

English 206: Life-Writing

Instructor: Carol Acton E-mail: cgacton@uwaterloo.ca

Virtual class Thursdays 2.30-3.50 pm via Zoom

I will send Zoom links for the class weekly via email

Course Description

Our memories tell us the stories of our lives, constantly reworking and reimagining them. But how do we and others construct our ‘selves’ through language? In this course we will read memoirs/autobiographies and diaries to explore the relationship between self and language, examining the way individuals create themselves through language and in the context of available cultural narratives.

I will be happy to discuss your assignments during office hours (we can meet on zoom so just email for an appointment) and to work through the writing process with you on an individual basis. Please remember to include the course number in any e-mails you send (otherwise I tend to treat them as spam) and to give your full name in the e-mail text.

Please read the course material before our discussions and reread it after to reinforce your understanding of it and think about it in connection to other works on the course. The short reflective assignments are designed to help you think about the various writings or related ideas and articulate your response as we go through the term.

The following texts are required reading

With the exception of *A Very Private Diary* they are all available through the university bookstore. For the diary you can order used copies online or do a print on demand from Lume books (I’m working on this process). It is also available on Kindle and through Blackwell’s in the UK and betterworldbooks

<https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/A-Very-Private-Diary-by-Mary-Morris-Carol-Acton-editor/9781780227382>

<https://www.betterworldbooks.com/search/results?q=a%20very%20private%20diary>

Neither of these charge for shipping- the prices at Blackwell’s are in Cdn\$ but it will take several weeks so order early. Please don’t use Amazon!!

I suggest you keep costs down by looking for used copies of all the books. If ordering online please do this well in advance: ie as soon as you get this!

Critical/theoretical reading:

Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 2010 ed.

(e-books are available through the UWlibrary for Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* 2010 ed., Wolff, *This Boy’s Life* and Al Ethari, *Waiting for the Rain* (currently on order)

Primary readings (you can use any edition):

Tobias Wolff, *This Boy's Life*

Jeanette Winterson, *Why be Happy When You Could be Normal*

Mary Morris (Carol Acton ed.) *A Very Private Diary: A Nurse in Wartime*

Lamees Al Ethari, *Waiting for the Rain: An Iraqi Memoir*

Digital reserve readings are given in the schedule so please look ahead

Assignments

20% each - 3 reflective pieces, 3-4 pages – for a total of 60%

40% Critical/Analytical essay 8-10 pages or a creative autobiographical piece 8-10 pages
+ 3 page commentary –

- Assignments must be emailed to me directly as a Word attachment – I will return with comments
- They should be double spaced in 11 or 12 pt font. Do not double space between paragraphs.
- All written work must indicate use of secondary sources with clear in-text citation and a bibliography/works cited at the end
- Further information on the above assignments will be available via a Learn e-mail/on the Learn site
- Online writing help: <https://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/how-guides/how-write-university>

On this site you will find help and guidelines on documentation, essay writing, writing the English essay, writing reflections and more

Weekly schedule – week date is for the Monday – As far as possible please read the full primary text and the assigned theoretical reading before the class discussion. We will have 80 mins on Zoom. I will record the beginnings and endings of these discussions and post them, but most of the time we'll be in small groups in break out rooms and these cannot be recorded. I hope, depending on your time zone, you will be able to attend these, though I recognize those in Eastern time zones may find it quite late.

Week 1 (Jan 11) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, chapt 1)

Introduction to Life Narratives

Extract from Helen Keller's autobiography (digital reserve - scroll down and look for Reserves on the left hand column of the Learn site – it will take you to the UW Library – sign in and all the digital reserves for the course will come up)

Reflection topics and guidelines

Week 2 (Jan 18) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, chaps 2&3)

This Boy's Life

Week 3 (Jan 25) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, (chapt 4)
This Boy's Life

Additional optional reading – Tim Winton, 'The Boy behind the Curtain' (digital reserve)

Reflective assignment 1 due Jan 29th 5pm your time

Week 4 (Feb 1) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, chapt 5&6)
Why be Happy

Week 5 (Feb 8) *Why be Happy*

Reading week 15-19

Week 6 (Feb 22) (Reading: *Reading Autobiography*, Appendix A)
Film: Sarah Polley, *Stories We Tell*

Please watch the film before class

Access through the UW audio visual site via Kanopy: open Kanopy and search under *Stories We Tell* and you will have access to the film:

