

COML 5110 640 (2024A)

Wed. 5:15pm-8:15pm

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Fisher-Bennett 244

Course Description

The subject of the course is life writing and its genres of autobiography, autofiction, memoir, the diary, and online diaries.

Genre theory frames the discussions that focus upon time perspective, the construction of self, issues of truth and fiction and of literary representation of experience, and the relation between private writing and public reading. The examination of these genres follows their literary historical paths, in their social contexts. It traces the transformation of religious confessions of men to secular autobiographies, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* and Benjamin Franklin's autobiography and their expansion to autobiographical writing of marginalized women as Sally Morgan's hybrid text *My Place*. The study of the memoir follows the genre from its medieval traces to modern memoirs, their political utilization, and the influences of market shifts. For autofiction we shall examine Rachel Cusk's *Outline*, compared to her memoir *Aftermath*, Sheila Heti's *How Should a Person Be*, and Natalia Ginzburg's *Family Lexicon*. In the history of the diary the analysis focuses on the role of the early canonical diary, as Samuel Pepys's diary, and its literary function in subsequent diary writings by women and men in times of war and peace, concluding with online diaries.

The course assignments will consist of short writing assignments related to the readings and a final paper. There will be no exams.

January 24, 2024 - First Class

Introduce yourself.

About Life-Writing

Go over syllabus & Assignments.

Navigate Canvas

Final paper: Select a diary or an autobiography, a memoir or an autofiction book, different from those (to be) studied in class, to analyze in your paper. Discuss your choice with me and once approved, start to analyze. Support all your arguments with appropriate quotes. Use our class discussions, concepts learned, your class readings and outside readings.

Your paper must contain some form of **close analysis** of its primary source materials, from which it must cite **directly** in the form of quotations.

- You must use **critical terms** accurately and in ways that support your argument.
- You must incorporate references in the form of **direct** quotations from **at least four** secondary sources related in some way to your topic.
- You must document **all** your sources using **MLA** style.
- Write with the aim of being understood. Use clear **topic sentences** and **transitions** in your paragraphs. **Proofread** carefully to catch grammatical/syntactical problems and typos.

Q – A

Reading and watching Assignments for next week:

I. Listen to my first video about autobiography. On Canvas

II- Texts to read.

1. *The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau.*

Go to UPenn Franklin catalog and seek under author Rousseau Jean-Jacques. It is an online text.

There are 12 volumes 1765-1769 which were published from 1782-1789. We will analyze a selection. Read: Introduction and books: I, VI, VII

III- Conceptual articles to read:

1) James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical and Bibliographical Introduction." In: *Autobiography, Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Olney James ed. (1980), pp. 3-27. **On Canvas**

2) George Misch, "Conception and Origin of Autobiography" in Olney, *Autobiography Essays* (1980), pp. 28-48. **On Canvas**

Weekly writing assignments related to the reading will be posted on Canvas

January 31, 2024

A beginning of a genre. Autobiographies of famous men

Going over your responses and discussion of readings.

Reading together parts from Rousseau's *Confessions*.

Watch for next week

Watch/Listen to a video (John Pollack on Benjamin Franklin)
(See Modules on Canvas)

Readings for February 7

I- Text

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20203/20203-h/20203-h.htm>

[Links to an external site.](#)

Project Gutenberg EBOOK- Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. Read Introduction and parts: I, II, III, IX, XI, XIII, XIV, XVIII.

For comparison Saint Augustin's confessions 4th century: Just skim through it to get an idea about the difference between the two most famous autobiographical confessions in the canon:

https://books.google.com/books?id=_wusCvC4yOcC&pg=PR17#v=onepage&q&f=false

II- Conceptual Readings

1. James Olney, “Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography,” In Olney Ed. *Autobiography, Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton University Press, (1980): 236-267. **On Canvas**
2. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “Autobiographical Truth” in *Reading Autobiography*. University of Minnesota Press, (2001): 15-18; 22-3. **On Canvas**
3. George Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” in *Autobiography, Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton University Press, (1980). See in reserve library uploads **On Canvas**
4. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*. University of Minnesota Press, (1989): 3-30; 119-137. **Online through library**

February 7, 2024

Truth and fiction in autobiography

Go over your responses and discussion of readings.

Readings and listening for next week

I- Listen to my lecture on the memoir. On Canvas

II- Text

Sally Morgan, *My Place*. Fremantle Arts Center Press: Western Australia, 1987.

