convenience; should you miss class you will thus be able to download these recordings to ensure that your absence does not result in missing important class discussions.

Grading Rubric

Your final grade will be based upon the following:

Participation & Attendance	20%
Mid-Term Paper (10 pages)	35%
Final Paper (10 pages)	45%

The choice of topic for the mid-term and final papers lies with you – indeed, it is part of the assignment itself. Anything covered in the course, or pertinent to topics and texts covered in class can be the topic of your papers. I expect students to consult with me concerning paper topics before beginning to write; this is only to ensure that paper topics are feasible undertakings. I do not assign topics, neither do I veto them: I merely offer my advice concerning the paper's success.

N.B. There shall be NO EXAMS. I expect you to work with the texts in the form of an essay, as opposed to reciting facts! I repeat, two papers and participation will determine your grade.

N.B. While I have explicitly designed the written component of this course to discourage the possibility of plagiarism, it must be emphasized that plagiarism will not be tolerated. While I will deal with such instances on a case by case basis, I cannot emphasize enough that it WILL deleteriously affect your grade. In fact, plagiarism is likely to harm your grade even if it is successful enough to evade detection – invariably, plagiarized material is of abysmal quality and generally worthless. In short, don't even bother trying.

Required Texts:

Giorgio Agamben – *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

Georges Bataille – *Blue of Noon*, Translated by Harry Matthews (London: Marion Boyars, 2002).

Georges Bataille – *L'Abbé C.*, Translated by Philip Facey (London & New York: Marion Boyars, 1988).

Maurice Blanchot – *The Most High*, Translated by Allan Stoekl (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

Maurice Blanchot – *The Writing of the Disaster*, Translated by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

Maurice Blanchot & Jacques Derrida – *The Instant of My Death / Demeure*, Translated by Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

Pierre Drieu la Rochelle – *Will O' The Wisp*, Translated by Martin Robinson (London & New York: Marion Boyars, 2000). [Out of print. E-book format only]

Edmond Jabès – *The Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion*, Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Georges Perec – *W, or the Memory of Childhood*, Translated by David Bellos (Boston: David Goldine Publisher, 1988).

Raymond Queneau – *We Always Treat Women Too Well*, Translated by Barbara Wright (New York, NYRB Classics, 2003).

Free PDF E-Books and Other Materials

<http://www.mediafire.com/ProfRowan>

Strongly Recommended Texts:

Pierre Klossowski – *Such a Deathly Desire*, Translated by Russell Ford (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

Tentative Schedule

September 1st – Introduction & Blanchot – *The Instant of My Death*

September 3rd – Derrida – *Demeure*

September 8th – Pierre Drieu la Rochelle – *Will O' The Wisp*

September 10th – Derrida – *Demeure*

September 15th – Drieu la Rochelle – *Will O' The Wisp*

September 17th – Film: *Le Feu Follet* (Louis Malle)

September 22st – Bataille – *Blue of Noon*

September 24th – Blanchot – *The Writing of the Disaster*

September 29th – Bataille – *Blue of Noon*

October 1st – Blanchot – *The Writing of the Disaster*

October 6th – Bataille – *Blue of Noon*

October 8th – Laure – *The Sacred* + Jerome Peignot – *My Diagonal Mother*

October 13th – Queneau – *We Always Treat Women Too Well*

October 15th – Blanchot – *The Writing of the Disaster*

October 19th – Mid-Term Papers Due

October 20th – Queneau – *We Always Treat Women Too Well*

October 22nd – Blanchot – *The Writing of the Disaster*

October 27th – Blanchot – *The Most High*

October 29th – Blanchot – *The Most High*, Pierre Klossowski - “On Maurice Blanchot”

November 3rd – Blanchot – *The Most High*

November 5th – Agamben – *Remnants of Auschwitz*

November 10th – Bataille – *L'Abbé C.*

November 12th – Agamben – *Remnants of Auschwitz*

November 17th – Bataille – *L'Abbé C.*, Pierre Klossowski - “The Black Mass of Georges Bataille”

November 19th – Agamben – *Remnants of Auschwitz*

November 24th – Georges Perec – *W, or the Memory of Childhood*

December 1st – Georges Perec – *W, or the Memory of Childhood*

December 3rd – Jabès – *The Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion*

December 8th – Perec – *W.*

December 10th – Jabès – *The Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion*

December 16th – Final Papers Due