

## **COLT 10.26 Autobiographies and Auto-Fictions: Narrating the Self on the Margins**

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Fall 2025, 11 Hour: 11:35-12:35, MWF; 11X: 12:15-1:05, TTh

Office Hours, 1:00-2:00 PM, M-W, and by appointment (via e-mail)

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Although “giving an account of oneself” is a narrative practice that extends back to the era of late antiquity, the idea of creating a distinct genre dedicated to creating a literary self-portrait seems to be a specifically modern idea. Traces of the genre’s origins can be traced back to early Christian lives of saints and in particular the spiritual confessions of St Augustine, but the creation of the autobiographical genre is one of several signal transformations in the way that the self as a philosophical subject changes through the consolidation of social, economic, political, and psychological processes understood through the concept of modernization. To narrate one’s own selfhood is an act of self-assertion in a culture for which “the self” has become the basic unit of social organization. For groups that have been excluded from the functions and institutions of modernity because their subjectivity has been excluded from the consensus of selfhood—specifically members of religious, ethnic, or sexual minorities, along with women of all religious, ethnic, or sexual affiliations—the act of narrating the self signifies a specifically political assertion that underscores the significance of the autobiographical genre as well as the limits of inclusiveness in the modern conceptions of subjectivity or selfhood. This class will focus on examples of autobiographical and (no less significant or exemplary) pseudo-autobiographical writing from Jewish, African American, and Arab sources. The commonality of perspective and narrative techniques among these sources will demonstrate the historical similarities of these cultures on the margins of modern culture, while suggesting the oppositional character of their relationship to modernity. *Classroom discussions and all readings in English.*

### **Course Goals**

Students will be introduced to tools of literary and cultural analysis. They (you!) will conduct close readings of different genres of text, and they will read theoretical literature relating to literary modernism, memory and autobiography. They will learn how to use the library, how to work with relevant research databases, how to put together a research bibliography, how to summarize and present an argument, and how to write and revise a research paper in several stages. They will also learn how to work collaboratively on their writing in peer-review sessions, and they will learn how to provide constructive feedback.

### **Course Requirements**

Preparation, Participation and Attendance	20%
Oral Research Presentation	20%
Paper Proposal and Research Bibliography	15%
Research Paper Draft One (1500 words)	10%
Research Paper Draft Two (2000 words)	15%
Final Research Paper (2500 words)	20%

### **Preparation, Participation and Attendance**

Class meetings are your opportunity to engage with the material and your peers. It is important that you are well prepared and that you actively contribute to the discussion. If you miss more than two sessions, your absence will affect your grade, unless there are serious circumstances which you have discussed with me before or right after the time of your absence. Attendance of additional x-hours, when scheduled, or guest lectures is mandatory.

### **Course Requirements**

This seminar provides an introduction to the concepts of autobiography and autobiographical fiction (pseudo-autobiography) and their relationship to the concept of selfhood from the eighteenth century until the end of the twentieth century. Everything I will assign in this course will be worth reading, I am certain; much of it will be fun, I hope; some of it will be unfamiliar to you, I expect. In order for the classroom experience to be successful for all involved, attendance, preparation, and participation of all students is essential. Each student must come to class at each session prepared to discuss the readings, respond to the questions I pose, and discuss the reactions of other students in an informed and respectful manner.

Students should expect to read on average 100-150 pages a week for this course.

### **Oral Presentation**

You will be expected to give a ten minute presentation on your research paper topic. You will chose an object of analysis of your choice that is relevant to your final research paper. You will talk about your interpretative framework and the scholarship you are using to analyse this object. How does it relate to the central argument of your paper? You will receive written feedback on your presentation by your peers.

### **Research Bibliography and Research Group**

In order to prepare your final research paper you will submit a paper proposal (around 200 words) and a research bibliography of at least 15 titles in MLA or Chicago style of citation by . Once you have submitted a bibliography, you will be assigned to a research group of students working on similar topics. You are encouraged to exchange sources and drafts within your research group and you will workshop your paper drafts twice in class (once within your group, and once outside). While you should extensively comment on drafts, all writing has to be your own (see the Dartmouth Honor Principle at <https://student-affairs.dartmouth.edu/policy/academic-honor-principle>).