Amazon

III- Conceptual Readings

- 1) Julie Rak, “Are Memoirs Autobiography? A Consideration of Genre and Public Identity” in *Genre*, 36 (Fall/Winter 2004): 305-326—**on Canvas**.
- 2) Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories*. Cornell University Press (1999): 1-141. **Amazon**.

Transitions and hybridity

Discussing the text, the readings, your responses. Is the text a memoir or maybe an autobiography, a biography, a coming-of-age sub-genre?

Readings and watching for next week:

I-Text:

Rachel Cusk, *AFTERMATH, On Marriage and Separation*. Faber & Faber (2012).
Amazon.

II- Read Book reviews:

<https://slate.com/human-interest/2012/08/rachel-cusks-divorce-memoir-aftermath-reviewed.html>

<http://www.theomnivore.com/camilla-long-on-aftermath-by-rachel-cusk/>

<https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/rachel-cusk/aftermath-marriage-separation/>

<https://bookmarks.reviews/reviews/all/aftermath-on-marriage-and-separation/>

<https://www.bookforum.com/print/1903/rachel-cusk-s-aftermath-on-marriage-and-separation-10039>

and

Watch her interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGg_6BGiHuM ;

III- Conceptual Readings:

1). Smith and Watson, "Expanding Autobiography Studies" in *Reading Autobiography*. (2010): 193-234; 38-42; 54-61. Online access:

<https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/lib/upenn-ebooks/detail.action?pq-origsite=primo&docID=310562>

book online and on Canvas.

2) Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*. (2010): 27-30 (on memory and trauma), **book online and on Canvas.**

3) Alex Zwerdling, *The Rise of the Memoir*. Oxford University Press (2017): 1-7; 8-32 **on Canvas**

4) G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir, an Introduction*, Oxford University Press (2012): 3-53; 169-183. Online in library: <https://academic-oup-com.proxy.library.upenn.edu/book/12076> **Amazon.**

February 14, 2024

Continuing memoir, what changed?

How are Sally Morgan's and Rachel Cusk's different memoirs?

Discussion of your responses and the readings.

Readings and watchin for next week:

I- Text

Outline Rachel Cusk, *Outline*. Picador Farrar, Straus, and Giroux (2014). **Amazon**

II- Interviews:

1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b08bwoCSSFY>

2)

https://www.google.com/search?q=Rachel+Cusk+outline%2C+interviews&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS856US856&oq=Rachel+Cusk+outline%2C+interviews&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQABiiBDIHCAIQABiiBDIHCMQABiiBNIBCTEwMTEyajBqN6gCALACAA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:96865de0,vid:KA-NVBdYmBM

III- Conceptual Reading

Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, (2001, second American edition). Pp. 7-59. **Book on reserve in the library, call no. PR851W3 2001.**

The Autofictional, Approaches, Affordances, Forms. Effe, Alexandra and Lawlor, Hannie, eds. (2022). pp. 1-18, 21-40, 185-204, 267-286. **Online access in library.**
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-78440-9>

February 28, 2024

Discussing autofiction and your responses.

Readings for next week

I – Text

Sheila Heti, *How Should a Person Be?* (2012), paperback **Amazon**.

II- Conceptual Reading:

Radical Realism, Autofictional Narratives and the Reinvention of the Novel. Fiona J. Doloughan. (2023). pp. 1-40, 125-156.

March 13, 2024

Continuing autofiction.

Next week's reading

I- Text

Natalia Ginzburg, *Family Lexicon* (2017), paperback **Amazon**.

II- Starting your paper:

It is time to begin work on your first draft of your paper. In 500-600 words, draft an introduction that conceptualizes your research problem and forecast what you plan to accomplish. Include purpose statement and a summary of the main claims you will present. Include a bibliographical list of at least 10 references and an interesting title that relates to your problem. Submit a post on Canvas; b) Read everyone's proposal (and take notes) and give me a list of 2 proposals that interest you, one of which you will review later. You will receive a list of issues to address in your reviews. The reviews will be due after the full first drafts are posted. This is only the phase in which students articulate what they plan to work on in their papers.

Due: March 24, 11:59p.m.

For: Everyone

March 20, 2024

Discussion the readings for this week and your responses. And going over your abstracts for the paper.

For Next Week

I- Listen to a linked audio on diary.

