First-Year Seminar 006: “Decisions and Revisions”
Fall 2014
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Office Hours:
• Mondays and Wednesdays, 2-4:30 (appointments recommended)
• Tuesdays and Thursdays (by appointment only)

Required Texts

University Bookstore

Grimwood, Ken. *Replay*.
Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*.
Hamid, Mohsin. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*.
Beckett, Samuel. *Krapp’s Last Tape*.

Blackboard Documents Menu

——. “The Lady with the Pet Dog.” (trans. Avrahm Yarmolinsky)
Oates, Joyce Carol. “The Lady with the Pet Dog.”

Course Overview

In this course, we will examine how a variety of “texts”—including novels, short stories, movies, music video, drama, and student writing—engage in adaptation, revision, recycling, and re-envisioning. In some cases, the works we read will revise themselves over and over, as with Ken Grimwood’s novel *Replay*. Others, like *Krapp’s Last Tape*, feature characters obsessively reliving (and revising) their own memories of the past. Some—including Mohsin Hamid’s *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*—“recycle” popular forms, in this case, self-help literature. Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir *Fun Home* uses visual depiction to recall and retell difficult episodes from the author’s youth, allowing her and her audience to come to terms with a partly factual, partly fictionalized past. And Joyce Carol Oates’s short story retells one of the most famous stories of Russian literature from a different point of view.

Lars von Trier’s film collaboration with Jorgen Leth titled *The Five Obstructions* (1967/2003) will structure our progress through these explorations and experiments. It consists of a short film and five re-makes and will serve as the inspiration for the six main essay assignments of the course. These assignments will invite participants in the course to engage in their own experiments with revising, adapting, and re-envisioning their work from multiple perspectives.
Outcomes

Students successfully completing this course will improve their academic competence in the following ways:

- They will become more effective speakers and participants in class discussions.
- They will become more competent critical, analytical readers.
- They will become more attuned to the nuances of writing and to the ways in which context, purpose, and genre affect the standards to which their writing aspires.
- They will become better able to contend with factors that affect the reliability of information they discover through research and to link researched discovery with literary and cultural representation.
- They will be able to situate their learning in the context of institutional (i.e. academic, school-related) expectations and of their long-term goals.
- They will have begun to develop the habits of mind and the self-discipline essential to success in college and beyond.

From Surviving to Thriving

One ongoing aim of our First-Year Seminar will be to foster participants’ transformation from “survival mode” to thriving at Drake University. Almost every day, we will make time for “The Freshman Fifteen,” a fifteen-minute conversation at the beginning of each class where we can address questions and topics essential to first-year students’ becoming more at home with the independent, self-reliant context of a residential, four-year University. As your professor, I will initiate some discussions on topics such as advising, declaring majors, conflict resolution, locating appropriate support services and resources, life in Des Moines, and the like. But more frequently, I will ask you to bring your own questions and concerns to the table.

Course Activities

**Teamwork and Collaboration:** Throughout the semester, you will be asked to contribute to the learning environment of the classroom by sharing your insights, asking questions, and taking part in small-group and plenary discussions.

**Graded Discussions:** As the course progresses, we will practice the art of collaborative, productive interaction, culminating in four graded discussions. In the early weeks of the course, we will establish the criteria by which these discussions will be graded and the various roles individuals might play in these discussions.

**Writing:** You’ll do two kinds of writing in this class:
Seven relatively informal one-page discussion briefs. These discussion briefs are designed to foster critical thinking about issues and topics we’ll discuss in class. Discussion briefs are graded on completion and timeliness: Those completed according to the guidelines and turned in on time will receive full credit; all others (late, incomplete, obviously hurried or careless work) will receive no credit. You must be present for the discussion for which these briefs are assigned to receive full credit. Prompts for these discussion briefs appear in the schedule of readings and assignments, below. Discussion briefs must be submitted using our online Blackboard Discussion forum by **12:30 pm the day before the first day of class in the week for which they’re assigned.**

Six somewhat more formal “essays” of varying length, along with a rough draft of the first one. These assignments ask you to experiment with different perspectives on, and approaches to, reflecting on the same basic topic: what are the attributes of the “perfect” student. You will be asked to adjust your take on this question with each essay you write, and to work within a different set of parameters and expectations with each iteration of the essay. Throughout the course, we will be using the term “essay” in its original, etymological sense, from the French word *assai*: An attempt, assay, or experiment. These essays will be graded according to the degree to which they fulfill pre-announced criteria. Their value is based on the degree of difficulty they present.

**Research Presentation:** As we make our way through *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*, you and a couple of your classmates will conduct research into the cultural and historic backgrounds of an assigned chapter of the book. As a group, you will offer a brief (15-minute) presentation of these backgrounds to your classmates the week prior to our reading and discussing the chapter in question.

