**ENGLISH 4335, SENIOR SEMINAR: HOW TO TELL A TRUE WAR STORY (CRN 24522)**

Spring 2014

8:00-9:15 TTh, Irby 310

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Office Hours: 11:00-12:00, 1:00-3:00 MWF; 11:00-12:00 TTh; and by appointment

**TEXTS:**

*Phantoms of a Blood-Stained Period: The Complete Civil War Writings of Ambrose Bierce*

*A Rumor of War*, Philip Caputo

*The Things They Carried*, Tim O’Brien

*When War Becomes Personal*, ed. Donald Anderson

*Catch-22*, Joseph Heller

*Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*, Ben Fountain

**READING SCHEDULE:**

“To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent . . .. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.”—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*

January 9 Introduction to course

Week 1 Paul Fussell, “Reflections on the Culture of War” (handout); O’Brien, “How to Tell a True War Story”; Ritterbusch (in Anderson), “Canon Fodder”; Bierce, “On a Mountain,” “What I Saw of Shiloh,” “A Little of Chickamauga”

Week 2 Bierce, “The Crime at Pickett’s Mill,” “Jupiter Doke, Brigadier General,” “One Officer, One Man,” “A Son of the Gods,” “George Thurston,” “Killed at Resaca”; Clements (in Anderson), “A Civil War Memoir”

Week 3 Caputo, chapters 1-6; MacGowan (in Anderson), “A Boatman’s Story”

Week 4 Caputo, chapters 7-12; Wolfe (in Anderson), “A Different Species of Time”

Week 5 Caputo, chapters 13-end; Newmiller (in Anderson), “Voices”

Week 6 O’Brien, “The Things They Carried,” “Love,” “Spin,” “On the Rainy River,” “Enemies,” “Friends,” “How to Tell a True War Story”

Week 7 O’Brien, “The Dentist,” “Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong,” “Stockings,” “Church,” “The Man I Killed,” “Ambush,” “Style”; Karlin (in Anderson), “Wandering Souls”

Week 8 O’Brien, “Speaking of Courage,” “Notes,” “In the Field,” “Good Form,” “Field Trip,” “The Ghost Soldiers,” “Night Life,” “The Lives of the Dead”; Furey (in Anderson), “Visions of War, Dreams of Peace”

Week 9 Heller, chapters 1-15

 **Midterm due Thursday, March 13**

Week 10 Heller, chapters 16-27

Week 11 Heller, chapters 28-end

Week 12 Fountain, pp. 1-107; Armagost (in Anderson), “Things to Pack When You’re Bound for Baghdad”

Week 13 Fountain, pp. 108-216

 **Research paper due Tuesday, April 15**

Week 14 Fountain, pp. 216-end; Clay (in Anderson), “Shadow Soldier”

 **Portfolio due Thursday, April 24**

Thursday, May 1 **Final exam--8:00-10:00 am**

**COURSE DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVES:**

The UCA catalog describes this seminar as the “capstone . . . for English majors in their senior year,” which means that it’s intended **a)** to immerse you deeply and actively—in an advanced way—in significant areas of literary study (in this case, some of the literature of various American wars), and **2)** to afford you the opportunity for “reflection on the progress and culmination of [your] undergraduate literary studies.” We’ll accomplish the deep and active part by looking in detail at a relatively small number of texts in true seminar format—that is, for approximately two-thirds of our in-class time the students, not the professor, will determine what questions and issues to discuss and will conduct that discussion, with the professor involved only as a participant in the proceedings, not their director or moderator. (The other one-third of class time will entail more direction from the professor, who will provide background material, discussion summaries, and framing concepts as necessary.) We’ll meet the reflection-on-progress-and-culmination part by assembling a writing portfolio over the course of the semester, as described below.

