Memoir and autobiography as practiced beyond U.S. and European borders often depart from the urban, metropolitan norm. Like novels, memoirs can no longer be seen, myopically, as Western forms. Global autobiography has a less pronounced obsession with Oprah-style success stories and shameful confessions in hope of redemption. It has other fixations, including the dilemma of writing in the conqueror’s tongue, finding identity through Western modes of self-representation, and perils of autobiographical self-fashioning in a de-colonial situation—the mere naming of friends and relatives can cause them serious trouble. Western forms of autobiography must be reinvented, hybridized, or discarded. This seminar features many diasporic writers and their displaced autobiographical narratives, such as the Californian whose parents were interned Japanese, the Nigerian redeployed to London, the Egyptian displaced to Amherst, Mass., the Damascene relocated in Ramallah on the West Bank of Palestine. Closer to home, CUNY GC professors such as André Aciman and Araceli Tinajero also appear on the syllabus, suggesting the richness and depth of autobiographical knowledge here at CUNY. Grades will be assigned on the basis of class participation, three low-stakes exploratory essays, and a final project that can be either a critical essay or something more closely resembling your personal memoir.

Assignments:
The final grade will be determined as follows:
20% participation (a composite grade, including your contributions to class discussions (on Zoom days, you will write your contributions into the chat function of Zoom); abstract of research paper with annotated bibliography of secondary sources; and peer reviews of research paper projects (in final class)
30% exploratory papers (3 total, 500 words each)
50% conference-length research paper (15 pages)

Extra credit (an additional 5%): Write a paper about Marcel Proust as disguised autobiography using three (3) of the four (4) listed sources: “Overture” to Swann’s Way; Derrida, “That Dangerous Supplement . . .”; Sprinker, “History, Literature, Proust”; and de Botton, “How To Read for Yourself”

Or, Alternative Extra Credit Essay,


3 February: Introductions and read Mary Louise Pratt, “Natural Narrative,” from Blackboard, Mary Karr, *The Liars Club*, pp. 14-18 ([https://archive.org/details/liarsclubmemoir00karr](https://archive.org/details/liarsclubmemoir00karr)) and start looking at the excerpts from Augustine’s *Confessions* and also Riley’s article about the confessions of Augustine and Rousseau

10 February: Live Zoom meeting today. Discuss Augustine, *Confessions*, selections (books 2 and 8), and Riley, “The Inversion of Conversion: Rousseau’s Rewriting of Augustinian Autobiography,” and key passages from Rousseau, *Confessions*, chapter 1, [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3913/3913-h/3913-h.htm](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3913/3913-h/3913-h.htm)

17 February: Live Zoom meeting today. Prior to the meeting, please read [https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3196/the-art-of-fiction-no-69-gabriel-garcia-marquez](https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/3196/the-art-of-fiction-no-69-gabriel-garcia-marquez) and “Living to Tell the Tale.” Please read, “Not Poor, Just Broke,” by Dick Gregory.

24 February: Live Zoom meeting today. Leigh Gilmore, “American Neoconfessional: Memoir, Self-Help, and Redemption on Oprah’s Couch” and André Aciman, *Out of Egypt* (pp. 3-23). Both readings are on Bb.

Your first exploratory paper is due 27 February: “A Moment that Changed Me.” The assignment prompt can be found on Blackboard, Week 4.


**10 March (in person)**: Meet at the GC today, covering Mohamed Choukri, *For Bread Alone* ([https://www.academia.edu/37830962/For_Bread_Alone_Mohamed_Choukri](https://www.academia.edu/37830962/For_Bread_Alone_Mohamed_Choukri)) and “ChoukriTanoukhiKeyPassages” (on Bb) as a guide to Nirvana Tanoukhi, “Rewriting Political Commitment for an International Canon: Paul Bowles's "For Bread Alone" as Translation of Mohamed Choukri's "Al-Khubz Al-Hafi." *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer, 2003), pp. 127-144.

17 March: Choukri, Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 ([https://www.academia.edu/37830962/For_Bread_Alone_Mohamed_Choukri](https://www.academia.edu/37830962/For_Bread_Alone_Mohamed_Choukri)). Kazantzakis, “A Night in a
Calabrian Village” (on Bb); Moraga and Anzaldua, This Bridge Called My Back (selections)

24 March (in person): Meet at the GC today, covering Suad Amiry, Sharon and My Mother-in-Law please read the book (required, available on Kindle) and watch the video https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-Lkry-SF01&hsimp=yhs-SF01&hspart=Lkry&p=Suad+Amiry%2C+Ted+Talk&id=1&vid=dab3ea07e3dec0c5e35fad557297488c&action=click

Your second exploratory paper is due 27 March 500 words. Guidelines are on Blackboard, 24 March.


7 April (in person): Meet at the GC today, covering Marjane Satrapi, Persepolis (https://archive.org/details/PersepolisVolume1/page/n47/mode/2up) and Hillary Chute, criticism of Persepolis

14 April: Assia Djebar, Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade (selections to read: “A Little Arab Girl’s First Day at School” (pp 6-8); “Women, Children, Oxen Dying in Caves” [pp 64-79]; “Aphasia of Love” and “Voice” [pp 125-140] ) and “Tunic of Nessus” (213-217). To get all these texts, go to https://archive.org/details/fantasiaalgerian00djeb/page/224/mode/2up You will need to sign up for free borrowing at https://archive.org

28 April (in person): Meet at the GC today, covering Julie Otsuka, The Buddha in the Attic (https://archive.org/stream/buddhainattic00otsu#page/63/mode/2up)


12 May (in person): last day of classes. Bring to class your idea for the final paper, including its sources, organization, method, and above all thesis statement. This class session will involve peer review of each other’s proposals. Guidelines on Blackboard, 12 May. Also read selections on Blackboard from Kapsalis, Elbow, and McGurl
19 May: Submit final paper or project

Extra Credit. Write an essay of 750 words engaging with two of the following sources.

Marcel Proust, “Overture” to Swann’s Way
Alain de Botton, “How to Read for Yourself”

Alternative Extra Credit Essay


INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING THE FINAL PAPER

1. Write eight double-spaced pages with one-inch margins (2500 words).

2. Put your surname and page number at top of each page.

3. Write about the readings. Your should write about language, figures of speech, structure of the literary text, in other words, about what makes the literary text literature. You are welcome to write also about the ways in which the literary work handles political, social, and economic history.

4. You may also choose to write an autocritography in which your personal experience is used to interpret one or more of the texts we have read.