

english 275 // thematic approaches to literature // **authoring autism**

Instructor: Melanie Yergeau
Email: yergeau.1@osu.edu

Class meets: Tuesday & Thursday 11:30-1:18, Stillman 235
Office hours: Tuesday & Thursday 1:30-3:00, Denney 324, Denney 547

Course description and objectives

Our course topic.

Public discourse on autism has reached critical mass. It's hard to open a newspaper, change a TV channel, or browse a Facebook profile without catching *something* about autism—the epidemic, the puzzles, the children, the charities, the discrimination. The CDC currently touts a 1 in 110 autism incidence rate; former Playboy bunnies claim that our government is poisoning children with heavy metals and dairy products; popular TV shows feature unemotional autistic characters with savant-like super powers; and college programs are molding the most autism-centric cohort of disability service professionals our country has seen to date. If we're to believe anything we encounter in the media or popular literature, we can certainly believe that autism is everywhere and has the potential to touch anyone at any time.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- Mark Haddon, *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*
- Readings from Carmen (print and bring to class)
- An external hard drive or large flash drive (16 GB or more)
- 5 blank DVDs
- Headphones
- One memoir from the attached list (see last page of syllabus)

With this supposed increase in autism has come an increase in texts about autism (across media, across genre), much of it volatile and emotionally charged. Our main objective in this class, then, is to consider the rhetorical import of these texts, to develop an understanding of autism as a complex and crucial part of the human experience, to examine the ways in which able-bodiedness (or neurotypicality) has become an invisible default. We'll work together in exploring how the authors of these various texts aim to persuade an audience that their view is *the* most emotionally, ethically, or logically sound view. To that end, we'll also investigate the many important

issues—legal, social, cultural, medical, political—currently at stake in the autism world. Throughout the term, we'll continually engage popular, literary, and scholarly representations of autism in print, film, and the blogosphere in light of the following questions: What does it mean to be an autistic person? What does it mean to be an autism parent, professional, or advocate? What does it mean to author autism?

General Education Curricula.

This course fulfills the arts and humanities GEC requirement for literature and is an elective course for the interdisciplinary minor in Disability Studies (<http://disabilitystudies.osu.edu/>). In GEC literature courses, students evaluate significant writing and works of art. Such studies develop capacities for aesthetic and historical response and judgment; interpretation and evaluation; critical listening, reading, seeing, thinking, and writing; and experiencing the arts and reflecting on that experience.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Students develop abilities to be informed observers of, or active participants in, the visual, spatial, performing, spoken, or literary arts.
2. Students develop an understanding of the foundations of human beliefs, the nature of reality, and the norms that guide human behavior.
3. Students examine and interpret how the human condition and human values are explored through works of art and humanistic writings.
4. Students learn to analyze, appreciate, and interpret significant literary works.
5. Through reading, discussing, and writing about literature, students learn to understand and evaluate the personal and social values of their own and other cultures.

Assignments

Blog project (5 short assignments, approx. 450-600 words each).....40%

Blogging is going to play an important role in this class. Because we are concerned with public discourse and media representations of autism -- and because much of this work is happening in *online spaces* -- it makes sense for us to craft our own projects in these spaces, to become familiar with composing and reading practices that happen online.

Throughout the quarter, I will pose a question or two on our class blog (<http://autism275.wordpress.com>) and ask you to post a response on your own individual blog prior to class. Additionally, I'll expect you to look over and comment on one another's posts as part of your preparation for class. We'll also use our blogs quite frequently for in-class writing and other activities. These posts will enliven and supplement our time together and thus be an important part of making this class matter.

You do not need any experience with blogging to do well on these assignments. You might consider these assignments to be somewhat like short response papers, with the added benefit of being able to comment on one another's writing, as well as the ability to insert hyperlinks, videos, images, or sound clips into your responses. You will be provided with more detailed writing prompts as the quarter progresses. Due dates and general topics are as follows:

- Post #1, Introductory post: **Due Thursday, 9/30**
- Post #2, Autism and Literature: **Due Tuesday, 10/12**
- Post #3, Autism and Film: **Due Tuesday, 11/9**
- Post #4: On Empathetic Scholarship: **Due Thursday, 12/2**
- Post #5: Autism and Memoir: **Collaborative post to class blog + 10-minute presentation -- due date varies**

Autism blog carnival (approx. 750-1,000 words + visual or aural map).....20%

Throughout the quarter, we will spend time reading and reviewing and engaging autism-related blogs. A blog carnival involves writing short summaries on several blog entries, plus a summative analysis, all pertaining to a particular theme—and we'll be doing just that. For this assignment, you will need to choose a theme related to autism—perhaps neurodiversity, or media, or vaccines, or education, or parenting, or—the potential themes and topics are endless, really. Once you've chosen a theme, you'll need to find 10 to 12 blog entries that somehow relate. (These blog entries can be as long or as short as you desire. And I'll also direct you to some really good resources for finding autism blogs, so no worries there.)