**ATTENDANCE**:

Given the central role you’re being asked to play in this class, attendance—**on time**—is mandatory. Three or more absences will lower your class participation grade, as will recurrent late arrival. If you miss five classes, you'll have one week after the last absence to see me with a believable excuse and a promise to sin no more; if you don't make this deadline, you'll be dropped from the course with a WF grade. And if you miss a sixth class following our conference about the five absences, you'll likewise be dropped with a WF.

**EXAMS**:

Our midterm exam will cover the course material through the first eight weeks—the texts by Fussell, Bierce, and Caputo. The final exam will have one section covering the course material from the ninth week to the end of the semester and then a second section taking in the whole course, asking you to make connections between the various works and periods we've studied. Both of these exams will consist of essay questions that I’ll formulate from the issues you choose to discuss in class and from some broad themes that I’ll bring up, and both will be take-home rather than in-class in format. I'll discuss these exams and their make-up in greater detail in class about a week before their due dates.

**RESEARCH PAPER**:

Each student must submit an original critical essay of ten pages, incorporating at least five secondary sources, that deals with a specific work or works **within the framework of the class theme**—that is, you may choose to write on material we’ve covered in class or you may choose texts outside that discussion (including stories, novels, poems, memoirs, plays, and films) that have engaged your interest, as long as those works address in some way the issue of wartime experience. We'll have much to say as the course progresses concerning various approaches you might take to writing these essays, important secondary sources, and specific grading criteria. Note from the outset that although your essay's content is the most important factor in determining your grade, how well you write (i.e., thesis, organization, style, coherence, grammar, etc.) will affect this grade as well, since even the best ideas in the world aren't really useful if you can't communicate them intelligibly to a reader. The form and documentation techniques you employ in the essays should follow the guidelines specified in the *MLA* (Modern Language Association) *Handbook*, which can also be found, in condensed form, at the English Department website link <http://uca.edu/english/mla-formatting/>.

The midterm and research paper are due at the beginning of class on the date assigned. I'll accept a paper late, but it will lose one letter grade for every class meeting it's late. **Note**: You must submit all required written work to receive a grade other than F for the course.

**JOURNALS**:

Your journals will play a crucial role in framing our in-class discussion, as follows: At the beginning of each week, you’ll come to class with a journal entry identifying the questions, reactions, objections, and observations you find most important to you in the reading assignments for that week (that means the **whole** assignment for that week—all the Fussell, O’Brien, Ritterbusch, and Bierce essays for week 1, for example). At the start of the first class for the week, we’ll take about ten minutes to get everyone’s concerns from your journals listed on the board and then you’ll decide which ones to start discussing, with the understanding that we won’t get to every question every week or even come to neat conclusions regarding the ones we do discuss (after all, we need to have something left to ponder in the wee hours of the rest of our lives . . .). As the foregoing implies, these journal entries are not supposed to be focused, linear, and coherent in the way that formal essays are; they’re supposed to be a record of your first thoughtful response to the material, so randomness, discontinuity, and other forms of roughness are fine, as long as you’re making an honest effort to engage with the text.

During the second class for each week, I’ll try to sum up what we’ve discussed, identify some large themes implied by that discussion, and offer whatever other insights or questions I feel are important for us to consider. At the end of that class, I’ll ask you to devote ten minutes to writing another journal entry evaluating the week’s work—noting what issues are now clear to you, which ones need further thought, which ones might connect to earlier readings we’ve done, and any other observations you may have. I’ll respond to these in writing, with the aim of furthering your thinking on the material. (I’ll normally just put a grade on your beginning-of-the-week journal.)