<https://uwaterloo.ca/information-systems-technology/services/media-resources-library/resources-streaming>

Reflective assignment 2 due Feb 26th 5pm your time

Week 7 (March 1)
Very Private Diary

Topics for Essay/Creative Writing assignment

Week 8 (March 8) *Very Private Diary*

Week 9 (March 15) Letter exchanges between Muriel Harpin and Charles 'Neville' Overton writing during the First World War (via email attachment and posted on Learn)

bell hooks (2 essays on digital reserve) and the autobiographical essay

Reflective Assignment 3 due March 19th 5pm your time

Week 10 (March 22) *Waiting for the Rain*

Week 11 (March 29) *Waiting for the Rain*

Week 12 (April 5) Review

Essay/creative writing assignment due April 12 by 5pm your time

There may be minor changes to the timetable above

Late assignments will have 2% deducted per day late. However, if you request an extension at least 24hrs before the deadline, either in person or via e-mail, I can arrange a new deadline with you without penalty. It is in your own best interest to hand work in on time so you don't become overwhelmed with overdue work. Please let me know if ongoing illness or family or personal issues cause problems during the term as it makes it much easier for me help you plan work accordingly if I know about such issues.

Important Information

Academic Integrity: To maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo and its Federated University and Affiliated Colleges are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.

Academic Integrity Office (UW): A resource for students and instructors.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline](#). For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to [University of Waterloo Policy 71 \(Student Discipline\)](#).

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Students who decide to file a grievance should refer to [University of Waterloo Policy 70 \(Student Petitions and Grievances\)](#). For more information, students should contact the Associate Dean of St. Jerome's University.

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under the St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Discipline or University of Waterloo Policy 70 (Student Petitions and Grievances) if a ground for an appeal can be established. In such a case, read [St. Jerome's University Policy on Student Appeals](#).

Note for Students with Disabilities: The [AccessAbility Services \(AS\) Office](#), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AS Office at the beginning of each academic term.

Mental Health Services: Lindsay Thomson is St. Jerome's University's Wellness Coordinator. She can be contacted at 519-884-8111 x28361 or at lindsay.thompson@uwaterloo.ca. Her office is Sweeney Hall 1016.

On Campus

- Counselling Services: counselling.services@uwaterloo.ca / 519-888-4567 x32655
- [MATES](#): one-to-one peer support program offered by Federation of Students (FEDS) and Counselling Services
- Health Services Emergency service: located across the creek from the Student Life Centre

Off campus, 24/7

- [Good2Talk](#): Free confidential help line for post-secondary students. Phone: 1-866-925-5454
- Grand River Hospital: Emergency care for mental health crisis. Extended Assessment Unit Phone: 519-749-4300 x6880
- [Here 24/7](#): Mental Health and Crisis Service Team. Phone: 1-844-437-3247
- [OK2BME](#): Support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning teens in Waterloo. Phone: 519-884-0000 x222

Full details can be found online on the Faculty of Arts [website](#).

Download [UW and regional mental health resources \(PDF\)](#)

Download the [WatSafe app](#) to your phone to quickly access mental health support information

B. TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that we are living and working on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron (also known as Neutral), Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. St. Jerome's University is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River.

C. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Students should be aware that this course contains the intellectual property of their instructor, TA, and/or St. Jerome's University. Intellectual property includes items such as:

- Lecture content, spoken and written (and any audio/video recording thereof);
- Lecture handouts, presentations, and other materials prepared for the course (e.g., PowerPoint slides);
- Questions or solution sets from various types of assessments (e.g., assignments, quizzes, tests, final exams); and
- Work protected by copyright (e.g., any work authored by the instructor or TA or used by the instructor or TA with permission of the copyright owner).

Course materials and the intellectual property contained therein, are used to enhance a student's educational experience. However, sharing this intellectual property without the intellectual property owner's permission is a violation of intellectual property rights. For this reason, it is necessary to ask the instructor, TA, and/or St. Jerome's University for permission before uploading and sharing the intellectual property of others online (e.g., to an online repository).

Permission from an instructor, TA, or the University is also necessary before sharing the intellectual property of others from completed courses with students taking the same/similar courses in subsequent terms/years. In many cases, instructors might be happy to allow distribution of certain materials. However, doing so without expressed permission is considered a violation of intellectual property rights.

Please alert the instructor if you become aware of intellectual property belonging to others (past or present) circulating, either through the student body or online. The intellectual property rights owner deserves to know (and may have already given their consent).