**Quizzes:** You will take a 5-question, multiple-choice quiz over every reading assignment in this course. These quizzes are meant to evaluate how carefully and completely you have done the reading. Students who carefully read assigned work in advance will have no difficulty with these quizzes. Those who do not read assigned work, or read it hurriedly or carelessly, however, will.

**Grading**

A total of 1,000 points is available in this class, with individual assignments worth varying fractions of that total. Accordingly, students in this class do not earn “grades” on individual assignments; they earn “points” toward a final grade. Following is a breakdown of points-per-assignment or required activity:

- Quizzes (Individual values depend on total number) 250 points
- Draft 1 20 points
- Essay 1 30 points
Essay 2 | 50 points
Essay 3 | 75 points
Essay 4 | 85 points
Essay 5 | 40 points
Essay 6 | 100 points
Research Presentation | 50 points
Discussion Briefs (7 @ 20 points each) | 140 points
Graded Discussions (4 @ 40 points each) | 160 points
TOTAL | 1,000 points

Final grades correlate to 100-point increments: 900-1,000=A; 800-899=B; 700-799=C; and so on. Point values are not rounded up or down.

A student’s performance in Teamwork and Collaboration can have three results: Effective, consistent participation in class discussions and in-class activities can raise the final point total by up to 50 points. Frequent absence, disruptive behavior, or inattention during class can lower a final point total by up to 50 points. Attentive attendance alone will have no effect on the final point total. I will let you know if you are in danger of a grade reduction.

Special Accommodation

If a physical, mental, intellectual or emotional impairment makes necessary accommodations not already in place for this course (including the arrangement or meeting place of the class or the format of exams, for example), please contact Michelle Laughlin, Coordinator of Student Disability Services, at extension 1835. I’m confident that we can make arrangements that answer your particular learning needs.

Email and Office Hours

The best way to contact me is in person, before, during, or after class, or during office hours. You’ll get immediate results that way. Failing that, email is the best form of communication for making an appointment for office hours or asking ever so brief a question (for instance, a question about a fact under discussion in yesterday’s class, or a question about a word limit or deadline). If you have a question about my expectations, about the work you’re doing, or about your performance in the class—all of which are likely to require a conversation—please plan to meet me during my office hours or immediately after class.

When you email me—or, indeed, any professor—be sure to indicate what class you’re in, to use your Drake email address, and to provide some context for your question. In your emails to me, you may address me as “Craig” or “Professor Owens” (I’m comfortable with both). Please do not begin your email without a direct address, or with an interjection (such as “Hey—” or “Yo!”) or an imperative (“Listen, dude:”). The subject line of the email address should concisely indicate the reason for your
email (which means that, if you’re replying to an email from me, you’ll need to enter a new subject line). Please use your Drake email address to send emails pertaining to this course.

The conversations we’ll have during office hours will be in-depth and, sometimes, time-consuming. You’re free to just drop in during my office hours. However, because of the time it sometimes requires to really attend to issues students bring to one-on-one meetings, I highly recommend making an appointment, either right after class or by email, in advance, to ensure your preferred time slot is available. Also, because I am sometimes required to attend meetings elsewhere during my office hours, emailing in advance will ensure that I will, in fact, be available during a particular time.

**Etiquette and Academic Freedom**

You are free to hold whatever opinions you choose. However, you should express only those that are germane to our course content and goals during class-time. Please be prepared to explain the validity of your opinions and interpretations. It is possible that your opinion on a relevant topic may prove distasteful or even offensive to others; I ask that you take that possibility into account and that you weigh your words carefully as you express your point of view. But please do not “censor” yourself if you have something relevant and insightful to add to the conversation. If it appears to me that the views you express or the manner in which you express them are impeding the academic aims of this class, I will let you know.

I realize, of course, that many of you have relationships with one another outside of class. I appreciate the role friendship and personal acquaintance play in determining in-class dynamics. Accordingly, I invite you to maintain those personal relationships in class, to the extent that they do not interrupt class. However, I also ask that you do not let your personal acquaintance with your classmates become exclusionary or clique-ish: Doing so will threaten the learning environment of the classroom.

**Attendance**

Attendance is required. More than two absences—previously arranged or not, and for any reason—will affect your final grade (see “Grading” above). (Two classes, incidentally, is one whole week of class). You may not make up quizzes after the date they are given in class. However, you may arrange to take two early if you must miss a class because of an unavoidable conflict. You are responsible, however, for requesting to do so at least one week in advance of the class you will miss. You may not earn credit for any other work done in class on a day you were absent. This policy applies equally to all students, including those who miss class because of school-sanctioned functions or responsibilities or for a religious observance. If you miss class—for whatever reason—you alone are responsible for the learning you missed out on. If you believe your circumstances warrant special consideration, please make an appointment to meet during office hours.
If you believe your absences are due to extraordinary circumstances, and that you should be allowed to make up work after the fact of an absence, please contact me. I’m not an ogre. It’s just that, for the sake of a general policy, it’s too complicated to try to anticipate every possible reason for an absence, and then to craft a distinct policy for every possibility. In these cases, it will be up to you what information you choose to share with me in explaining your circumstances and requesting exceptions to the general policy outlined above.