### **Research Paper**

For the final research paper (at least 2500 words—around 9-11 double-spaced pages—excluding the bibliography) you can pick a topic of your choice that relates to this class. You should discuss ideas with me ahead of time and I am always happy to give you suggestions. You will submit two full drafts throughout the class, which will be peer-reviewed in class (x-hours). Please bring three paper copies of your paper to the peer-review sessions. You are expected to incorporate the peer-review feedback and my feedback into each draft and the final version.

## **X-hours**

Please keep the x-hours for this class free from any other commitments. Make-up hours or additional meetings may be scheduled at any point.

## **Accommodations**

Students requesting disability-related accommodations and services for this course are required to register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS; [Getting Started with SAS webpage](#); [student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu](mailto:student.accessibility.services@dartmouth.edu); 1-603-646-9900) and to request that an accommodation email be sent to me in advance of the need for an accommodation. Then, students should schedule a follow-up meeting with me to determine relevant details such as what role SAS or its [Testing Center](#) may play in accommodation implementation. This process works best for everyone when completed as early in the quarter as possible. If students have questions about whether they are eligible for accommodations or have concerns about the implementation of their accommodations, they should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

## **Religious Observance**

If any student anticipates a religious holiday observance that overlaps with sessions of this class, they should please let me know this before the end of the second week of the term.

## **Consent to Record**

*(1) Consent to recording of course meetings and office hours that are open to multiple students. By enrolling in this course,*

*a) I affirm my understanding that the instructor may record meetings of this course and any associated meetings open to multiple students and the instructor, including but not limited to scheduled and ad hoc office hours and other consultations, within any digital platform, including those used to offer remote instruction for this course.*

*b) I further affirm that the instructor owns the copyright to their instructional materials, of which these recordings constitute a part, and my distribution of any of these recordings in whole or in part to any person or entity other than other members of the class without prior written consent of the instructor may be subject to discipline by Dartmouth up to and including separation from Dartmouth.*

*(2) Requirement of consent to one-on-one recordings*

*By enrolling in this course, I hereby affirm that I will not make a recording in any medium of any one-on-one meeting with the instructor or another member of the class or group of members of the class without obtaining the prior written consent of all those participating, and I understand that if I violate this prohibition, I will be subject to discipline by Dartmouth up to and including separation from Dartmouth, as well as any other civil or criminal penalties under applicable law. I understand that an exception to this consent applies to accommodations approved by SAS for a student's disability, and that one or more students in a class may record class lectures, discussions, lab sessions, and review sessions and take pictures of essential information, and/or be provided class notes for personal study use only.*

## **Dartmouth Honor Code**

You are expected to observe all aspects of the Academic Honor Principle that is discussed in the ORC. Dartmouth College policy requires that any apparent violation of the Honor Code be

reported to the Committee on Standards. For this class, from the stages of choosing a topic, through doing research, you may work with other students. You may have other students proofread your work and they may give you their opinions. However, the actual writing of your papers and other work must be done individually. The work you hand in should be your own. And you can not hand in work that you have already handed in or will hand in for another class. Sources must be clearly and properly identified - books, articles, internet sites, professors, students and other sources, be they textual or oral, must be acknowledged.

For more information and examples of common violations of the honor code, please see <https://students.dartmouth.edu/community-standards/policy/academic-honor-principle>.

For proper citation practice, please consult:

<https://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu/learning/materials/sources-and-citations-dartmouth>

### **Laptops, Cellphones and Food**

Laptop and (especially!!) cell phone use is not permitted in class unless it is explicitly part of a classroom assignment. Please plan to eat your meals before or after class.

### **Other Resources for this class**

RWIT: Dartmouth's Peer Writing Center: <https://students.dartmouth.edu/rwit/>

Citations Guide with Access to Chicago Manual of Style:

<https://students.dartmouth.edu/rwit/student-guides/sources-and-citations-guide>

MLA Style Manual (from the Purdue Online Writing Lab):

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/mla\\_style/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/mla\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html)

### **Course Calendar**

#### **Week One**

September 15 Course Introduction

September 17 The First Autobiography? *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon*, Introduction and Chapters 1-14: pages 1-61

September 19 Solomon Maimon, Chapters 15-22, Continued: 62-119

#### **Week Two**

September 22 Pseudo-Autobiography or Autobiography? Sh. Y. Abramovitsh ("Mendele Moykher Sforim"), *Of Bygone Days*, in *A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas*: pages 249-302

September 24 (No Class: happy Rosh Hashanah!)