Regarding journal grades: Each journal is worth a maximum of ten points. If your entry shows an honest, thoughtful effort to come to grips with the work, you'll get somewhere from 8 to 10; if it shows a solid but not all that insightful effort, you'll get somewhere from 4 to 7; if you don't do the entry, or if you blow it off with superficial comments, or if you just crib ideas from critics and label them as your own, you'll get somewhere from 0 to 3. (This does not mean that you're forbidden to read criticism to get your ideas going; you're welcome to do so, and to address critics' ideas in your journal, as long as you clearly identify which ideas are the critic's and which are your own in response to what that critic has to say.) At the end of the semester, I’ll figure your final journal grade by taking the ratio of the total points you’ve earned to the total points possible. If we do twenty-five journals, for instance, then the total possible score will be 240 (see the next paragraph for the explanation of this seeming mathematical anomaly); if you earn 220, then your percentage is 92, which means an A for your final journal grade. (My grading scale is 90-100=A, 80-89=B, 70-79=C, 60-69=D, below 60=F.)

Given the time-sensitive nature of the journals, you may not submit them late. You are allowed, however, to skip one journal without penalty; if you hand in every journal, I’ll drop the one on which you earned the lowest score.

**WRITING PORTFOLIO:**

As noted above, one of the objectives of this course is to help you reflect on your development and evaluate your growth over the span of your career as an English major. With that objective in view, this course requires that you submit a portfolio containing work from different stages of your undergraduate career and your own evaluations of that work. I’ll grade this portfolio based on its completeness and the thoughtfulness of your self-evaluation. The English Department’s Assessment Committee will also examine it, but they will have no part in assigning your grade; their aim is to assess the department’s effectiveness in facilitating student learning in general.

These are the required contents for the portfolio:

* Ungraded copies of your midterm and research paper for this course. **Note**: this means that you’ll need to make two copies of these assignments—one for me to grade and return and the other to go unblemished into the portfolio.
* At least one paper from a lower-level English course, preferably a survey (i.e., American Lit I or II, English Lit I, II, or III). If you’re a transfer student, this paper can be from a class at another institution.
* One paper from a junior/senior-level course that you’ve taken recently.
* A self-assessment form for each paper you put in the portfolio, including the two from this class. Attach the form to the front of each paper. (I’ve provided one copy of this form at the end of this handout; make the other copies you’ll need from that one.)
* A 500-word reflective essay assessing your progress as a student—that is, the development of your ability to write, to think critically about literature, to understand historical and cultural contexts, and to apply your growth in these areas to other areas of your life. Please address such issues as weaknesses and strengths you had when you began your university career, the ways in which your coursework addressed those issues, what you think you’ve learned, and what you wish you had learned more about. Please keep your focus primarily on the papers that you’ve included in the portfolio (which means that the papers you choose from other courses should be a genuine reflection of your progress, not stuff you pick randomly simply because it was close at hand).

Please submit your portfolio in a manila folder—do **not** put it in a binder or anything else that will make access to the contents difficult.

**GRADES:**

Your final grade will come from the following percentages:

Attendance/Participation 20%

Journal 10%

Midterm 15%

Final 15%

Research Paper 20%

Portfolio 20%

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**:

Knowingly presenting someone else’s work as your own, whether in an exam, journal, or any other format, constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism carries serious penalties, from failure on a particular assignment to failure for the course. If you ever have any questions on this subject, please feel free to ask me about them, without fear of embarrassment, and/or consult this page and its links for more information: http://uca.edu/integrity/

**Here is UCA’s official policy statement regarding academic integrity**: The University of Central Arkansas affirms its commitment to academic integrity and expects all members of the university community to accept shared responsibility for maintaining academic integrity. Students in this course are subject to the provisions of the university’s Academic Integrity Policy, approved by the Board of Trustees as Board Policy No. 709 on February 10, 2010, and published in the Student Handbook. Penalties for academic misconduct in this course may include a failing grade on an assignment, a failing grade in the course, or any other course-related sanction the instructor determines to be appropriate. Continued enrollment in this course affirms a student’s acceptance of this university policy.

**OTHER UNIVERSITY POLICIES**:

If you have questions about the university’s academic policies, guidelines regarding sexual harassment, or any other matters, please consult the relevant sections of the UCA Student Handbook. UCA adheres to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you need an accommodation under this act due to a disability, contact the UCA Office of Disability Services at 450-3135.

