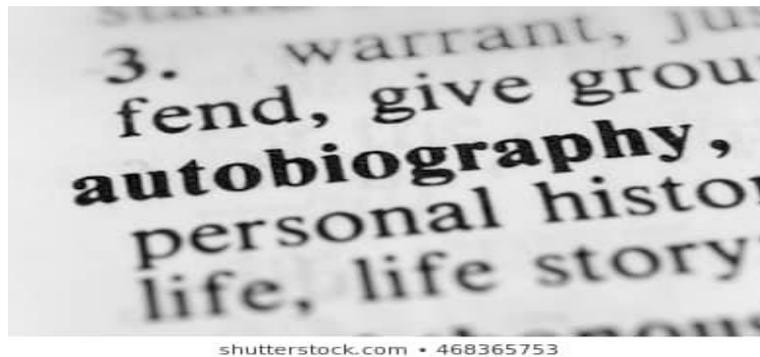


Memoirs and Autobiography: To Be or Not To Be

Thursdays, 2:30 – 4:00 p.m, AA 259



“All autobiography is storytelling: all writing is autobiography.” – J.M. Coetzee

“Autobiography is awfully seductive; it’s wonderful. Once I got into it, I realized I was following a tradition established by Fredrick Douglas – the slave narrative – speaking in the first-person singular, talking about the first-person plural, always saying ‘I,’ meaning ‘we.’” – Maya Angelou

“The biography of a writer – or even the autobiography – will always have this incompleteness.” – V.S. Naipaul

“Autobiography begins with a sense of being alone. It is an orphan form.” – John Berger

“The difference between memoir and autobiography, as far as I see it, is that a memoir is there primarily to tell one particular story, whereas an autobiography tries to be a full account of a life.” – Salman Rushdie

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live... We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.” – Joan Didion

“I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well.” – Henry David Thoreau

Course Aim:

What is a "life" when it's written down? How does memory inform the present? This course will address these questions among others, considering the relationship between biography, autobiography, and memoir and between personal and social themes.

This course, designed for anyone who wants to read with us, addresses issues that have special significance to the genres of autobiographical writing (or life narrative): truth and truth-telling, collaboration and representation of the other, authenticity and ownership, ethical uses of sensitive material, memory and its relation to autobiographical truth, the autobiographical

narrator, identity and self-representation, life narrative as testimony, and the convergence of personal and political narratives.

Instructors: Professor Mike Amey and Professor Rachel Martin

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Office: Bisdorf / AA252

Blog: <https://thespoilers.blog/> This is a work in progress. The instructors will be publishing their own stuff here as well as material relevant to the books under discussion.

Course Prerequisites/Co-requisites

A willingness to read books and talk about them.

General Goals of all Spoilers Classes:

The primary objectives of the Spoilers classes are:

- 1) to engender in students an appreciation of literature and its role in illuminating all aspects of the human condition;
- 2) to teach students how to use literary theory and reading strategies to explore literature;
- 3) to familiarize students with terminology used to discuss literature and the conventions used to write about literature;
- 4) to help students discover the connections between literature and other academic disciplines;
- 5) to develop and foster in students the ability to think critically and to express their ideas cogently

“Required” Texts (Any edition of these texts are acceptable):

Bulosan, Carlos. *America Is in the Heart*

Dandicat, Edwidge. *Brother, I'm Dying*

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl; written by herself*

Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus*.

Spufford, Francis. *The Child that Books Built; A Life in Reading*

Additional Material and Email Use:

Handouts, supplemental readings, or links to online sources may be handed out by the professor or made available via email.

Please be sure you are on the class email listserv to receive these. We also announce class cancelations via email.

Grading:

This is the best kind of class – a class for the love of learning – so there are no grades or credit to be earned. Just come and enjoy.

Class Reading Schedule (This is a flexible schedule, which means that, as necessary, discussions may continue on to subsequent weeks. The schedule may also change, but we will inform you of any major changes in advance. We will spend approximately 2 weeks on each book):

Thursday, August 22nd

Before class read:

- “The Cultural Values Necessary for the Creation of Autobiography” by George Gusdorf from *Autobiography* (pdf via email)
- “Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity” by Julie Rak (pdf via email)

Thursday, August 29th

Before class read:

- Excerpt from *The Book of Margery Kempe* (pdf via email)

Thursday, September 5th

Before class read:

- *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl; written by herself* (pg. 1 – 80)

Thursday, September 12th

Before class read:

- *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl; written by herself* (pg. 80 – the end)

Thursday, September 19th

Before class read:

- *America is in the Heart* (Part 1 and 2)

Thursday, September 26th

Before class read:

- *America is in the Heart* (Part 3 and 4)

Thursday, October 3rd

Finish discussion of *America is in the Heart*

Thursday, October 10th

Before class read:

- *Maus* (Chapters 1 – 3)

Thursday, October 17th

Before class read:

- *Maus* (Chapters 4 – 6)

Thursday, October 24th

Before class read:

- *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Chapters 1 – 3)

Thursday, October 31st

Before class read:

- *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Chapters 4 – 6)

Thursday, November 7th

Before class read:

- *Brother, I'm Dying* (Part 1: He is My Brother)

Thursday, November 14th

Before class read:

- *Brother, I'm Dying* (Part 2: For Adversity)

Thursday, November 21st

Finish discussion of *Brother, I'm Dying*

Thursday, November 28th

No class – Thanksgiving Holiday

Thursday, December 5th

Before class read:

- *The Child that Books Built; A Life in Reading* (Chapters 1 – 3)

Thursday, December 12th

Before class read:

- *The Child that Books Built; A Life in Reading* (Chapters 4 – 5)