

EN 6595 3.0: Special Topics: Literary Nonfiction: Women's Autofiction and Autotheory

Prof. Myra Bloom

This course focuses on the female authors (in English or English translation) at the vanguard of autofiction and autotheory, from the 1980's to the present. Our goal is to study—and produce—hybrid-genre literary texts by attending closely to the aesthetics and politics of their work. Contextualizing these primary texts within 20th and 21st-century cultural discourses, we will consider how they emerge out of, and respond to, social and political concerns in the recent past and in the contemporary moment. Following feminist scholars who have noted the specific exigencies faced by women who use autobiographical content in their writing, we will examine how hybrid forms at once reflect and resist established codes of gender and genre. We will also consider how these texts engage with the specific forms of experience relating to gender, sexuality, race, and other identity positions, drawing on theories like Daniel Heath Justice's concept of "Wonderworks" and Christina Sharpe's formulation of "wake work." Studying the critical and popular reception of these hybrid texts, we will test the hypothesis—advanced by scholars and cultural critics—that women's life writing is more stringently evaluated and regulated than that of their male counterparts.

Through self-reflective writing exercises, we will work to develop, create and workshop our own autotheoretical or autofictional writing. Students will have the option of submitting either a creative or critical piece of writing as their final assignment in this course.

Primary texts will be selected from the following list:

Nelly Arcan, *Whore*
Rachel Cusk, *Transit*
Tove Ditlevsen, *The Copenhagen Trilogy*
Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*
Annie Ernaux, *Simple Passion*
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictée*
Sheila Heti, *How Should a Person Be?*
Meena Kandasamy, *Exquisite Cadavers*
Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick*
Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*
Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*
Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*
Elizabeth Smart, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*
Tanya Tagaq, *Split Tooth*
Erin Wunker, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy*

Critical readings will be selected from the following list:

Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*
Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling*
Hywel Dix, *Autofiction in English*
Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*
Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing and Criticism*

Irene Gammel, *Confessional Politics: Women's Sexual Self-Representations in Life Writing and Popular Media*.

Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography*

Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*

Johanna Hedva, *sick woman theory*

Anna Poletti, "Periperformative Narrative: Queer Collages"

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*

Jia Tolentino, *Trick Mirror*

Course Learning Outcomes

- Identify key texts in women's autofiction and autotheory
- Identify and analyze the discursive and stylistic features of these hybrid texts
- Trace continuities with and departures from established literary genres
- Connect aesthetic choices to questions of personal identity and political engagement
- Analyze the role of gender, race, sexuality, and other identity positions in determining the production and reception of texts
- Use appropriate critical and creative methodologies to evaluate the aesthetics and politics of the texts, in both oral and written forms
- Use appropriate critical and creative methodologies to produce autotheoretical or autofictional writing, and to engage in self-reflection about this writing.

Evaluation

Seminar presentation: 20% (10% oral + 10% written) [1000 words]

Writing exercises: 30% (3 papers x 10%/ea) [500/ea=1500 words]

Creative or critical assignment: 40% [2500-3000 words]

Participation: 10%