

# The Impossibility of Witnessing and the Imperative to Listen: Teaching Trauma in an Interdisciplinary Classroom

by

Jennifer Schulz  
Senior Instructor, Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies  
Seattle University

**Abstract:** This article will describe how I have integrated my work as a psychotherapist specializing in trauma and as a literature professor in an interdisciplinary course on Trauma Narrative in which I explore with my students how literary texts (novels, poetry, and plays) and clinical discourses (e.g. the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, psychological theories, and research studies) can inform and challenge each other as we seek to understand the lived experience and meaning of trauma. Current interdisciplinary theories of trauma that revise the doctor/patient relationship into witness/testifier implicate us in this class as witnesses of trauma testimony. Indeed, these literary, clinical, and theoretical works force us to ask the very fundamental questions: What assumptions do I bring to a literary text/individual that mediate my response to either? How does this text/individual interrupt these assumptions and challenge me to new ways of listening? How does this text/individual change me? Following a description of the course, I will discuss how we can foster meaningful integrative research projects with our students as we ask them to encounter the limits of their own understanding of the suffering of others, or, at times, their own jarring identification with this suffering. How can teaching toward interdisciplinary integration call us to witness our students as they discover the ways in which their reading, writing, and research call them to witness *themselves* anew? And what are the unique challenges of engaging in this work when the focus is trauma?

**Keywords:** trauma, witnessing, narrative, interdisciplinary, literary studies, psychological theories, teaching

## By Way of Introduction – A Transdisciplinary Journey Back to Listening

If I am being honest with myself with regard to my relationship with academia, I have always had one foot out of the university. But before

I actually stepped out of the university and into the clinic, I had earned a Ph.D. in American Literature and a Visiting Assistant Professorship teaching American Studies and creative writing in an Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences program. While I loved, and still love, teaching in a university classroom, four years into this first teaching position, I took a two-year hiatus in order to complete clinical training in psychology. And it was not the interdisciplinarity of my clinical program that enticed me. It was my students' stories. I had been working with a number of my university's majority non-traditional female student population in creative writing workshops and independent studies, and I realized that I wanted to be able to listen to their stories beyond helping them draft and revise their manuscripts. Indeed, I went back to graduate school to attend to the practice that I have valued most in my professional and personal life: listening.

From my first years out of my clinical program working in community mental health clinics and throughout the past fifteen years of working in private practice, I have sought ways to forge creative connections between my work as a psychotherapist and my work as a literature professor. My earliest clients were people whose lives were shaped by chronic trauma inflicted by homelessness, poverty, and abuse. And, rather than immediately turning to psychological theory and research for insights in working with these clients, I found myself often turning to novels and poetry. As I re-discovered the ways in which literature communicates the haunted consciousness of the culture and the individual, I was able to find new ways of listening to my clients. Indeed, in immersing myself in work outside of the writing and literature classroom, I remembered what I had already learned deeply within that space. Our encounters with literature bring us face to face with the stories and silences that both reflect and disrupt our cultural narratives, our dominant ideologies, our diagnoses, our deeply held fictions and assumptions about each other. Literature gives us a window into ourselves and into those who may seem most unfamiliar to us and, thus, we have a moral imperative to *read*, just as we have a moral imperative to *listen*. If my training as a literary critic and professor taught me how to *close-read*, to listen for structure as well as content – a practice that I took with me into the therapy room, the study of psychology, and more importantly, my work with individual clients, made me a better reader of literature and, indeed, a better listener.

### **A Curricular and Theoretical Invitation**

I returned to teaching in the year after I completed my clinical training, but I returned to teaching at a different university with a different demographic of students – more traditional in age, more diverse in gender identification,

and, even for white-dominated Seattle, more diverse in racial and ethnic identification. In the context of the Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies program in which I teach, I was invited, several years after my return, to design a special topics course. The special topics course was presented to our majors within the trajectory of their program<sup>1</sup> in the following way in our course catalog:

[This course] brings you into deep contact with a scholarly concern of the professor. Unlike in [the program's methods] course, the professor pre-chooses the general course topic within which you find your voice. Topics are purposefully complex and culturally relevant so that your interests and social convictions can breathe in the course. [This course] continues the interdisciplinary inquiry of [our introductory course], complements [the methods course], and emphasizes critical interdisciplinarity and tolerance for ambiguity. (from "Where Does This Course Fit in the B.A. in Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies?")

When I first read this general course description, I saw it as nothing less than a resounding invitation to explore with my students the possibilities for common ground between my two vocations that I believe I will always be aiming to discover, question, navigate, create, and complicate. Because I work, in my private practice, primarily with adult women who have been victims of early childhood trauma (mostly in the form of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse), all roads in and out of this common ground for me originate in or traverse the complex landscapes of trauma. And because I have spent my whole professional life (in both fields) studying stories, the course is specifically focused on *narratives* of trauma.

As a literary scholar, I always underscore that the narrative structure within which we choose to tell stories is just as important as the content of the stories. And what may, on the surface, look to be a linear, and self-assured, narrative

---

<sup>1</sup> The Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies (IDLS) program at Seattle University requires majors to complete sixty credits, twenty-five of which comprise a strategic core consisting of the following: an introduction to interdisciplinary studies course that emphasizes metacognition and introduces students to the broad disciplinary categories of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences; a methods course that engages students in individual research projects by stepping them through the interdisciplinary research process (IRP) delineated by Allen Repko and Rick Szostak (2017) in *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory*; a course that immerses students, through academic service learning, in the complexities of community engagement; a senior synthesis course that requires students to design a legacy project that foregrounds one of the three emphases in the program (metacognition, interdisciplinary research, or community engagement); and the special topics course that this article describes.

of my own journey from my clinical training to my special topics course is actually a much more complex one. Indeed, Special Topics: Narratives of Trauma has emerged out of the circuitous journey of an interdisciplinary scholar who has one foot in and one foot out of academia. Long before this course came to fruition, at the suggestion of a colleague from a nearby university who knew of my dual career paths and who was teaching literature courses to prison inmates, I began to read the work of Cathy Caruth, who teaches in the fields of comparative literature and English and has focused on the experiences and discourses of trauma, testimony, and witnessing. Two of her collections of essays, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and, more recently, *Listening to Trauma: Conversations With Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* (2014), invited me into the theoretical discourses of this interdisciplinary work that scholars across disciplines of history, psychology and psychiatry, sociology, cultural studies, etc. have been forging in conversation with each other. Indeed, conversation is primary to the interdisciplinary method in this work, as in all interdisciplinary work. And Caruth (2014) literalizes this in her recent text, which is collected as a series of transcribed interviews that she conducted with various scholars and practitioners. I had drawn from Caruth's (1995) earlier text when I taught discipline-specific literature courses, but in designing this special topics course for my interdisciplinary studies majors, I wanted to justify to my students (and myself) the importance of bringing the methods fundamental to literary analysis into an interdisciplinary study of trauma.

