

## CANG 9106&CANG 9206 \_ Writing America's Wars, 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> Century

Level: C1+

Instructor: Rachel Kyne, Ph.D.

*"In the end, of course, a true war story is never about war... It's about love and memory. It's about sorrow. It's about sisters who never write back and people who never listen."*

- Tim O'Brien, "How to Tell a True War Story" (*Esquire*, 1987)

### Course Objectives:

- Gain familiarity with some of America's major contemporary conflicts, from the First World War to the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, and the ongoing War on Terror
- Read and discuss a range of genres and forms of writing, from novels and poems to a graphic narrative, military propaganda, journalistic reporting, science fiction, and short stories
- Consider the relationships between individualism and militarism, literature and history, and trauma and narrative
- Develop confidence in academic writing in English

### The course is organized into two-week sections addressing the following themes:

1. *What makes an ideal soldier?* Masculinity, race, and military belonging
2. *How to speak the unspeakable?* Trauma and history in survivors' testimonies
3. *What does a war story look like?* Writing about war in journalism, science fiction, and poetry
4. *Do wars end?* When war invades the everyday

### Assignments and Evaluation:

1. Participation:
  - Regular contributions to class discussion
  - Self-collated Vocabulary List — 100 words and phrases collected over the term with your own translations
  - One 300-word Reading Response, due Week 6
2. Group Oral Presentation: Prepare questions to lead class discussion and select specific passages for us to discuss
3. One 750-word essay due in Week 10
4. Final Exam

**Texts** will be provided as PDFs.

Please be aware that many of the texts we will be reading in this course contain depictions of extreme violence, including references to genocide, violent injury, and psychological trauma.

### **Syllabus:**

Week 1 – Introductions; overview of course; writing exercise

### **Weeks 2-3:**

#### **What makes an ideal soldier? Masculinity, race, and military belonging**

Week 2 – *Reading:*

Ernest Hemingway – Chapters 3-4 of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), excerpts

Week 3 – *Readings:*

1. Rebecca Onion, “A World War I-Era Memo Asking French Officers to Practice Jim Crow with Black American Troops.” *Slate* (27 April 2016) (short article)
2. “Secret Information Concerning Black Troops” (military memo dated Aug. 7 1918), published by W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Crisis*, May 1919 (short memo)
3. *Poems:*
  - Claude McKay – “If We Must Die” (1919)
  - Langston Hughes – “I, Too, Sing America”; “Will V-Day Be Me-Day Too?”
  - Gwendolyn Brooks – “Negro Hero”

### **Weeks 4-5: How to Speak the Unspeakable? Trauma and History in Survivors’ Testimonies**

Week 4 – *Reading:*

Art Spiegelman – *Maus* Ch. 1-4 (Graphic narrative)

Week 5 – *Reading:*

Art Spiegelman – *Maus* Ch. 5-6

### **Weeks 6-7: What Does a War Story Look Like? Writing War in Journalism, Science-Fiction, and Poetry**

Week 6 – [**300-word Reading Response due today!**]

*Reading:*

Ray Bradbury – “There Will Come Soft Rains” (short story)

Week 7 – *Readings:*

1. Michael Herr – “Hell Sucks” (*Esquire* 1968) (journalistic essay)

2. Ocean Vuong – “Self-Portrait as Exit Wounds” from *Night Sky with Exit Wounds* (2016) (poem)

### **Weeks 8-10: Do Wars End?—When War Invades the Everyday**

#### Week 8 – *Readings:*

1. Katey Schultz – “With the Burqa” from *Flashes of War: Short Stories* (2013)
2. “Untidiness” – Amanda Dalton (poem)
3. Phil Klay – “Redeployment” (*Granta* 116: August, 2011) (short story)

#### Week 9 – *Readings:*

1. David Finkel – *Thank You for Your Service*, Ch. 1, excerpts
2. Brian Turner – “Eulogy” (poem)
3. Dunya Mikhail – “The Iraqi Nights” (poem)

#### Week 10 – *Readings (poems):*

1. Toni Morrison – “The Dead of September 11”
2. Fatimah Asghar – from “Oil”
3. Hayan Charara – “You”
4. Taha Muhammed Ali – “Abd el-Hadi Fights a Superpower”
5. Adam Zagajewski – “Try to Praise the Mutilated World” (from 9/11 edition of *The New Yorker*)