

**"All autobiographies are lies."** George Bernard Shaw

**"I am a lie that always tells the truth."** Jean Cocteau

ENGLISH 389RQ: The Memoir (INQ)

Spring 2014

Instructor: Stacy Bell

Phone: 770/784-8469 (o); E-mail: smcquai@emory.edu

Office: Humanities Hall 105

Office hours: MW 2:00-3:30, T 10-12, and by appointment; office hours are subject to change each week, so please use the option of making an appointment.

*Required Texts*

Fuller, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*

Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*

Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*

Liao, *For a Song and a Hundred Songs*

Parker, *Larceny in My Blood*

*Course Description & Structure*

English 389R: The Memoir is an examination of the importance to contemporary American society of a vaguely-defined literary genre. Students will read modern and contemporary memoirs that explore themes of racism and incarceration. This TPSL/INQ course will meet five Fridays during the semester at Lee Arrendale State Prison, in addition to regular classes on the Oxford campus. In addition to the Oxford students, nine incarcerated women are enrolled. Short writing assignments will precede a capstone personal narrative. The inside and outside students will collaborate in completion of the required course work.

*Objectives*

The successful English 389RQ student will meet the following:

- To read critically all of the assigned texts with an emphasis on analyzing the purpose and enduring literary value of each memoir
- To create a unified definition for the memoir genre
- To write critical responses to each memoir that feature a strong thesis and appropriate academic structure and organization, as well as demonstrate mastery of grammar, punctuation, and style appropriate in college-level writing
- To answer the essential questions through independent inquiry
- To complete a capstone personal narrative that considers audience, purpose, and social relevance
- To reflect on the experience of collaboration with incarcerated students

*Essential Questions include but are not limited to:*

1. How is a memoir different from an autobiography?
2. What makes a “good” memoir?
3. Why has the memoir genre become so popular in recent years?
4. What is the memoirist’s obligation to her subject(s)? Must she protect others’ privacy and dignity in the process of truth-telling?
5. What is truth? ***Must a memoir be accurate in order to be true?***
6. Are there certain experiences that “must” be shared?
7. College students can study memoir anywhere. How is the location of this class inside a maximum-security women’s prison significant? How does the context contribute to the pursuit of and successful realization of the course objectives?

*Evaluation:*

Five 500-word RAs: 7% each

One 3000- to 5000-word nonfiction prose essay: 35%

INQ Reflection: 10%

Participation: 20% ***The five visit to Alto are mandatory.***

Understanding the memoir: Bring a copy of this handout to every class. We will use this rubric to construct a working definition of the memoir genre. At the end of the semester you will use this rubric to evaluate your own personal narrative.

Reflective Analysis: For each book, you will write a short [500 words] critical reflective analysis. I will give you some questions in advance to guide you, but you will not be limited to writing about these questions. The short responses must examine the value and significance of the text. I encourage you to focus on the aspects of the book that you believe to be essential to its inclusion in the genre. As the semester progresses your reflections on the texts should become increasingly independent of my guiding questions.

Nonfiction Prose Essay: At the end of the semester you will submit a personal narrative [3000-5000 words]. You will submit the narrative in three stages; I will read and respond to each draft. You will be paired with one other student from the partner institution; the two of you will share your drafts and provide each other with written feedback and suggestions. Writing is a process. Effective writing requires revision. Each draft should be a clean, revised copy of the personal narrative in progress.

INQ Reflection: Over the course of the semester, we will apply the essential questions to each memoir that we read. When you submit your personal narrative at the end of the semester, you will include a reflective summary of the questions as applied to your own narrative and to your experience taking the class inside the prison.

## *Business*

**Blackboard:** Your class conference, including all information about assignments, your grades and your class syllabus, is available to you on Blackboard. You are responsible for knowing the information and materials posted there.

**Office Hours:** The purpose of office hours appointments is to help you with the process of writing: to a) brainstorm b) construct, and c) organize. I will not proofread essays and therefore will not discuss an essay within 24 hours of the due date. Oxford has an excellent Writing Center and peer-tutoring program with well-trained students who can help you improve your essays. Use the Writing Center regularly, but remember that tutors are not proofreaders. Treat them with the same respect as you would your professors.

To meet with me, sign up on the weekly schedule outside my door. If you cannot see me during office hours, contact me to make an appointment.

**Late Essays:** Your essays are due at the *beginning* of class on the specified date. I will lower the grade for an unexcused late essay by one full letter grade for each day it is late. After four days the essay will receive a zero. I will not accept unstapled essays.

**Email:** Use email for the following reasons:

- To cancel an appointment
- To notify me of an absence
- To ask a legitimate question about an assignment
- To say hello!

I do not answer emails requesting information contained in the syllabus or about grades. If you want to discuss a grade, make an appointment.

**Plagiarism:** The work you submit for class must be your own. You may not submit an essay more than once. If you use another author's words or original ideas in your writing, you must give credit to the author using correct citation style as we will practice in class. We will discuss plagiarism, and we will devote class time throughout the semester to learning how to avoid it. If you are concerned about plagiarism, see me during office hours. Read the honor code at <http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code/>.

**Electronic toys:** Laptops are permitted only when required. Silence your phone and put it away during class. If you are using a translator, let me know. I will take your phone away from you if I see it. And I'll read your texts.

**Printing:** Blue and gold makes green! Print rough drafts on recycled paper, and print double-sided final drafts to save paper. Turn in paper copies of all essays, no exceptions.

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5. What is truth? ***Must a memoir be accurate in order to be true?***
6. Are there certain experiences that “must” be shared?

Understanding the memoir		
Author’s goal, objective or motivation	Audience—intended or actual	Enduring [social, political] value

## JANUARY

- 15 Introduction and Objectives
- 17
- 20 MLK Holiday: No class
- 22
- 24 Class will not meet.
- 27 *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*
- 29 *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*
- 31 Alto

## FEBRUARY

- 3 *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*
- 5 *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*
- 7 Class will not meet.
- 10 *Larceny in my Blood*
- 12 *Larceny in my Blood*
- 14 Alto
- 17 *Larceny in my Blood*
- 19 *Larceny in my Blood*
- 21 *Larceny in my Blood*
- 24 *Five Chimneys*
- 26 *Five Chimneys*
- 28 *Five Chimneys*

## MARCH

- 3 *Five Chimneys*
- 5 *Five Chimneys*
- 7, 10, 12, 14 Class will not meet.
- 17 *Survival in Auschwitz*
- 19 *Survival in Auschwitz*
- 21 Alto
- 24 *Survival in Auschwitz*
- 26 *Survival in Auschwitz*
- 28 Alto
- 31

## APRIL

- 2
- 4 Class will not meet.
- 7 *For a Song and a Hundred Songs*
- 9 *For a Song and a Hundred Songs*
- 11 Alto
- 14 *For a Song and a Hundred Songs*
- 16 *For a Song and a Hundred Songs*
- 18 *For a Song and a Hundred Songs*
- 21 Class will not meet.

- 23 Class will not meet.
- 25 Class will not meet.
- 28 Final class: summary discussion of the semester. Final draft of personal narrative due.

We will not have a final exam.

