

WRI 101 M • Trauma Literature • Scott Denham • Spring 2024 • Wed 1:30-4:20 + XP

How do authors write about trauma? How do we read about trauma? What is empathy when mediated through literary texts? How do scholars read and understand and debate about the literature of trauma and what this literature does to and for readers? Can readers experience trauma vicariously? What is the role of an author's personal experience in writing about trauma? Questions like these will lead us through stories about trauma and help us take part in a scholarly conversation about trauma literature. We will pay close attention to narrators as we learn about narrative theory; about the roles of historical context, biographical experience, and the archive for authors framing stories and narrators telling those stories; about the genres of historical fiction, fictional autobiography, memoir, and life writing. We will learn how to discover scholarly and public intellectual discourse about literary texts and how to take part in those conversations.

Key texts Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*, Guadalupe Nettel's *The Body Where I Was Born*, Lydia Ginzburg's *Notes from the Blockade*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus I and Maus II*, Katya Petrowskaya's *Maybe Esther*; perhaps also, if students want to commit, lyric: by Claudia Rankine and Paul Celan. We will use essays by Saidiya Hartman, Elizabeth Rosner, Susan Sontag, Walter Benjamin, among others, as catalysts for our reading and writing.

We meet once weekly in seminar as a group for three hours, with a coffee break, on Wednesday afternoons and also once weekly individually in tutorial for half an hour on Mondays or Tuesdays (meeting times tbd). Weekly essays, four formal papers. In this course we practice peer review and ungrading (see scottdenham.net for details).