I found one such justification in Caruth's transcribed conversation with Dori Laub (Caruth & Laub, 2014), a clinical professor of psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine and a psychoanalyst who works primarily with victims of massive psychic trauma. In 1979 he was the co-founder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale. When Caruth asked him why he chose to collaborate with a literary scholar (Shoshana Felman) when working on his most well-known project, *Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), he said,

You know, a [Holocaust] historian is more attentive to the fact and to the written document, or even the written testimony by the Germans – which is valid, though it is not survivors' testimony. The psychoanalyst is more attentive to the internal reality and has a difficult time with the external reality. With the literary scholar, it's imagination. It's not limited to reality. It continues a back-and-forth flow between reality and imagination. (Caruth & Laub, 2014, p. 58)

The program in which I teach places great value and emphasis on interdisciplinary work as necessitating a “tolerance for ambiguity,” as is made apparent in the description of the special topics course. Laub’s “back-and-forth flow between reality and imagination” is something I have a felt-sense for as I listen to my clients; it is the position that I occupy most of the time, and it is something that requires a deep tolerance for ambiguity. In these side-by-side realizations, I knew that the question that would guide me every day as I walked into my Narratives of Trauma class would be, how can I invite students into a practice of tolerating ambiguity as they read literary representations of human suffering? – a question that is driven by a deep conviction that this practice takes a radically ethical stance.

Before stepping into my description of the course itself (which now I have taught three times), what it has taught me, and how it has changed my teaching and my clinical practice, it is important to give a bit more theoretical and historical grounding by unpacking Laub’s (Caruth & Laub, 2014) own ambiguous and, certainly enigmatic, use of the concept “imagination.” In particular, I would like to explore why he finds it so fundamental to being attentive to – or witnessing – trauma. And one way to unpack this concept is to look at it within the larger interdisciplinary conversation of trauma theory.

In her groundbreaking text *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence*, Judith Herman (1992), associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School and director of training at the Victims of Violence Program at Cambridge Hospital, dramatizes the social and political situatedness of trauma as a diagnosis, and, thus, as a highly disciplinary (epistemological and methodological) lens that has had deep implications (positive and negative) for the practice of witnessing. She opens her book with a chapter that traces the history of trauma as a diagnosis from mid nineteenth-century studies of women’s “hysteria” through the activism of Vietnam Veterans Against the War and women’s liberation movements of the 1970s that manifested the concept (and diagnostic label) Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, first formally articulated in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in its third edition in 1980.

Caruth, like most of us who work with trauma, uses Herman’s important historical perspective as a starting point when, in her own *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, she discusses how the American Psychological Association (APA) attempts (problematically) to locate trauma phenomenologically within diagnostic criteria in *DSM-4* (1994) (and continues to do so, I would argue, in its most recent (fifth) revision). Trauma, Caruth (1995) writes,

cannot be defined either by the event itself – which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everybody equally – nor can

it be defined in terms of a distortion of the event. . . . [It] consists, rather, solely, in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. . . . [There is] a delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely *true* to the event. . . . The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (p. 5)

This unique paradoxical structure of experience that Caruth describes (“belated,” “incomplet[e]” vs. “absolutely true”) should not be mis-read to signify that the traumatized experience “false memories” – an idea that, in the early 1990s, received significant public and clinical attention as parents and clinicians criticized some practices of psychotherapy for “suggesting” or planting false memories of early childhood abuse in vulnerable patients. Indeed, as many of us who work with survivors of trauma feel, and as Judith Herman articulates so eloquently in response to these claims, “‘Don’t I wish! If I could implant memories, I would implant happy ones. . . .’” (Caruth & Herman, 2014, p. 143). Caruth’s notion of “impossible history,” rather than calling into question the veracity of the trauma survivor’s accounts, intersects with Laub’s call for “imagination” (Caruth & Laub, 2014) in being attentive to the testimony of a trauma survivor. Both theorists call for a witness who can listen to a recounting of a traumatic history without expectations of linear, chronological, or causal narrative. Further, as Caruth invokes in the above quotation, the witness must be able to listen outside of the theoretical assumptions of psychoanalysis. Such assumptions tend to overlay narratives of repressed drives as interpretive lenses through which to make sense of the emotional and physiological distress that one may feel when recounting specific traumatic events from the past. Instead, the listening that Caruth describes requires a “breaking of paradigms” (Caruth & Laub, 2014, p. 56) and, in Laub’s term, “imagination.” Indeed, both turn to the role of the listener, the witness, as the most essential catalyst to a client’s survival – because only through an authentic witness can one integrate the trauma experience (the impossible history) into his or her present living so as to move beyond its devastating hold.

What does this kind of listening look like in practice? When I sit with my 36-year-old client who survived rape throughout her childhood by her father (and all the psychological terror that comes with it) and her mother’s silent depression, I do not listen for a chronological accounting of the abuse (the history), I do not listen for symptoms (as framed by the

*DSM*: dissociation, avoidance, etc.), I certainly do not overlay a prescribed narrative of unconscious repression of this memory, even if this is the first time she has spoken it out loud. I listen for the anxiety and anger she feels today in her marriage. And for her relationship to her own work. I listen for the sound quality of her breathing. And for the words and sounds that momentarily pass between us as she ventures (fleetingly at first, then more sustainedly) into her bedroom at age nine. I listen to her silences, and to the gaps in the story – which are different things. I listen for metaphor and for both the limitations and the possibilities of language – for the always-more-than what is said and what is directly told.

Laub might describe this as

the literary element of being a listener, of imagining what is to be transmitted. . . . [I]n order to transmit the testimony, it needs a process with an imaginative midwife who's there ahead of time, ready to receive. And in the process of transmission, it becomes a witnessed story, and it becomes a narrative. (Caruth & Laub, 2014, p. 58)

I learned to listen in this way (imaginatively) not only through my clinical training (which was wonderfully interdisciplinary) but also through my literary scholarship – through close-reading, which is being attentive not just to the events narrated but also to the structure, the diction, the figurative language. An authentic reader is not “imaginative” in the sense of being able to “make stuff up” and is not there “ahead of time” in the sense of already knowing more than the author. An authentic reader is imaginative in his or her ability to mine the text for the depth of meaning inherent in the process of the storytelling. An authentic reader, like an authentic listener, is open to the figurative possibility of narrative as well as the profundity of silence – the limits of the narrative.

