

## **ENG9WI: Writing and Identity**

(Spring 2012)

Who is the 'I' that writes? Does it exist outside the text?

The constitution and representation of the self has been a central concern of English Studies for the past few decades. Questions of identity loom large in literary texts and theoretical reflections: the self as narrative, as the repository of individual and collective memories, as the subject of psychoanalytic scrutiny, as product and producer of cultural and national identities, and as the site of conflict between competing claims of belonging. Increasingly, movements of people and ideas engender a challenge to the conventional cultural and national boundaries that constitute the identity and status of the individual. Yet it is not only identity that has been called into question in recent years, but also many received critical approaches to and theories of the self.

This module sets out to explore the construction and recognition of identity by way of a multiple questioning of the subject. It seeks to foreground recent innovative reflections on the status of the individual subject through four related 'areas of study': self-fashioning; the spectacle of the 'other'; contested selves; nation and identity.

Lectures and seminars on this module use literary texts, essays, visual art and film to explore a range of fundamental questions about the category of the self:

- Do identity and the self have a history? Where and when do they begin?
- Is the self 'created' or 'fashioned'? How is *recognition* involved in identity?
- What signifies 'difference' in ideas of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality?
- How do issues of language impinge upon the making of new identities?
- How are various identities codified, contested and negotiated?
- Which aesthetic forms and strategies do 'identity politics' draw upon?
- What is the nation? Is it an ethnic, linguistic, or imagined community?
- How is national belonging 'narrated'? What historical forces have shaped it?
- What roles do memory and story-telling play in personal identity?

### **Set texts for purchase:**

- William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* (1608), ed. Philip Brockbank (Arden Shakespeare, 1976) ISBN 1903436648
- Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (1688; Penguin Classics, 2003) ISBN 0140439889
- Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: Parts One & Two* (1992-93; Nick Hern Books, 2007) ISBN 1854599828
- Andrew O'Hagan, *Be Near Me* (2006; Faber, 2007) ISBN 0571216048
- ENG9WI Module Reader

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