

World Literature: Confession (ENGL 1315)

Prof. Shaj Mathew (smathew@trinity.edu)



Upside-down map of India, circa 1770

This course surveys world literature via the theme of confession. By looking to fiction, poetry, memoir, and film from across the globe, it asks how the form of confession has changed from antiquity to the Middle Ages to modernity. These confessions canvass the secular and the religious; the diary and the testimony; the traumatic and the comedic; and the Western and the non-Western. Authors and directors include Sappho, Augustine, Farid Attar, Montaigne, Gabriela Mistral, James Baldwin, Roberto Bolaño, Clarice Lispector, Virginia Woolf, Jamaica Kincaid, Forough Farrokhzad, Simone Weil, and Orhan Pamuk. These confessional narratives increasingly question the reliability of memory itself, and the course will periodically adopt this spirit of self-reflexivity: What is “world literature” and why should we study it?

Required Texts

1. Augustine, *Confessions* [[Oxford](#)]
2. Farid Attar, *The Conference of the Birds* [[Penguin Classics](#)]
(*full pdf of Attar available on T Learn*)
3. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* [[Folger](#)]
4. Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* [[Mariner Books](#)]
5. Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.* [[New Directions](#)]
6. James Baldwin, *Another Country* [[Vintage](#)]
7. W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz* [[Modern Library](#)]
8. Roberto Bolaño, *Distant Star* [[New Directions](#)]
9. Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* [[FSG](#)]
10. Orhan Pamuk, *The White Castle* [[Vintage](#)]

Assessment

- 1) Attendance, participation, & weekly discussion posts [20%]
- 2) 2-3-page close reading [15%]
- 3) 4-5-page creative assignment OR second critical essay [20%]
- 4) 10-minute presentation [15%]
- 5) 7-page final essay [30%]

Course Schedule

Unit One: Lyric, Ancient and Modern

1/11: Introduction

1/18: Sappho, fragments

1/23: Forough Farrokhzad, "Earthly Verses," "Another Birth," "Let Us Believe in the Coming of the Cold Season," "The Wind Will Take Us Away." Also listen to at least one of the Persian-language recordings.

1/25: Gabriela Mistral, selected poems

Unit Two: Religious Confessions

1/30: Augustine, *Confessions* [Books 3 + 6-8]

2/1: Augustine, continued. [Books 10-11]

2/6: Augustine [Books 8, 10, 11] - review of conversion scene & time and memory

2/8: Farid Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*

pp. 1-18; 37-86

*optional excerpts from *The Requirements of the Sufi Path* by ibn Khaldun

**optional Dick Davis essay on translating medieval Persian poetry

***2/10: Essay One (500-700-word close reading) due before midnight on Friday**

Unit Three: Interiority

2/13: Attar, continued. pp. 181-245

2/15: Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past" and "Reminiscences" from *Moments of Being* (pp. 25-159)

*optional/time-permitting: Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown."

2/20: Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

2/22: Shakespeare, continued.

2/27: James Baldwin, *Another Country* (to page 100)

3/1: Baldwin, continued (to page 227).

3/6: No class: take the time to read in greater depth

3/8: Baldwin, finish.

Unit Four: Interrogation of Memory

3/20: W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*

3/22: Sebald, continued.

***Extra Credit: Attend two films from Middle East Film Festival in Dicke Hall & write a one-page report on them* [Festival Dates: 3/23 & 3/24 + 3/30 & 3/21]**

3/27: Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*

3/29: Lispector, continued.

***3/31: Creative Assignment or Second Critical Essay (5 pages) due**

4/3: Roberto Bolaño, *Distant Star*

4/5: Bolaño, continued.

Unit Five: To Whom?

4/10: Orhan Pamuk, *The White Castle*

4/12: Pamuk, continued.

4/17: Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* [finish entire novel]

4/19: Exercise on argumentation.

4/24: Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile"

Gloria Anzaldúa, "Borderlands/La frontera"

Ai Weiwei, *Human Flow*

4/26: Course recap & evaluation. Come to class with a three-sentence argument.

Excerpt from Eliot Weinberger's *19 Ways of Reading Wang Wei*

***4/30: Final essay (7 pages) due**