A Note on Laptops and Other Technology

Some of our texts are electronic, so I understand why you would want to bring a laptop to class. But past experience has shown me that enough students abuse this privilege every semester, distracting themselves and others with web-browsing and social-networking unrelated to classwork, that widespread use of laptops during class time has become unworkable. So, please do not use laptops computers in class unless I specifically ask you to do so. You may, however, use tablet-style computers, such as an iPad, to access electronic readings during class. If I begin to suspect that participants are using their electronica for purposes unrelated to our class, we will revert to an entirely 20th-century student-technology paradigm.

Please keep your cell phone silent and out of sight during class. If you are expecting an urgent phone call, set your phone to vibrate and quietly excuse yourself from class to take the call.

Other Course Policies

The following policies and procedures by and large amplify guidelines already implicit in the syllabus. If you have any questions about these policies, please do not hesitate to ask.

- If you must eat in class, do so discretely. That is, don’t eat in a way that impairs your ability or the ability of your classmates to consult texts, take notes, and participate in discussion. Also, do not bring particularly odoriferous, noisy, dangerous (think soup), or complicated (think chopsticks) food to class. Absolutely no bananas. The ideal food for eating in class, I have found, is the Cucumber Roll: noiseless, odorless, bite-sized, and tasty, these morsels have the advantage of satisfying hunger without annoying those nearby.
- Drinking beverages is fine, as long as you don’t: spill them; slurp; make noise with the straw or container. Coffee, in particular, is always allowed. But don’t hurt anyone with it.
- Please do not touch, fondle, strike, pinch, hit, stroke, or make out with any classmate or otherwise disport with a classmate’s possessions, body, or parts thereof.
Please do not groom yourself in class. “Grooming” in this context refers to any of the following activities, or activities related to them: adjusting one’s hair; applying salve, lotion, balm, or sunscreen to one’s skin; applying makeup; dressing or undressing; the paring of fingernails or toenails, or the removal of dead or calloused skin from around them the pulling out of and fidgeting with hair, including hairs of the head, of the brows, of the lashes, of the ears, of the nose, or of any other area of the body; brushing or flossing teeth; exfoliation of any kind; applying hand sanitizer or hand cleanser, except in the case that some event has occurred to soil one’s hands during class; the buttoning, unbuttoning, tucking in, untucking, straightening, adjusting, rolling up, rolling down, loosening, tightening, buckling, unbuckling, untying, removing, or donning of any item of clothing. Please do not exude of any infected or noxious vapors (including the smell of smoke or body odor). Avoid picking of the nose or ears (particularly with the assistance of a key, a pen-cap, a pencil, or any other semi-sharp object). Outerwear should be taken off and put back on before and after class, respectively. Exceptions: Shoes come untied may be retied discreetly; flies left unzipped or unbuttoned by accident may be zipped or buttoned, if discreetly ignoring said fly is impossible; if one becomes unexpectedly over-warm or over-cold, the removal or addition of a layer of clothing, quickly and discreetly done, is allowed. The blowing of noses, in the case of colds or allergies, and the wiping of eyes, in the case of extreme sadness or hilarity, are acceptable, so long as they are carried out discreetly. Please ensure that your breath is fresh-smelling.

Please do not read the newspaper or magazines, browse the web, or complete work for other courses during class-time.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Note: The following schedule lists readings and assignments on a week-by-week basis. Except for Discussion Briefs, all assigned work is due on the first day of class in any given week unless specifically indicated otherwise below. Discussion Briefs are to be uploaded to our Blackboard Discussion Board by 12:30 pm on the day before the first day of class in the week they are assigned (usually Sunday). This schedule is subject to change with advanced notice. Sometimes these changes will be announced in class—another reason why it’s important to attend every class.

