

Class Title: *Familiar Perpetrators: On the Intimacy of Evil in Contemporary American Literature and Popular Culture*

Class Instructor: **Assoc. Prof. Mihaela Precup**

Class Description:

This class explores the representation of perpetrators of acts of violence in contemporary American literature and popular culture. It focuses primarily on the process of perpetrators becoming familiar figures, either because their representation is well-circulated in works of American literature and popular culture in ways that make the audience feel intimately connected to them, or simply because they are represented by their own family members and friends. By “perpetrators,” this class refers to “those who had a hand...in the physical destruction of other individuals” (Strauss 2017), but it also attempts to expand this definition, which does not cover certain other more insidious acts of perpetration like those that led to the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, white nationalism or the “genocide by default” produced during the global pandemic (Gonsalves qtd. in Moran 2020).

In this class, we examine a variety of primary sources from present-day American literary and popular culture, such as documentary films (*The Act of Killing*, 2012), comics (*Drawing Power*, 2019), biographical fiction (Eli Saslow’s *Rising out of Hatred: The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist*, 2018), TV series (*Our Flag Means Death*, 2022-2023), and other texts that cover acts of perpetration such as genocide, serial killings, sexual abuse and assault, and racially motivated hatred. The theoretical approach of this class includes authors from fields such as memory and trauma studies, perpetrator studies, and gender and sexuality studies.

Class Requirements:

Every student will be asked to participate in one round-table discussion on the assigned readings. Extra points will be awarded for excellent class participation. There will be a final written exam.