Your task will be to summarize each entry very briefly and then show us how it connects to your theme. We'll spend nearly two class periods, in groups, discussing your findings as well as blog-related issues. You'll hand in your final blog carnival write-up via your blog, and you'll also include one more piece: either a visual (e.g., a diagram, a photo) or aural (e.g., a brief audio description, a song) map that represents what you've learned about this topic, as well as a brief description of your representation. We'll discuss this in more detail as the time approaches. You'll receive further guidelines during Week 4.

Public Service Announcement for the local Autism Society (4 components) 30%

1. Proposal (2 double-spaced pages) (10%)
2. Video PSA (60-90 seconds) **OR** a graphic/textual PSA (i.e., brochure, ad, poster) (10%)
3. Presentation (5%)
4. Letter to the Autism Society (5%)

A note about technology

You do not need previous experience with video or image editing technologies in order to complete class projects; you will receive necessary instruction and practice during the course of the quarter. Please do note, however, that we will only use Windows Movie Maker, Photoshop, and/or InDesign in this course. Though you're certainly free to explore and use alternative software, I will not be able to assist you in using other programs—the responsibility for learning and troubleshooting will fall on you.

This project offers an opportunity to translate your growing understanding of autism/autistic discourses from criticism into practice and to share your work with the local community. In small groups, you will propose, compose, analyze, and present a PSA of your own creation and then share your project with both the class and the Central Ohio chapter of the Autism Society. This will be your opportunity to author autism, as it were, in your own way, and to create something of benefit to the Columbus community.

There are several important components to this project. First, on **October 28**, we'll have several visitors from the autism community in our class. In order to keep the discussion active and on-point, you will be responsible for asking our guests questions. Moreover, this discussion will be videotaped and you will have access to the video materials for use in your PSA project, should you choose to use it. Additionally, you will be expected to attach a brief letter to your project in which you explain your rhetorical choices and reflect on what you've learned in the process. You'll receive further guidelines during Week 4.

Participation..... 10%

Good participation includes coming to class on time, active listening, completing in-class activities, being prepared to contribute your views on the assigned reading, showing a positive attitude, collaborating appropriately, and showing respect to your classmates and to me. If you have any concerns about participation, please don't hesitate to talk with me.

Course policies

Final versions of assignments must be turned in on time. Late projects are subject to a penalty of one letter grade for each day late. Missing class or encountering technological misfortunes *are not* acceptable excuses for failing to meet a deadline.

Academic misconduct. Plagiarism is the unauthorized use of the words or ideas of another person. It is a serious academic offense that can result in referral to the Committee on Academic Misconduct and failure for the course. Please remember that at no point during the writing process should the work of others be presented as your own.

Attendance & tardiness. Attendance is essential to the success of this class and to your development as a writer. Therefore, each unexcused absence after two will result in the lowering of your final grade by a third of a grade. Excused absences, such as those for documented illness, family tragedy, religious observance, or travel for inter-collegiate athletics, will not affect your grade. It is program policy that 5 unexcused absences will automatically result in failure for the course.

Whether you are excused or not, if you miss a class, you are expected to make up the work. This means, if you miss on a day when a film is shown, you must make arrangements to view it on your own time. Additionally, I will count you as absent if you are more than 15 minutes late to class, sleeping, texting, emailing, and most especially, if you come to class unprepared to discuss the day's assigned readings. I reserve the right to hold pop quizzes to spot check for preparedness.

Class cancellation policy. In the unlikely event of an emergency, I will contact you via email and request that a note on department letterhead be placed on the door. In addition, I will contact you as soon as possible following the cancellation to let you know what will be expected of you for our next class meeting.

Changes to the schedule. At any point throughout the quarter, I reserve the right to make changes to our daily schedule.

Resources

The **Office for Disability Services**, located in 150 Pomerene Hall, offers services for students with documented disabilities. If you need any particular accommodations in order to make the class more accessible, please let me know right away, either after class or during office hours. I am more than happy to work with you. You can contact ODS at 292-3307 or <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

The **Ombudsman of the Writing Programs**, Matthew M. Cariello, mediates conflicts between instructors and students in English. His Autumn 2010 walk-in office hours in Denney Hall 412 are Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 1-3; other times are available by appointment. Please email cariello.1@osu.edu. All conversations with the Ombudsman are confidential.

The **OSU Writing Center** is available to provide free, professional writing tutoring and consultation during any stage of the writing process. Services include face-to-face tutorials by appointment at their main location in 475 Mendenhall Lab, online tutorials via the chat function on Carmen, and online appointment scheduling, available 24/7. The Writing Center provides an incredibly valuable service for all writers (from undergrads to faculty)—I strongly recommend you take advantage of it! You may set up an appointment by calling 688-4291 or online at <http://cstw.osu.edu>.

The **Digital Media Project** (DMP) is the division of the English department that provides equipment and technical support to students enrolled in English classes. You will be using the DMP's resources extensively throughout the quarter. The DMP general office is located in Denney 324, and offers equipment borrowing and support from friendly, expert staff. The DMP Mac lab is located in Denney 343, and is available for use during designated lab hours (see "DMP Studio Hours" at <http://dmp.osu.edu>).