Lest one feel that paradigms can be broken by relying on new paradigms (i.e. how to-manuals for “authentic” listening, which my clinical field certainly is not short on), witnessing, as both Caruth and Laub would emphasize, is always fraught with paradox. Laub writes,

Survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story, they also needed to tell their story in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell*, and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past, against which one has to protect oneself. (Laub, 1995, p. 63)

And yet, to underscore this paradox, “The imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling. . . . There still remain islands that are not quite representable. Or transmittable. . . . Just think of. . . inside the gas chambers” (Caruth & Laub, 2014, p. 58). Indeed, it is the

imperative to witness, *and* the impossibility of witnessing, that have become the theoretical and methodological underpinning of my course. Listening, while attending to this fundamental paradox, requires “breaking paradigms” and “imagination.” And I can think of no better scholarly environment in which to explore what this can mean than an interdisciplinary classroom.

### **Learning to Listen (and Witness) in the Classroom**

Special Topics: Narratives of Trauma, as I tell my students on the first day of the term (and frequently throughout the course), is not really as much about trauma per se as it is about witnessing trauma. And because it is important for me, in all of my courses, to bring the phenomenon that we are studying alive in the classroom, or rather to open up the possibility for this kind of lived encounter, I begin the course by asking students to draw from their own personal experiencing (of memory, their own sources of trauma, or the realization that they have not suffered trauma, and their own sources of connection and care). And (recognizing the potential anxiety that an invitation like this might trigger in those of us who teach and in our students), I emphasize that this is a course that asks us to use our own experiencing *as a tool*, a way of listening *beyond* the content of our own experiences.

In order to invite, while also framing, such a practice, we read a poem by Adrienne Rich (1981) entitled “For Memory.” Because a trauma narrative (giving testimony of trauma) is always a navigation of memory, I want us first and foremost to encounter the phenomenon of memory, in all its lived complexity. I will cite the poem in its entirety here to help as I subsequently try to transcribe some of what it opens up in dialogue with my students.

“For Memory,” by Adrienne Rich

Old words: *trust fidelity*  
Nothing new yet to take their place.

I rake leaves, clear the lawn, October grass  
painfully green beneath the gold  
and in this silent labor thoughts of you  
start up  
I hear your voice: *disloyalty betrayal*  
stinging the wires



I stuff the old leaves into sacks  
and still they fall and still  
I see my work undone

One shivering rainswept afternoon  
and the whole job to be done over

I can't know what you know  
unless you tell me  
there are gashes in our understandings  
of this world

We came together in a common  
fury of direction  
barely mentioning difference  
(what drew our finest hairs  
to fire  
the deep, difficult troughs  
unvoiced)  
I fell through a basement railing  
the first day of school and cut my forehead open –  
did I ever tell you? More than forty years  
and I still remember smelling my own blood  
like the smell of a new schoolbook

And did you ever tell me  
how your mother called you in from play  
and from whom? To what? These atoms filmed by ordinary dust  
that common life we each and all bent out of orbit from  
to which we must return simply to say  
*this is where I came from*  
*this is what I knew*

The past is not a husk yet change goes on  
Freedom. It isn't once, to walk out  
under the Milky Way, feeling the rivers  
of light, the fields of dark –  
freedom is daily, prose-bound, routine  
remembering. Putting together, inch by inch  
the starry worlds. From all the lost collections.

Because we read this poem on the first day of class, my aim is not full-blown literary analysis but simply paying attention to specific word choices, phrases, metaphors that they hear (secretly, the fundamental first step, of course, in literary analysis).

I would like to describe briefly three particular themes (among many) that this poem has opened up in conversation with my students: our everyday relationship to memory; memory and our relationship with others; and the relationship between memory and freedom. First, students talk about the everyday activity of “rak[ing]” and “clear[ing]” leaves as a trigger for memories (“and in this silent labor thoughts of you/start up”). Of course, the everydayness of raking leaves works metaphorically as well, particularly as the speaker encounters the thoughts and “stuff[s] the old leaves into sacks.” We are not wholly agents and authors of our own memories. The memories “start up” as if by their own volition (with simple everyday activities as catalysts), and despite attempts to “stuff” them, “still they fall and still/I see my work undone.”

Of course, there is an important “you” that is the subject of these (perhaps) unbidden memories, and the middle section of the poem dramatizes the experience of memory in relationship to another. While the phrase “we came together in a common/fury of direction” suggests that the speaker and the “you” found one another, in part, through their impassioned intention toward a shared idea of the future, their differences with each other have originated in the past. It seems clear that the speaker’s relationship with the “you” has been fractured as we hear the speaker’s thoughts of the words “*disloyalty betrayal/stinging the wires.*” In acknowledging the “gashes in our understandings/of this world” the speaker wonders “did I ever tell you?....And did you ever tell me?” Memory, and more specifically, telling and listening to stories of our pasts become essential for connection, for bridging, or more appropriately, healing these “gashes” by giving some context for the other to understand “*this is where I came from/this is what I knew.*”

My students arrive at the end of the poem and encounter the striking “Freedom.” And the punctuation is significant as it is the only period in the poem until the end. Freedom is not, however, the definitive answer to the disconnection from the other or from oneself. Freedom is described very specifically as “daily, prose-bound, routine/remembering.” At this moment, freedom comes from an *act* of remembering that is never completed. A memory, likewise, is not something that can be fully captured or conveyed in one recounting. It is clear that the speaker and the “you” have already, in fact, spoken of their memories with each other (given the specificity of

the details following the speaker's questions: "did I ever tell you?" and "did you ever tell me?"). But this sharing "isn't just once" (and should not be); it is "daily, prose-bound, routine." We live simultaneously in the past, present, and future, and our understanding of ourselves, of each other, and of ourselves in relation to the other, unfolds in our stories that work to situate ourselves in this complex relationship to time and experience.