Literature provides "a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but . . . a momentary stay against confusion."—Robert Frost, “The Figure a Poem Makes”

"Literature, whether handed down by word of mouth or in print, gives us a second handle on reality . . . enabling us to encounter, in the safe, manageable dimensions of make-believe the very same threats to integrity that may assail the psyche in real life; and at the same time providing through the self-discovery which it imparts a veritable weapon for coping with these threats whether they are found within our problematic and incoherent selves or in the world around us."—Chinua Achebe, “What Has Literature Got to Do with It?”

“Why, you might ask, should we care how other people think and feel about stories? Why do we talk about them in this language of value? One answer is that it is just part of being human. People tell stories and discuss them in every culture, and we know they have done so as far back as the record goes. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Tale of Genji*, the Ananse stories I grew up with in Asante, weren’t just read or recited: they were discussed, evaluated, referred to in everyday life. We wouldn’t recognize a community as human if it had no stories, if its people had no narrative imagination. So one answer to the question why we do it is: it’s just one of the things that humans do. But a deeper answer is that evaluating stories together is one of the central human ways of learning to align our responses to the world. And that alignment of responses is, in turn, one of the ways we maintain the social fabric, the texture of our relationships.”—Kwame Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*

“I kept one purpose in mind, a kind of literary mission, if you will. That mission was set out for me by Joseph Conrad, who said the writer’s task is ‘by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is above all to make you see.’ I wanted to write a book that would make its readers see the war as we warriors saw it, and by seeing it, to feel the heat, the monsoon rains, the mosquitoes, the fear; to experience the snipers, booby-traps, ambushes and firefights, as much as was possible on the printed page. . . . When they came to the end, I hoped they would look into the mirror, or better yet, into their souls and, regardless of how they came down on the issue [of the rightness or wrongness of the war], ask themselves a few questions: ‘Now what do I think? What do I feel now? How would I have behaved if I had been there?’”—Philip Caputo, “Goodnight, Saigon,” *War, Literature, and the Arts* 12.1

“Some people ask me, ‘Why don’t you write plays that I know exactly what the specific answer to the question you’re raising is by the end of the play?’ And I always have to answer these people by saying that I find I can ask an awful lot more interesting questions if I don’t have to supply the answers to them. If I limited the content of my plays to what I could give specific answers to, I think I’d write very dull plays.”—Edward Albee, *The Spectator*, ed. Studs Terkel

Louis Menand’s three basic ways of approaching a work of literature:

as “an autotelic [having a purpose within itself] verbal construction, a work of art”

as “a participant in the dialogics [the multiple independent voices] of literary history, a commentary on the tradition to which it belongs”

as “a window on its time, an artifact”

Basic questions for each work:

What motivates people to go to war?

What motivates people to fight rather than run when the actual shooting starts?

What happens to people when they fight—what physical, mental, emotional changes do they undergo?

How do people who have undergone combat and people who haven’t had that experience relate to one another?

What literary techniques do writers use to convey the answers to these four questions?

How much of all of the foregoing is universal, regardless of time period, and how much is historically specific? Caputo in *WLA* again:

“I also had a further ambition: to write a book that would reach beyond its time and place toward the universal; a book that would tell a tale not only of that particular war but of war itself, and the truth of war, and what poet Wilfred Owen called the pity of war.”

**Student Self-Assessment, English Major Portfolio**

The attached paper is from which course?

Instructor's name:

Semester and year of the course: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**In a paragraph, describe the following:**

(1) What was your purpose in writing this paper *(persuasive, analytical, informational, interpretive)*

(2) Describe the process you used to compose the paper.

(3) What surprised you in the process of writing this paper?

(4) How well do you incorporate primary and secondary source material into the paper?

(5) What do you think the paper’s most serious weaknesses are?

(6) What do you think the paper’s greatest strengths are?