



ENGL 0038 / COML 0038: Study of a Genre

World Autobiography

Professor Max Cavitch

spring 2024

TR 10:15-11:45AM

description and content

This course will introduce you to the great variety of narrative forms and themes in autobiographical literature from a wide range of cultural and national traditions. As a course on a major narrative genre, it will give you a grounding in the fundamentals of genre- and narrative-theory and criticism. And, as a course on world literature, it will introduce you to the principles and theories of comparativism, as well as contemporary debates regarding the regional, the national, and the global in literary studies. Our focus will be on “modern” autobiography, from the late 18th century to the present day, with particular emphasis on 20th- and 21st-century autobiographical writing, from many different parts of the world. All works—many of them in translation—will be read in English, which means we’ll be examining the role of the English language in shaping different conceptions of “world literature.” Representative authors and locales include: Alison Bechdel (U.S.), Nirad Chaudhuri (India), Mohamed Choukri (Morocco), J. M. Coetzee (South Africa), Alicia Elliott (Canada/Six Nations), Annie Ernaux (France), Anne Frank (Germany/Netherlands), Kiese Laymon (U.S.), Audre Lorde (U.S.), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (France), Wole Soyinka (Nigeria), Greta Thunberg (Sweden), and William Wordsworth (U.K.).

course structure

hybrid: lecture and discussion

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required readings

books for purchase: both print and e-copies acceptable

critical/theoretical essays: made freely available for downloading/printing

assignments and requirements

attendance and in-class participation: required

pop quizzes: to assess and reward timely completion of reading assignments

in-class presentations and group work: to hone research and speaking skills

several very short essays and response-papers: to hone research and writing skills

mid-term exam: to assess retention and understanding of course readings and lectures

final exam: to assess retention and understanding of course readings and lectures

weekly workload

required reading: moderate-to-heavy (approx. 100-200 pages per week)

required writing: light-to-moderate (averaging roughly two pages per week)

requirements filled by this course

College: Sector: Arts and Letters (AUAL)

English Major: Sector 1: Theory and Poetics (AETP); Sector 2: Difference and Diaspora (AEDD); Sector 6: 20th & 21st Centuries (AE20)

English Concentration Attribute: 20th-21st Century Concentration (AE21)