After we explore Rich's representation of memory in this poem together, I ask my students to freewrite (to put pen to paper, to silence the internal critic, and to write without stopping) in response to the following, deceptively simple, prompt: "What is your earliest memory? Describe this in as much sensory, narrative, emotive detail as possible." Students write for five to seven minutes, and then I invite them into a shared reflective discussion on what it was like to access this memory. We talk about impressionistic memory (the vague traces of places, people, and objects that they called up). Students speak with a mix of certainty and uncertainty: "Could it really have been in the nursery and in my crib? Could I really remember something that happened when I was three? It must be because that's when we lived in that house with that swing-set in the backyard." Inevitably, someone suggests that maybe we *think* we remember what others in our family have told us or what we have seen in photographs. Are we the agents of our own memories? Or are we merely the authors of narratives that we have pieced together out of trace remnants and others' stories? And what if our memories contradict those of others with whom we lived? How do our memories figure in to the stories we tell of ourselves in the present and those we project into the future? In this phenomenological approach to memory, I introduce the ways in which trauma disrupts, and further complicates, what is already a complex access we have to our own lived experiencing and, thus, to our own life narratives.

By way of underscoring the importance of taking an interdisciplinary approach to trauma (and the witnessing of trauma), I show students the *DSM-5*'s (2013) description of "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," which systematically outlines the five criteria that describe what constitutes a traumatic event and the type and number of the behavioral symptoms following a traumatic experience, as well as their duration. I underscore and give context for the *DSM* as a very disciplinary (epistemological and methodological) tool by describing how it is "used" in a clinical context. It is a normative text in the sense that it does a lot of work, certainly clinically (in terms of assessment and diagnosis), but also (potentially) legally and economically, in the case of insurance claims, legal judgments, and employment implications. But we then re-read the *DSM* as a cultural text,

open to close-reading. I ask students to describe what they see in and what is missing from these diagnostic criteria and, inevitably, fresh out of their own reflective work on the phenomenon of memory, they say some version of “What’s lost is the lived experience of the source of trauma itself: What does it smell like, taste like, sound like? How does time move in the moment when the trauma occurs? How does the self experience the self-in-relation to the world in this moment? And how does the self live beyond this moment?”

Indeed, they are ready to unpack some of what Caruth claims is the “unique *structure of [trauma] experience*.” Recall that in Caruth’s (1995) introduction to her interdisciplinary approach to trauma, she, like my students in the class discussion, places her emphasis on *time* and *memory*. I will reiterate her description of this structure here:

The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it ...[There is] a delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely *true* to the event....The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (p. 5)

The language of the *DSM*, indeed, places an emphasis on the “after-the-factness” of trauma symptoms e.g. “the trauma is persistently re-experienced” through “intrusive thoughts” and “flashbacks” (*DSM-5*, 2013, p. 271), but this does not quite capture what Caruth calls an “impossible history” that those who experience trauma “carry. . . within them.” Indeed, Caruth’s use of this puzzling phrase underscores the inadequacy of the diagnostic manual in describing the lived experience of trauma memory.

As my course proceeds, we turn to literary texts of trauma testimony as a response to this inadequacy and to explore this complex phenomenon that Caruth is trying to describe. While close-reading a literary text cannot fully replicate the experience of listening to an individual’s trauma testimony in person and in real time, it requires that we listen in a new way (beyond diagnosis and beyond expectations of a linear chronology), a way that attends to the metaphors, the gaps, the paradoxes that recognize the inadequacy of language itself to describe the complexity of memory, particularly of trauma memory. Our first literary text, Toni Morrison’s (1987) fictional slave narrative *Beloved*, is based loosely on the life of escaped slave Margaret Garner, who attempted to kill her children to prevent them from returning to slavery when she was re-captured under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Morrison’s prose, written through multiple narrative

perspectives and through different temporal modalities (sometimes we are in the past; sometimes in the present; past and present blur; time is compressed; time is expanded), immerses my students in the “impossibility” of integrating the lived trauma of slavery in a post-Emancipation present; the past cannot stay in the past as the characters literally run into, and re-live, their memories. Sethe, Morrison’s now-emancipated main character, lives in the Post-Reconstruction borderlands of Cincinnati with one nearly-grown daughter (born as she escaped slavery) in a house haunted by a child (born into slavery) whom she killed twenty years before when she was captured. Isolated from a community that lives in its own trauma, the two women navigate an everyday in a present that is possessed by the past. In an early scene, when Denver, her living daughter, asks a pointed question about an apparition she observes holding her mother as Sethe kneels in prayer, Sethe tells her,

I was talking about time. It’s so hard to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it’s not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it’s gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there in the world. . . . Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It’s never going away. Even if the whole farm – every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what’s more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (pp. 43-44)

For Sethe, chronological time is “so hard to believe in.” Haunting, however, is not. In other words, “rememory” (while itself suggestive of the painful persistence of memory, in its “re”-iterative quality) is distinct from what she warns Denver against in this passage. The persistence of traumatic events not only keeps the past alive but also gives it the potential literally to return in the exact places of its occurrence. It is inscribed on the landscape and, thus, implicates and victimizes all of us (“you who never was there”). This certainly could be read as a commentary on the legacy of slavery in the collective unconscious of the U.S. (and in the persistent literal manifestation of systemic racism). As a nation, we are haunted by the collective trauma of slavery. And it also speaks to the power of Sethe’s individual trauma and its very real implications for her daughter, who lives in and lives out the intergenerational transmission of trauma and is terrified to leave the borders of her yard. We are not, in fact, the agents or owners of memory or rememory. Instead, we become, as Caruth (1995) puts it, “the symptom of a

history that [we] cannot entirely possess” (p. 5).

As my students discover, we, as readers, do not diagnose Sethe when she gives Denver this warning. From the beginning of the novel, we learn what the women characters know: that their house is haunted by the “spiteful” ghost of a baby. Morrison’s opening paragraph leaves no room for us as readers to question the presence and reality of ghosts in 1873 Ohio. And if we get caught up in trying to decipher what is “real” and what is “not real,” we cannot move on from the first page. Indeed, from the very beginning of the novel, the narrative voice is teaching us how to read the novel. And in Sethe’s warning, she is teaching us, more specifically, how to read a narrative that calls our conventional notions of narrative – of setting, plot, and character – into question. What Caruth might identify as the phenomenon of “impossible history” does not, however, make the novel “impossible” to read (as many students may feel in these first pages). Instead, Sethe’s warning and Denver’s reception of it are also an invitation to re-see history through the lens of trauma, and thus to become authentic witnesses.

Caruth writes that

The history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another. The meaning of the trauma’s address beyond itself concerns, indeed, not only individual isolation but a wider historical isolation that, in our time, is communicated on the level of our cultures. This speaking and this listening – a speaking and a listening from the site of trauma – does not rely . . . on what we simply know of each other, but on *what we don’t yet know of our own traumatic pasts*. In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the *very link between cultures*: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability *to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves*. (emphasis added, Caruth, 1995, p. 11)

Denver, isolated by her mother’s trauma and by the fact that she never technically lived as a slave, creates a bridge between Sethe and Morrison’s readers as she learns to listen beyond her own isolation and, by the end of the novel, to reach out to connect her family, again, with the community. As Caruth states, “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures” but only if we learn to listen beyond “a simple understanding of the pasts of others” and beyond our own expectations and assumptions for what constitutes a “coherent narrative.”

