

## ENG 660—MEMOIR AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY (WINTER 2021)

Instructor: Mary Wood  
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Office Hours: M 2-4, W 2-3, by apt.  
445 PLC, available via Zoom

### Description

This seminar examines autobiographical genres, with a focus on modern and contemporary literature. We will discuss key theoretical questions in autobiographical theory, including: What defines the subject of autobiography? What is distinctive about autobiography, testimony, memoir, diary, and other forms of self-writing? What determines "truth" in autobiography and what happens when the autobiographical "contract" between reader and writer is broken? Why have forms of self-writing been of particular interest to historically marginalized groups and how have writers from these groups shaped the genre? How have autobiographical forms resisted the primacy of the individual? The course will also serve as an introduction to archive studies; students will have a chance to do archival scholarship at Special Collections as well as in online archives as they develop their seminar essays.

### Texts

The following texts are available through the Duckstore ([www.uoduckstore.com](http://www.uoduckstore.com)). They may also be ordered through local independent bookstores (Eugene and Portland), including J. Michaels Books ([www.jmichaelsbooks.com](http://www.jmichaelsbooks.com)), Smith Family Bookstore ([www.smithfamilybookstore.com](http://www.smithfamilybookstore.com)), Tsunami Books ([www.tsunamibooks.org](http://www.tsunamibooks.org)), Black Sun Books ([www.blacksunbooks.net](http://www.blacksunbooks.net)), and Powell's Books ([www.powells.com](http://www.powells.com)).

Terese Marie Mailhot, *Heart Berries: A Memoir*  
Amy Kurzweil, *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir*  
James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*  
Meena Alexander, *Poetics of Dislocation*

Articles and book chapters for the class are listed under Course Schedule below and are available in pdf form on the course Canvas site.

### Assignments

**1)Discussion posts**—Every week, beginning in Week Two, please post to the Canvas Discussion Board a 200-word response to the readings for the upcoming class. Post by **Monday at noon about readings we will discuss the following day (Tuesday)**.

**2)Class presentation**—Each class, starting in Week Two, 1-2 students will develop and present (10 minutes) TWO research questions based on the readings for that week. By "research questions," I mean something that could serve as the germ of a paper idea.

**3)Essay or project abstract**

**4)One-page archive description**

**5)Rough draft of final essay**

**6)Final essay**

### **Grading**

Discussion posts—10%

Class presentation—10%

Abstract—5%

Archive Assignment—5%

Rough draft—25%

Final project—45%

### **Accommodations**

Appropriate accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability and require accommodation, you must contact the Accessible Education Center (<https://aec.uoregon.edu/>) by the end of the first week of class. That office will help provide needed accommodations.

### **Course Reading and Discussion Schedule**

[1-5 to 3-12]

#### Week One

Jan. 5<sup>th</sup>—Introductions. What is Life Writing? How has it changed historically and how has it been theorized? In-class reading and discussion.

#### Week Two

Jan. 12<sup>th</sup>—James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*. Histories of Black autobiography and criticism in the U.S. Other Readings (in Canvas): Carter Mathes, Marlon Ross, Joycelyn Moody.

#### Week Three

Jan.19<sup>th</sup>—More on Baldwin. Archives as source of life writing and letters as life writing—Joanna Russ/Ursula LeGuin papers.

#### Week Four

Jan. 26<sup>th</sup>—Archives continued. Meena Alexander, *Poetics of Dislocation*. Mixed-genre autobiography. De-colonial life writing.

#### Week Five

Feb. 2—Amy Kurzweil, *Flying Couch: A Graphic Memoir*. Third-generation Holocaust narrative. Graphic memoir.

#### Week Six

Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>—More on Kurzweil. Begin Terese Marie Mailhot, *Heart Berries: A Memoir*.

#### Week Seven

Feb. 16<sup>th</sup>—More on Mailhot.

#### Week Eight

Feb. 23<sup>rd</sup>—Return to questions from previous weeks. Discussion of student projects.

#### Week Nine

March 2<sup>nd</sup>—Continue discussion from previous weeks. Student projects.

#### Week Ten

March 9<sup>th</sup>—Workshopping of student projects.