**Week 1: August 25 & 27**

Introductions ↪ Course Policies and Procedures ↪ Participation Guidelines ↪ In-Class Viewing: Jorgen Leth’s *The Perfect Human* ↪ Discuss Essay 1: “The Perfect Student”

**Week 2: September 1 & 3**
No Class on Monday (Labor Day) ✉️ Read: Anton Chekhov’s “Lady with the Pet Dog” (both translations: Litvinov and Yarmolinsky--Blackboard) ✉️ Discussion Brief #1: Choose a phrase or sentence from one of the two translations of Chekhov’s story that differs significantly from the analogous sentence or phrase from the other translation (or is included in one and excluded from another). Type both sentences at the top of your paper, and indicate the translation and page number from which you’re quoting each. Then, in about 350 words, explain what you think is significant about the difference between the way the two translators chose to render the phrases or sentences you chose. Please bring two copies of your Discussion Brief to class on Wednesday.

Week 3: September 8 & 10

Read: Joyce Carol Oates’s “Lady with the Pet Dog” (Blackboard) ✉️ Write Discussion Brief #2: Choose a brief passage (from 1 to 3 sentences) from Oates’s story that you think demonstrates an important difference between her version of this story and Chekhov’s. Type that sentence at the top of the page, and then, in about 350 words, explain what you think is significant about the difference between the two stories represented by the passage you chose. Please bring two copies of your Discussion Brief to class on Monday. ✉️ “The Perfect Student” (Draft): Please remember to bring two hard copies of your rough draft to class to class on Wednesday.

Week 4: September 15 & 17


Week 5: September 22 & 24

Read: Mohsin Hamid’s How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia (chapters 1-3) ✉️ Groups 1 and 2: Present findings on the history and culture of Pakistan in the decades of the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Week 6: September 29 & October 1

Read: Hamid’s Filthy Rich (chapters 4-6) ✉️ Group 3 and 4: Present findings on the history and culture of Pakistan in the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. ✉️ In-Class Viewing: Leth and Von Trier’s “Obstruction #2” and The Perfect Human—Bombay (Wednesday) ✉️ Discuss Essay #3: “The Perfect Human: Derailed” ✉️ Upload Essay #2 to our Blackboard “Assignments” menu (in standard document format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by 4:00 pm on Friday, October 3.
Week 7: October 6 & 8

Read: Hamid’s *Filthy Rich* (chapters 7-12)  
**Discussion Brief #3:** Choose an image, event, or cultural reference from this week’s reading that strikes you as both foreign and essential to understanding the cultural context of the story. Quote the sentence or passage in which this reference or image appears at the top of your page, and indicate the page number from which it comes. Then, in about 350 words, explain what you see as its significance to your over-all understanding of the novel.

Week 8: October 13 & 15

No Class on Monday (Fall Break)  
**In-Class Viewing:** Leth and Von Trier’s “Obstruction #3” and *The Perfect Human: Complete Freedom*  
**Discuss Essay #4:** The Perfect Student: Free  
**Upload Essay #3 to our Blackboard “Assignments” menu (in standard document format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by 4:00 pm on Friday, October 17.

Week 9: October 20 & 22

Read: Ken Grimwood’s *Replay* (first half)  
**Discussion Brief #4:** In about 500 words, formulate a hypothesis about what is the cause or purpose of Jeff’s “replays” and, using evidence from the novel, demonstrate the validity of your hypothesis.

Week 10: October 27 & 29

Read: Grimwood’s *Replay* (complete)  
**Discussion Brief #5:** Based on your continued reading of the novel and our discussions, rewrite last week’s discussion brief. If your hypothesis hasn’t changed, or has changed only a little, use evidence from this week’s reading to further validate it. If it has changed, explain how and why, again using specific evidence from the week’s reading.  
**Upload Essay #4 to our Blackboard “Assignments” menu (in standard document format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by 4:00 pm on Friday, October 31.

Week 11: November 3 & 5

In-Class Viewing: Leth and Von Trier’s “Obstruction #4” and *The Perfect Human: Cartoon*.  
**Discuss “Essay” #5:** “The Perfect Human: Visualized”  
**Read:** Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* (Chapters 1-3)  
**Discussion Brief #6:** Select a page on which you believe an image either a.) adds significantly to the meaning of the text or b.) detracts/distracts from the meaning of the text. Indicate the page number, and explain, in about 350 words, why you think the image(s) on that page have the effect they do.

Week 12: November 10 & 12
Read Bechdel’s *Fun Home* (complete) ➔ In-Class Viewing: Leth and Von Trier’s “Obstruction #5” and “The Perfect Human: Ventriloquist” ➔ Discuss Essay #6: “The Perfect Student: Evaluation”

**Week 13: November 17 & 19**

In-Class Presentations of “Essay” #5

**Week 14: November 24 & 26**

Read: Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* ➔ No class Wednesday—Thanksgiving Break

**Week 15: December 1 & 3**

In-Class Viewing: Atom Egoyan’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* ➔ End-of-Semester Business

**Finals Week**

Upload Essay #6 to our Blackboard “Assignments” menu (in standard document format: .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf) by 4:00 pm on Wednesday, December 9.