I open my course with *Beloved* for many reasons but, perhaps, most fundamentally because it is the most difficult literary text we will read. And

because, in this difficulty, it requires us to close-read, to attend to language beyond our assumptions and common understandings. Caruth's and other trauma theorists' concepts help us to ask particular questions of the text, but I remind my students not to privilege theory over testimony. We work to place them in authentic conversation, even as I acknowledge my own bias that trauma testimony (literary or spoken) – in other words, an accounting of lived experience – always already exceeds theoretical explanation just as it also exceeds the methodological approach of close-reading, as valuable as both these disciplinary tools have been for us up to this point.

After we have spent several weeks working through *Beloved*, my students write a challenging analytical essay that close-reads a specific passage of the novel through the lens of trauma theory. And it is at this point in the course that I invite us to return to the phenomenon of memory again. But instead of returning to the lived experience of remembering, now we dive into the lived experience of listening to others' recounting. In a practice that I introduce as "radical curiosity," I ask students to pair up and give undistracted attention to their partners (each partner taking a five-minute turn at listening while the other talks about anything that is "weighing on him or her" and then switching roles). Listeners can respond by asking questions, but only those that derive from genuine curiosity, resisting any urge to compare their own experiences or to attempt to "fix the problem" their partners are describing. After the exercise I, again, invite students into a shared reflection. And I will draw from my most recent experience teaching this course to relay some of their responses. One woman described the surprising intensity of "being listened to in a way I'm not sure I ever have been listened to before." She said that she was so used to taking care of her listener and quickly turning the attention to the listener, that she found herself crying when all the attention remained on herself and her own story. One man said that he had never felt that much "intimacy with another man before." His partner added, "I started my listening by trying to 'close-read' everything he was saying; and then I realized that close-reading was actually getting in the way of genuine curiosity."

This is a crucial moment in the course because it underscores the fundamental paradox of the course, the one that identifies its theoretical and methodological underpinning: the imperative to witness, *and* the impossibility of witnessing, that Laub (1995) has identified in the process of trauma testimony. "Radical curiosity" requires that we suspend assumptions of understanding even as we relentlessly pursue understanding. It requires that we relinquish the impulse to interpret, which would be to foreclose on the ways in which lived experience is always more than that which can be interpreted. In their genuine encounters

with one another, perhaps even more than in their deep encounters with the literary texts in the course, my students are called to tolerate ambiguity with respect to the testimony of others.

### **Student-Led Integrative Interdisciplinary Research**

It is from this stance that the students launch their own independent interdisciplinary research into a contemporary site of trauma that they will pursue throughout the rest of the course as we continue to read literary texts and theories of trauma together. To describe each text we read and how we read it would overwhelm the purpose of this article, but I will simply name some of the additional texts here to give a sense of the scope (and limitations) of what we read and the sites of trauma we explore together. Our literary texts include Art Spiegelman's (1986) graphic novel of intergenerational Holocaust trauma, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History*; a selection of war poetry by Wilfred Owen (1921) about WWI, Bruce Weigl (1994) about the Vietnam War, Carolyn Forché (1981) about US Imperialism in El Salvador during the Cold War, and Brian Turner (2007) about the US-Iraq War; and Paula Vogel's (1997) playscript about an incestuous relationship between uncle and niece, *How I Learned to Drive*. Alongside these literary texts, we read a selection of essays on trauma theory mostly taken from Caruth's (2014) collection of interviews she conducted with Robert J. Lifton, Arthur S. Blank, Judith Herman, and Dori Laub. Throughout the term, while immersing themselves in the complexity of these "conversations" among the literary texts and the theories, students expressed frustration with the relatively U.S./Eurocentric take on trauma that informs these theories (many are based on the theorists' encounters with individual patients/clients in a traditional psychoanalytically-informed therapeutic context or in a context of individual testimony). Their frustrations led to productive investigations into theories of trauma that draw from post-colonial theory and from non-white, non-European scholarly and cultural perspectives that I will be using to inform further evolutions of my course.

Their frustrations also led them to explore sites of trauma that resonated, in some cases, with their own cultural, familial, and/or social histories. Given their research, they co-created the curriculum for the last part of the term as they discussed and presented their projects to the class, asking for feedback as they also gave the rest of us insights into sites of trauma that our shared interdisciplinary methodology was uncovering. The assignment for the latter part of the term asked them to engage the same interdisciplinary approach that we had been working with throughout the quarter but, this time, to



move beyond literary texts (if they chose) in exploring the ways in which the contemporary sites of trauma they had identified were being represented and witnessed. The following is an excerpt from my assignment prompt:

The final interdisciplinary project toward which each of you will work throughout the quarter is designed to encourage you to think deeply and critically about our readings AND to link these thoughts to a contemporary source/experience of trauma (associated with a social problem or set of issues) of your own choosing. . . . You will need to introduce your site in the beginning of the essay: give the historical, social, political, cultural and/or economic contexts for the issue by drawing from media and more general information sources. Further, discuss how the issue is being addressed and/or represented at present (what are the “narratives” – cultural, political, popular, historical, legal *and/or* literary – that work to represent this issue?) and then make a claim for the limitations of taking these narratives at face value alone. This will also be a way to set up your argument for the kind of interdisciplinary approach that you are taking toward the issue – that is, **close-reading the narratives** (a method of literary analysis) through the **lenses of trauma theory** (theories and concepts from psychology) – which will inevitably also address the paradox of witnessing as an imperative/impossibility that Laub underscores.

What is important to underscore about this assignment is that it challenges students to move outside of a discipline-specific or even multidisciplinary “research report” and requires them to engage the interdisciplinary methods we have been using together all quarter. More specifically, they are challenged by the concept of “narrative” in the assignment; while we explored this discipline-specific concept from English/literary studies throughout the quarter as we analyzed literary texts, this project invites students to recognize extra-literary texts as narratives, as literary studies scholars do, texts which could include legal documents, media accounts, historical documents (primary texts), even empirical psychological studies or clinical assessments. This assignment asks students to *close-read* these texts as representations of the experience of trauma and, as we have all term, close-read them in conversation with specific trauma theories. Fundamentally, the assignment asks students to identify what new insights they gain or what new questions they raise by means of this interdisciplinary analytical method that discipline-specific studies of trauma alone have not been able to access. In this case, students are being asked to witness the ways in which these sites of trauma have been witnessed.