II- Diary text

Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*. Eds. Robert Latham and William Mathews, University of California Press, Berkley (1970): Read: Vol. 1 (1660): Introduction up to page xcvi, pp. 1-35, 256-279; Vol. 9 (1669): 422-433, 462-504, 540-565. Also read from the Ely Lord Edition pp. 150-162 (1665 the plague), 184-190 (1666 London fire), 282-290 (1668 Deb). **All are on Canvas.**

All the diary's volume from 1660-1669—9 volumes are in Van Pelt library.

However, they are not online.

III- Conceptual Readings

1) Philippe Lejeune, *ON DIARY*. Eds. J. Popkin and J. Rak, University of Hawaii Press (2009): 147-210; **Book available in the library online. Amazon**

2) Robert Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries*. Oxford University Press (1974): 1-127; Available **in Van Pelt Library, call number: PR908. F6. On reserve. Also, on Canvas.**

March 27, 2024

Pepys and the diary genre

Discussion of all final papers. Students are invited to comment on papers by peers and ask questions of each other. The purpose of this is to start getting you acquainted with the process of peer-review and cooperation. This will be considered as a part of your participation.

Discussion of readings and your responses to peers.

Readings for next week and for April 10

Philippe Lejeune, “Auto-Genesis: Genetic Studies of Autobiographical Texts”, **and** “How Anne Frank Wrote the Diary of Anne Frank” In *On Diary* (2009): 213-266. **On Canvas** [For next week].

Desirée Henderson, *How to Read a Diary, Critical Contexts and Interpretive Strategies for 21st-Century Readers*. Routledge (2019). **Online in Van Pelt.**

Batsheva and Dan Ben-Amos, eds. *The Diary: The Epic of Everyday Life*. (2020), pp. 1-24 (the introduction). **In the library and online access, on Canvas.**

April 3, 2024

Visit the rare books collection-diary manuscripts.

After the visit we will watch together the video on editing and publishing diaries.

April 10, 2024

Discuss the readings and your responses.

Reading for next week:

I- DIARY

Chaim Kaplan, *Scroll of Agony, the Warsaw Diary of Chaim Kaplan*. Indiana University Press, 1999.

Ii – Conceptual Readings

1) Batsheva Ben-Amos, “On Holocaust Diaries” in *The Diary*, (2020): 364-382.

An eBook in Van Pelt Library.

2) Leena Kurvet-Kaosaar, “Estonian Women’s Deportation Diaries” in *The Diary*, (2020): 383-396. **An eBook in Van Pelt Library.**

April 17, 2024

analyzing together Chaim Kaplan’s diary and the articles.

Readings and assignment for next week:

1) Laurie McNeill and John David Zuern, “Online Lives 2.0: Introduction” in *Biography*, 38.2 (2015): 1-33 **Oline through Van Pelt**

2) Madeleine Sorapure, “Autobiography Scholarship 2.0: Understanding New Forms of Life Writing” *Biography* 38.2 (2015): 267-272 **on Canvas.**

3) Kylie Cardell, “From Puritans to Fitbit, Self-Improvement, Self-Tracking, and How to Keep a Diary” in *The Diary*, (2020): 399-410. **An eBook in Van Pelt Library.**

4) Jill Walker Rettberg, “Online Diaries and Blogs.” in *The Diary*, (2020): 411-424. **An eBook in Van Pelt Library.**

5) Post an advanced draft of your final paper. The paper length should be 25 pages of polished writing. You can post your papers to Canvas. Each student has chosen or was assigned 1 paper by another student to go over, to comment, critique and suggest how to improve the paper. Again, the purpose of this is to get you acquainted with the process of peer-review and cooperation. This will be considered as a part of your participation.

Evaluation Checklist for Peer Review of Independent Research Project

Yes (+X points) No (-Y points)

Did you **restate your partner's thesis statement** in your own words?

Did you point out **at least one strength** in the draft?

Did you point out at least **one area for development** in the draft?

Did you comment on the use of **direct quotations from primary sources**?

Did you comment on the use of **direct quotations from secondary sources**?

Did you comment on the use of **critical terms**?

April 24, 2024

Discussion of all your papers and articles about online diaries.

Required reading for next week:

I- Online Diary

Riverbend, Alia Mamdouh, *Baghdad Burning*, *Girl's Blog from Iraq*.

II- Article

Kylie Cardell, "Read My Lips: Genre, Rhetoric, and the Baghdad Diaries of Nuha al-Radi." *a/b: Autobiography Studies*. 27.2 (2012): 316-337 **on Canvas**.

May 1, 2024

Online diaries and blogs—continued.