September 26 Abramovitsh, Continued: 302-358

#### **Week Three**

September 29 Women's Work: Puah Rakovsky, *My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman*, Chapters 1-3: pages 20-89

October 1 Puah Rakovsky, *My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman*, Chapters 1-3: pages 20-89

October 3 Rakovsky, continued: Chapters 4-6: pages 89-130

#### **Week Four**

October 6 Autobiography as Critical Theory: Walter Benjamin, *Berlin Childhood around 1900*: pages 37-78

**Paper Proposal and Bibliography are Due**

October 8 Benjamin, Continued: 78-124

October 10 Benjamin, Concluded: 125-164

#### **Week Five**

October 13 African, Arab, European? Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*: pages 1-87

October 15 (No Class: Happy Simchat Torah!!)

October 17 Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*: pages 1-87

#### **Week Six**

October 20 A Refugee from Europe: Kadya Molodovsky, *A Jewish Refugee in New York*: 1-53

**October 21, X-hour session: Research Presentations**

October 22 Molodovsky, continued: 53-110

**October 23, X-hour session: Research Presentations**

October 24 Molodovsky, concluded: 110-172

#### **Week Seven**

October 27 A Refugee in His Own Country: Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Pessoptimist*, Chapters 1-20: pages 3-66

October 29 Habiby, continued: 69-114

October 31 Habiby, concluded: 117-163

#### **Week Eight**

November 3 The Autobiography as (Mock-) Epic Fran Ross, *Oreo* (Part 1), pages 3-88

November 5 Fran Ross, *Oreo*, continued: 91-150

November 7 Fran Ross, *Oreo*, concluded: 151-212

**Peer Review Second Paper Draft**

**Week Nine**

November 10 Three Times Exiled, Sayed Kashua, *Track Changes*, pages 3-81

November 12 Kashua, *Track Changes*, continued: 85-150

November 14 Kashua, *Track Changes*, concluded: 151-231

**Final Research Paper Due**

**Week Ten**

November 17 Exiled in America, at Home in Europe? James Baldwin, “Autobiographical Notes,” “The Harlem Ghetto,” “Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown,” “A Question of Identity,” “Equal in Paris,” “Strangers in the Village,” *Collected Essays*, pages 5-9; 42-53; 85-90; 91-100; 101-110; 111-129

**Primary Texts**

All primary readings will be available at the Baker-Berry Library and via Canvas. Bibliographical information is included herewith for research purposes, and in case you would like to build your own personal library!

Secondary readings—for presentations and research work—will emerge from class discussions as well as communication between your fearless leader and yourselves based on your individual research projects as well as general topics considered collectively. (Hint: a good source for finding these secondary sources is the introductory materials included in most of the primary sources; these will be available through Canvas and at the Library!)

Baldwin, James. *Collected Essays*. (New York: Library of America) 1998. ISBN 978-1-883011-52-9

Benjamin, Walter. *Berlin Childhood around 1900*. Translated by Howard Eiland. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press) 2006. ISBN 9-780674-022225

Habiby, Emile. *The Secret Life of Saeed, the pessoptimist*. Translated by Salma K. Jayyusi and Trevor LeGassick. (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books) 1974; 2003. ISBN 1-56656-415-8

Kashua, Sayed. *Track Changes*. Translated by Mitch Ginsburg. (New York: Grove Press) 2020; 2021 ISBN 978-0-8021-4845-2

Maimon, Solomon. *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon: The Complete Translation*. Translated by Paul Reitter. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 2018 ISBN 978-0-691-20308-9

Molodovsky, Kadya. *A Jewish Refugee in New York*. Translated by Anita Norich. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 2019 ISBN 078-0-253-04076-3

Ross, Fran. *Oreo*. (New York: New Directions Paperbacks) 1974; 2015 ISBN 978-0-8112-2322-5

Rakovksy, Puah. *My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland*. Translated by Barbara Harshav and Paula E. Hyman. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) 2002 ISBN 978-0-253-21564-2

Salih, Tayeb. *Season of Migration to the North*. Translated by Denys Johnson-Davies. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann African Writers Series) 1969; 1970 ISBN 0-435-90066-8

Wisse, Ruth R. (Editor) *A Shtetl and Other Yiddish Novellas*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press) 1973; 1986. ISBN 0-8143-1848-7