I will describe, in some detail, two recent student projects as a way to illustrate what kinds of insights and questions this interdisciplinary method has yielded, insights and questions that have, actually, altered my notion of what purpose undergraduate interdisciplinary research can and should serve.

In one project, my student Sara Gregoire (2018) explores the “war on drugs” that ideologically, economically, politically, and literally activates the U.S.-Mexico border. She positions herself at the outset of the essay as the granddaughter of a Mexican policeman who, having to make a choice whether or not to participate in dishonest and corrupt practices to safely maintain his position, chose to cross the border and overstay his work visa in the U.S. in the late 1960s. Generations later, Gregoire, witnessing “the veil of shame that casts a shadow over this story,” places her grandfather’s story on the eve of the 1970 Controlled Substances Act signed by President Richard Nixon, “who two years later would announce the United States’ War on Drugs.... creat[ing] the perfect environment for drugs to be trafficked into the United States from Mexico” (pp. 2-3). This complex historical and personal contextualizing already positions Gregoire as researcher and her readers in a rich experience of witnessing, as opposed to merely researching and reporting findings about this site of trauma. She concludes her introduction:

This [“War on Drugs”] set the stage for a lifetime of collaborations between the border countries that has resulted in 80,000 reported deaths due to organized crime since 2006 (“Mexico Drug War Fast Facts,” 2018); however it is worth noting that many deaths and disappearances go unreported so the actual number is most likely a lot higher.

Every day Mexican citizens die as a result of America’s appetite for illegal drugs. The people are crying out but are rarely heard and often silenced by cartels and the governments of both Mexico and the United States. It is a story that has been decades in the making yet rarely listened to. It is for this reason that I seek to examine the narratives that have come out of the Mexican Drug War in order to give a voice to the people. At the same time I think it is also important to look at the dominant narratives. While they likely proliferate falsehoods, these misrepresentations of the truth are just as important to break down in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand. I will be examining the narratives of the Mexican War on Drugs and the United States’ response to immigration and the illegal drug trade starting with the point of view of the people, i.e. journalists and social media

users who are attempting to spread their messages through modern mass communication. Then I will look at the politics, specifically the rhetoric of the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, as well as a Senate court case that dealt with drug laundering of a multinational bank. The examination of these multicultural narratives will aid in understanding the close ties between Mexico and the United States that have allowed the Drug War to get as bad as it has. I will look at these narratives through the lenses of trauma theory, specifically those of American psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton, psychoanalyst Arthur S. Blank, and training and supervising analyst at the Institute of the Mexican Psychoanalytical Association, Reyna Hernández de Tubert supplemented by sociologist Thomas DeGloma. The violence in Mexico has created an environment in which we are all witnesses to the traumas of the Mexican people and we must understand this on a psychological level if we are to comprehend the complexities of the problem. (pp. 3-4)

While it is tempting to let Gregoire's analysis take over this article, I will provide just an excerpt that exemplifies the interdisciplinary approach that she took in close-reading, in particular, how Mexican journalists have attempted to uphold their own professional commitment to report the truth of the chaos unleashed by the drug cartels and by the negligence of the Mexican government, even as they have suffered as pointed targets of the cartels. Gregoire writes,

*El Diario de Juarez* was the premier newspaper in Ciudad Juarez, one of the most violence-plagued cities in Mexico. The newspaper upheld its mission to report the realities of the drug war and the facts. However in September of 2010, in response to the murder of one of the newspaper's photographers named Luis Carlos Santiago, they released an editorial with a gripping headline that read: "What Do You Want from Us?" The editorial was addressed directly to the cartels. The title exemplifies the growing frustration and fear that the Mexican people face every day. What is so fascinating about this editorial is how the newspaper addresses the cartels, first in their claim that the cartels are the "de facto authorities" ("The *Diario de Juarez* editorial," 2010), basically acknowledging that the cartels effectively carry more power within the city, and some may claim the country as a whole, than the government. Psychoanalyst Arthur S. Blank (2014) claims that traumatic events "violate the order of things" (Caruth & Blank, p. 287) in his discussion of war trauma which I find to be relevant to this

topic. This is demonstrated in the way in which the cartels attempt to control the country's narrative through their power over the news media, but also in the government's inability or reluctance to implement the structural change necessitated to put an end to the violence. When the newspaper asks the cartels what they "intend for us to publish so that we know what is expected of us. . . explain what you want from us so we may no longer pay tribute with the lives of our colleagues. . . lives used as vehicles for messages" ("*The Diario de Juarez* editorial," 2010), they are acknowledging that the laws of the land are the laws of the cartels rather than the laws established by the government. The editorial went so far as to recognize that the government and justice system, to whom they first turned, had failed in their job to protect their citizens. As a result of this inadequacy, the newspaper is now turning to the true holders of power, the cartels, and is essentially pleading for their lives in what they are calling a truce. They are encountering death every day in not only the literal sense, but also in a symbolic sense according to psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton's (2014) discussion of his symbolization theory. Through fear of disintegration and intimidation the writers of this editorial are attempting to survive by negotiating their lives with their tormentors, in effect participating in spreading the cartel's narrative to the wider public. The narrative of Mexico is quickly becoming the narrative of the cartels, a narrative of violence and wrongdoing rather than a narrative of hope and social movement. However it is important to recognize *El Diario de Juarez's* reluctance to be quieted. By publicizing their truce, they are informing the public of the narrative biases within Mexico, an act of power in itself. (pp. 6-7)

By utilizing the literary studies concept of "narrative" and the method of close-reading, Gregoire was able to give voice to an aspect of the lived experience of the traumatic impact of the "War on Drugs" in everyday Mexican culture (which she extends by close-reading social media "warnings" published by Mexican citizens about potential cartel targets and the government's punitive responses to such warnings). Further she identifies these narratives as political acts of resistance by close-reading them through the lenses of Blank's (Caruth & Blank, 2014) theory that trauma "violat[e]s the order of things" and through Lifton's (Caruth & Lifton, 2014) symbolization theory, which describes any response to the violation of trauma as a meaning-making act. She concludes her essay not by providing an "answer" to the problem but by arguing for this level of witnessing: "I cannot tell you how

social change will finally bring an end to the Drug War in Mexico. . . . [W]e must learn to listen to [working-class Mexicans'] stories, their narratives, and act accordingly. . . . through a collaboration of voices and points of view, especially the voices of those who are most detrimentally affected by the violence" (pp. 19-20).