OIT Classroom Services, located in Central Classrooms 25 (the basement), will also check out media equipment to students. You will need the "Student Equipment Loan Permission Form," which I will distribute mid-quarter, to access these resources. Check out <http://oit.osu.edu> for more info.

The **Digital Union**, located in the Science and Engineering Library (SEL 370), is a place for faculty, students, and staff to explore emerging technology. The Digital Union has technology, space to work, and a knowledgeable staff to guide users to thoughtful solutions and provide a supportive environment for low risk trial and error with technology. Visit <http://digitalunion.osu.edu> to check out their hours and resources.

SCHEDULE

	Topics/Activities	Reading Due	Assignments Due
Week 0			
Th 9/23	Introductions Course overview	DSM-IV & DSM V entries	
Week 1: Terministic screens			
T 9/28	What is autism? Blog setup & memoir sign up	Chew & Raymaker, "10 Autism Controversies" Burke, "Terministic Screens"	
Th 9/30	What is/are disability studies?	Straus, "Autism as Culture" Osteen, "Autism and Representation" View <i>Autism Reality</i> (10-minute video documentary)	Blog post #1 due
Week 2: Controversies galore			
T 10/5	Cure & anti-cure movements	Carley, "GRASP and the Word 'Cure'" Singer, "Cure Is Not a Four-Letter Word" ABFH, "Articles of Tasty Prey"	
Th 10/7	Vaccines & diet	Wallace, "An Epidemic of Fear" Selections from McCarthy's <i>Mother Warriors</i> Rethinking Autism (6 short videos total)	

Week 3: Autism in/and/as literature			
T 10/12	Fictional representations	<i>Curious Incident</i>	Blog post #2 due
Th 10/14	Fiction, poetry	selections from <i>Speed of Dark</i> Mukhopadhyay, "Five Poems"	Groups 1 and 2 present
Week 4: Revisiting neurodiversity and disability studies			
T 10/19	Representation and self-representation Introduce blog carnival assignment	Montgomery, "Defining Autistic Lives" Robertson & Ne'eman, "Autistic Acceptance, the College Campus, and Technology" view Baggs' In My Language	Groups 3 and 4 present
Th 10/21	Functioning as discourse Introduce PSA assignment	D.J. Savarese, "Communicate with Me" Ralph Savarese, "To Persevere" and "You're Adopting Whom?" Murray, "Autism Functions"	Groups 5 and 6 present
Week 5: Blogs and blog carnivals			
T 10/26	The carnival begins!	Selections from the Autism Blog Directory and other autism-related blogs	First 5 entries of blog carnival due (draft)
Th 10/28	Panel discussion Continuing the carnival	Readings TBD	
Week 6: Film and new media			
T 11/2	View <i>Temple Grandin</i>	selections from Grandin's <i>Thinking in Pictures</i>	Bring junk food

Th 11/4	View selections from <i>Autism the Musical</i> Discuss <i>TG</i> and <i>ATM</i>		Final blog carnival due
Week 7: Parenting			
T 11/9	Autism and parenting Using Photoshop and InDesign	Sinclair, "Don't Mourn for Us" Sicile-Kira, "The Real World of Autism: The Refrigerator Mother Club" Murphy, "Proverbs 13:24" Zaks, "I Have Asperger Syndrome, and I Am a Parent"	Post #3 due Groups 7 and 8 present
Th 11/11		NO CLASS	
Week 8: Diagnosis and retrodiagnosis			
T 11/16	Diagnosis, retrodiagnosis, and "trends" Using MovieMaker	Senator, "Is Autism the New Gay?" Brown, "Intro" and "Emily Dickinson"	PSA proposal due to Carmen dropbox
Th 11/18	Studio time		
Week 9: Gender			
T 11/23	Women and girls The extreme male brain	Bumiller, "Quirky Citizens" Baron-Cohen, "Essential Difference: The Male and Female Brain" Cat in a Dog's World, "Diagnostic Criteria, Stereotypes, and Invisibility"	

Th 11/25		NO CLASS	
Week 10: Toward an empathetic scholarship			
T 11/30	What does it mean to <i>author</i> autism? Studio time	Prince, "The Silence Between"	
Th 12/2	Studio time		Post #4 due
Finals Week			
Date & Time TBD	PSA presentations		PSA due on DVD

MEMOIR LIST

Parent biographies	Autie-biographies
Roy Grinker, <i>Unstrange Minds</i> (Group 1)	Dawn Prince-Hughes, <i>Songs of the Gorilla Nation</i> (Group 2)
Rupert Isaacson, <i>The Horse Boy</i> (Group 3)	Donna Williams, <i>Nobody Nowhere</i> (Group 4)
Ralph Savarese, <i>Reasonable People: A Memoir on Autism and Adoption</i> (Group 5)	Jerry and Mary Newport, <i>Mozart and the Whale: An Asperger's Love Story</i> (Group 6)
Valerie Paradiz, <i>Elijah's Cup</i> (Group 7)	Tim Page, <i>Parallel Play</i> (Group 8)