ENGL 882 – MA PROJECT PROPOSAL
Name: Maya Gal
Date: 04/17/18
Title: Ethics of Storytelling; How to Represent Trauma?

My M.A. project extends on my final paper for Dr. Kim’s Graduate course on multiculturalism, where I investigated the ethics of storytelling more specifically on Refugee Tales Vol I. The questions I investigated were: how does one translate a story, from one medium to another, particularly if it is not your own story? Does such ‘translation’ result in further erasure of voices, or an attempt to revive them? who has the right to represent what experiences, traditions, and understandings from a particular group of individuals? How does language influence these conflicts? I am interested in investigating the same concerns in my project, on a larger scale. I am not yet sure of an entire reading list, but in addition to Refugee Tales Vol I and II, I want to explore Red: A Haida Manga by Michael Yahgulanaas, Maus by Art Spiegelman, and Say You’re One of them by Uwem Akpan. I am particularly interested in translation across mediums (in the case of Red, for instance, a true event transformed into a graphic novel, or Refugee Tales, which expresses collected interviews and orally shared stories onto prose narratives). How are the ethics of storytelling different among these different mediums of literature? Are some forms easier to translate certain aspects onto?

I will investigate the conflicts of representation in several terms. One is language: how finding a common language can either add or neglect original authorial perspectives (that is, the ethics of representation through translation). How does narration affect storytelling in that regard (medium is again relevant to consider here)? Can words be ‘borrowed’ or are they always inevitably ‘taken’? Second is the conflict of continuity: is the goal of the story to distribute collective information, or to tell the tale of an individual? Where do you draw the line (Red, for instance, comes together to create one large painting, what message does that attempt to convey)? Is a written story ‘continuous’? Lastly, I want to also reflect on the conflicts of class and experience. Do certain attributes deem some authors more ‘qualified’ to tell particular stories than others? Essentially, I am interested in investigating what the stakes are in respect to representation and the ethics of storytelling traumatic experiences that are often times reflected as ‘universal’, or experiences by a larger minority. A clearer thesis will develop with further reading, but these are the questions I have in mind to approach the project.

My aim is to submit my completed product to the Journal of Narrative Theory. I think it is a perfect fit in terms of content to my proposed topic; the journal is accepting submissions to a special issue titled “Refugee Literatures: Migration, Crisis, and the Humanities”. This particular issue explores contemporary ethics behind the narration of refugee experiences, asking the following questions: “when refugees speak, how do they tell their stories? What narrative, poetic, rhetorical, and legal forms have they used to give account of their lives?”. With the focus of Refugee Tales Vol I and II in my project, as well as more generally of the ethics in the act of storytelling traumatic experiences, this issue seems very relevant to my research. The deadline of submission is September 1st, 2018, with papers expected to range between 25-35 pages.

Reader 1: Name: Dr. Christine Kim
Signature: __________________________

Reader 2: Name: Dr. Sophie McCall
Signature: __________________________