In one other project, my student Martin Mendiola (2018) poses a series of questions in order to extend our exploration of trauma to the experiences and narratives of second- and third-generation Filipino Americans (and, arguably, to other immigrant populations in the U.S. whose ancestors were displaced by U.S. colonialism). Like Gregoire, Mendiola positions himself as a witness to his own generation as a way to open up questions and insights into the complexity of witnessing, and, in particular, the complexity of witnessing systematic legacies of trauma that cannot be "located" within one traumatic occurrence.

In beginning this project, I sought to explore the connection between trauma long in the past (the brutality of U.S. colonial violence and genocide at the turn of the 20th century) and the various more immediate "traumas" experienced by Filipino-Americans (e.g. diasporic trauma, colonial trauma, intergenerational trauma, insidious trauma, cultural trauma, etc.). Yet, as University of California, Berkeley sociologist Neil J. Smelser (2004) argues, "no historical event or situation automatically or necessarily qualifies in itself as a cultural trauma" (p. 35). Rather, trauma is "part of a process-in-system" (Smelser, 2004, p. 35). In other words, trauma has more to do with a person's or people's relationship to or reaction to a violent event. Trauma is socially constructed. Given Smelser's contention, I sought to understand how Filipino-Americans, not being present for the most explicit and overt acts of violence, but arguably still implicated in a U.S.-driven racist system, relate to our colonial history. In what ways do Filipino-Americans learn, express, and obfuscate Philippine history and trauma?

It is important for Filipino-Americans to understand the history of our past displacement, insofar as it has led to many of the contemporary struggles we face today (e.g. racism/colorism, estrangement from home, etc.). Moreover, insofar as a cause of displacement was colonialism, it is important for Filipino-Americans to recognize the ongoing impact of U.S. colonialism on the Philippines today and on Filipinos in the U.S. today. Given this background, some Filipino-Americans, including myself, assert a claim to a "collective trauma" as a result of the colonization and

neo-colonization of the Philippines. Can and should we say that the Filipino peoples have *collectively* experienced a *trauma*? What ways can and do Filipino-Americans engage with our trauma-rooted history and present? What limits and possibilities do Filipino-Americans experience in attempting to witness the trauma of “our people?” (pp. 2-3)

Mendiola focuses much of his analysis on close-reading literary texts: specifically, poetry written by Filipino-Americans of his generation who are working to represent the legacies of colonialism. As we met to talk about his process of close-reading these poets “in conversation” with the theory we had read together, we talked about the poetry as itself engaged in the process of theorizing – agreeing that the theories themselves should not foreclose on the ways in which the poetry was challenging assumptions about traumatic experience. Pushing beyond the theoretical discourses I had introduced in this course, he framed his close-readings in this way:

Though much of the contemporary literature on trauma discusses victimhood and survival, and the popular discourse on trauma carries with it a connotation of *powerlessness*, I would like to avoid reproducing such a discourse that is both disempowering and inaccurate. As Eve Tuck (2009) asserts in her open letter titled “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” it is costly, disempowering, and inaccurate to study the experiences of marginalized communities through a lens of damage, brokenness, and depletion. These ways of viewing our communities “frame [them] as sites of disinvestment and dispossession” (p. 412). Instead, in order to recognize the complex personhood of the individuals in our communities, we should shift our epistemology from one of understanding the damage of simple (unidimensional) damaged people to one of understanding the desires of complex (multi-dimensional) people. According to Tuck (2009), “Desire [. . .] accounts for loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities” (p. 417). To maintain an epistemology of desire, I propose that we consider Louie’s and Troy’s poetry as narratives of *trauma survivance*. Tuck (2009) explains that research should “celebrate our *survivance*” (p. 422), a concept from Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, who described survivance as “moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create space for synthesis and renewal” (as cited in Tuck, 2009, p. 422). Viewing these poems as narratives of trauma survivance will highlight the complexity of

their meanings – painful, hopeful, and more.

It is not my goal to develop conclusions that apply to all Filipino-Americans or to claim *how* all Filipino-Americans *ought* to feel in response to our colonial past and violent racist present. Rather, I wish to demonstrate the value of listening to their narratives of trauma survivance. To listen well to something as complex as trauma, an interdisciplinary approach, one that attempts to listen from multiple perspectives, can be helpful. My hope is that this framework may be useful and built upon in the ongoing struggles of Filipino peoples and, if applicable, by other communities who face violence and oppression. I invite readers to engage these poems as listeners and interlocutors with these Filipino-American narratives of trauma survivance. (pp. 4-5)

Like Gregoire's (2018) essay, Mendiola's (2018) resists positing an answer or taking a stand (often what we require of undergraduate essays); rather they both offer an invitation to readers to engage in a method of witnessing that opens up new possibilities for recognizing the limits of our understanding.

I learned from my students in this class, and from the reviewers of an earlier draft of this article, something about the unique potentiality of integrative interdisciplinary work in the humanities. I would like to borrow from both Gregoire's and Mendiola's work to try to articulate this new learning. By positing attempts to make meaning out of trauma (e.g. telling stories through poetry; posing questions in newspaper editorials to perpetrators and silent bystanders) as powerful and political acts of agency, and by inspiring a close-reading of such narratives through an "epistemology of desire," my students invite us into a new way of listening to each other, to themselves, and to the media with which we are inundated all day every day. They have learned, and they invite us, to listen across the isolation and difference that trauma effects – to find connection in the attempt to listen to the complex work of putting words and form to suffering.

This invitation does not, however, present us with, in William Newell's words, "a new, more comprehensive understanding as a finished product" (Repko, Newell, & Szostak, 2012, p. 301), which he describes, in his conclusion to *Case Studies in Interdisciplinary Research*, as the goal of interdisciplinary integration in the natural and social sciences. Instead, he asserts that "full integration is seldom wished for in the. . . humanities disciplines wishing to respect the deliberate ambiguity inherent in the art objects they critically examine" (p. 301). Newell helps to articulate interdisciplinary work in humanities as an *experiential* process when he adds,

it seeks to draw others (audiences, viewers, readers) into the integrative process and encourage them to participate in a shared integrative process. . . . Although scientific knowledge is disembodied and ideally purely cognitive, as is the integration of knowledge from different sciences by the interdisciplinarian, artistic expression is not only affective as well as (if not more so than) cognitive, but also potentially embodied, and so, too, can be its (partial) integration by the interdisciplinarian. It strikes me that the role of emotion in interdisciplinary integration. . . deserves more attention. (p. 301)

Studying trauma demands that we attend, in particular, to the affective and the embodied, and, I believe that teaching trauma can give us another layer of insight into the unique potential of the humanities in interdisciplinary study.

