

Graduate Library Research Award Reflective Essay

Last semester, I took Critical Methodology with Dr. Dermot Ryan. Students were free to develop a research topic in any area of literary study we were interested in pursuing. I entered the LMU English Masters Program interested in postcolonial studies, and applied to this program thinking I would be researching the work of Caribbean scholars such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. Over the course of the semester in Critical Methodology, my interests shifted from postcolonial theory to a more nuanced and intersectional space in which trauma theory, embodiment theory, and archival theory join together.

For my research project in Dr. Ryan's course, I decided to explore my original interest in Caribbean literature through two novels written by Afro-Caribbean women: Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. I checked out Kincaid's book with Link+, as it was already checked out from our library. I noticed, in both novels, mother daughter relationships are related to their bodily connection to one another; further, this bodily connection is deeply steeped in personal, familial, and institutional trauma. When I began research on these two books, I was still focused on Postcolonial interpretations of these texts; but my paper began to feel outdated, and I knew if I continued on that path, I would not contribute to the body of scholarship in the meaningful way I wanted to. So I pivoted.

The library resources helped me pivot and refine my research topic; I saw an opportunity to explore my research through an interdisciplinary lens. My thesis shifted from assuming the mother/daughter relationship mimicked the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and instead approached mother/daughter connection differently. I began to consider: "How do

these novels showcase bodies of mothers and daughters as archives, sites in which narratives of trauma are recorded and passed down intergenerationally?”

At one point last semester I had nearly 15 books checked out from the LMU library catalog and other Link+ libraries: Some books contained literary criticism, some sociology, while others explored trauma and bodies. I became acquainted with how these different fields could contribute to my essay. I also consulted many articles while working toward a thesis statement, finding them through “OneSearch Advanced Search,” filtering peer-reviewed articles, and through JSTOR, Project Muse, or Taylor & Francis Online. I was impressed by all the free articles available to me. Once I had sources that were exploring a similar research question to my own, I turned to their Works Cited pages for leads identifying other scholarly sources to read.

My interdisciplinary approach to this essay posed the challenge of leading me off track from literary studies. While I found all the sociology studies, psychology studies, and archival science articles incredibly interesting, I had to narrow my research’s scope in order to succeed. This was the most important learning experience I had throughout my research process. This is when I turned to Dr. Ryan, who recommended I read embodiment and trauma theory (in particular, the work of Elizabeth Grosz, Gail Weiss, and Cathy Caruth); I then found these scholars’ bibliographies immensely helpful in progressing my research.

Over the course of the semester, students in Dr. Ryan’s course developed a Proposal, an Annotated Bibliography, a Literature Review, a first draft of a research paper, and a significantly revised final draft of that paper. The Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography helped me

put my sources in conversation with one another. They also illuminated for me which sources would be useful choices for my essay. The Proposal assignment encouraged me to identify my focus and narrow my scope, and to ponder how I could build on or disrupt the already-existing research in this field of study.

I am proud to write, I submitted my proposal to the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS) conference. The paper was accepted! I will be traveling to New Orleans in September to present a version of the paper I am submitting for the Library Research Award. I always find research to be a recursive process, and in preparation for my presentation at MELUS, find myself continuously seeking out the latest published work that might take my research to new levels.