Just as lenses of “victimhood” and “powerlessness” and even “mental disorder” foreclose on the complexity of the experience of trauma, any notion of “comprehensive understanding” would undermine the ethically radical stance of tolerating ambiguity in the face of human suffering and survival that I discuss earlier in this article. Teaching this course – which was borne out of my conviction that the most fundamental responsibility we have to one another as humans is genuine listening – has required me to recognize the ways in which the integrative work we do in the humanities necessarily *must* integrate the affective and the embodied, as well as the cognitive. And the classroom provides a unique opportunity for inviting students into this lived integrative experience in our immediate interactions with each other; while my students’ final projects crucially communicated their interdisciplinary integrative understanding in writing, it was in their respect for, indeed, their daily reverence for each other and for their individual and shared processes of encountering this difficult phenomenon where the most important integrative work was done. My colleague Sven Arvidson (2015) writes of “reverence” toward a work of art:

The experience of reverential awe in the face of complexity places or re-places us in a shared situation with others. In particular, we share an awareness of a necessarily limited perspective about the Something we are oriented towards. When a scholar takes an interdisciplinary humanities approach, this activity is also an invitation to others (audiences, viewers, readers) to enter this shared space of reverential awe and respect. An interdisciplinarian drawing primarily from non-humanities disciplines also asks others to share in the integrative result, but in the humanities the making



of interdisciplinary integration is designed to be participatory, as Newell observes, not just shared. The work in the interdisciplinary humanities demands a response, a personal responsibility for a personal response. (p. 139)

Indeed, as I and my students encountered complex trauma narratives together we entered into this shared space of “reverential awe and respect” for works of art. Toni Morrison’s (1987) character Sethe attempts to tell former slave Paul D why killing her daughter was “Simple”; Paula Vogel’s (1997) character Lil’ Bit *both* turns toward *and* pushes away her Uncle Peck’s sexually intimate advances beginning when she is eleven years old; and poet Brian Turner (2005) describes a suicide gently, beautifully, “And it happens like this, on a blue day of sun/when Private Miller pulls the trigger/to take brass and fire into his mouth.” As we wondered together about how to read the immensity of beauty and horror (and their simultaneity) represented in these literary texts, I reminded my students that, similarly, neither the word “victim” nor the word “survivor” could ever adequately describe my clients. And we were constantly reminded that as we walked into this classroom every day, we entered into a space in which we were called to attend to each other in our full human responses to these texts. In other words, we were not only “audience, viewers, and readers”; we were also witnesses holding, for one another as fellow humans, the suffering as well as the potentiality of desire: for connection, compassion, and presence. “The lessons I learned in this class are thumbprints on my soul,” one of my students reflected after the course ended. “Thank you for celebrating our shared humanity and speaking with love.”

**Biographical Note:** JENNIFER SCHULZ is a Senior Instructor in the Interdisciplinary Liberal Studies program at Seattle University, Seattle, WA. She holds a doctorate in American literature and a masters in clinical psychology. She teaches a wide variety of interdisciplinary courses on literature, trauma, the body, integrative interdisciplinary research methods, and creative non-fiction writing. She is committed to researching best practices for integrating service learning into her courses and has developed rich community partnerships with non-profit organizations in the Yesler Terrace neighborhood adjacent to Seattle University. She is also the director of the Seattle University-Pacific Northwest Ballet Educational Partnership, which provides a college education to professional dancers. In addition to her teaching, as a licensed mental health counselor in private practice, she works with women who have experienced childhood trauma. Dr. Schulz has published articles on early twentieth-century American literature, on literature and evocation, and on incorporating creative writing practices in qualitative research methodology. She has also conducted phenomenological psychological research on experiences such as despair, intimacy, and “at-homeness.” She may be reached at [schulzj@seattleu.edu](mailto:schulzj@seattleu.edu).

## References:

- American Psychiatric Association. (1994). Post-traumatic stress disorder. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, D. C.: APA.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Post-traumatic stress disorder. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, D. C.: APA.
- Arvidson, P.S. (2015). The virtue of reverence in interdisciplinary studies. *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* 33, 117-143.
- Caruth, C. (Ed.). (1995). *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Caruth, C., & Blank, A. (2014). Apocalypse terminable and interminable: An interview with Arthur S. Blank. In Cathy Caruth (Ed.), *Listening to trauma: Conversations with leaders in the theory and treatment of catastrophic experience* (pp. 47-78). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Caruth, C., & Laub, D. (2014). A record that has yet to be made: An interview with Dori Laub. In Cathy Caruth (Ed.), *Listening to trauma: Conversations with leaders in the theory and treatment of catastrophic experience* (pp. 47-78). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Caruth, C., & Herman, J. (2014). The politics of trauma: An interview with Judith Herman. In Cathy Caruth (Ed.), *Listening to trauma: Conversations with leaders in the theory and treatment of catastrophic experience* (pp. 47-78). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Caruth C., & Lifton, R. J. (2014). Giving death its due: An interview with Robert Jay Lifton. In Cathy Caruth (Ed.), *Listening to trauma: Conversations with leaders in the theory and treatment of catastrophic experience* (pp. 47-78). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: Crisis of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. New York: Routledge.
- Forche, C. (1981). The colonel. *The country between us*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Gregoire, S. (2018). The narratives of Mexico's war on drugs: How trauma theory aids our understanding. Unpublished manuscript, Seattle University, Seattle, WA.
- Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence*. New York: Basic Books.
- Laub, D. (1995). Truth and testimony: The process and the struggle. In Cathy Caruth (Ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Mendiola, M. (2018). Listening to Filipino-American poetic narratives of trauma survivance: An interdisciplinary approach. Unpublished manuscript, Seattle University, Seattle, WA.
- Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved*. New York: Knopf.
- Owen, W. (1921). Dulce et decorum est. *Poems*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Repko, A. F., Newell, W.H., & Szostak, R. (Eds.) (2012). *Case studies in interdisciplinary research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Repko, A. F., & Szostak, R. (2017) *Interdisciplinary research: Process and theory* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rich, A. (1981). For memory. *A wild patience has taken me this far*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Spiegelman, A. (1986). *Maus I: A survivor's tale: My father bleeds history*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Turner, B. (2005). Eulogy. *Here, bullet*. Farmington, ME: Alice James Books.
- Vogel, P. (1997). *How I learned to drive*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc.
- Weigl, B. (1994). Song of napalm. *Song of napalm: Poems*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.