**HP Advanced Seminar: Autobiography**  Fall Semester 2014

Prof. Susan A. Michalczyk  
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Office Hours: Stokes S285  
M/W 11:30am-1pm  
TH 1:30-2:30pm and by appt.  
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**Required Texts:**

Madeleine Albright, *Prague Winter*

Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

Italo Calvino, *Hermit in Paris: Autobiographical Writings* (selections), *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*

Andre Dubus, *Meditations from a Moveable Chair, Dancing After Hours* (selections)

Alice Munro, *The View from Castle Rock, Runaway* (selections)

**Literary Criticism and Foundational Works:**

James Olney- *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing*, University of Chicago Press, 1998 (available in paperback)  

Augustine, *Confessions* (focus on Book X), Oxford World’s Classics

Jean-Jacque Rousseau, *Confessions* (selections only), Oxford World’s Classics

**Films:** (to be seen outside of class)  
Class/Author:

**Sept. 8** Introduction and discussion of Olney’s essays from *Metaphors of Self*; “A Theory of Autobiography” and “Synthesis”, *Boston Globe* reviews (contemporary consideration of genre)

**Sept. 15**... continuation of above and Guskoff’s essay, along with discussion of *Life Itself*

**Sept. 22** Augustine and Rousseau (the tradition of autobiography and memoir) (*You Kill Me, Love, Marilyn*)


**Oct. 6** Bronte (*Bright Star*)


**Oct. 27** Woolf (*The Hours*)

**Nov. 3** Calvino (*The World According to Garp*)

**Nov. 10** Dubus (*Invictus*)

**Nov. 18** individual presentations on semester’s paper/film discussions

**Nov. 25** Munro (*Away from Her, Amour*)

**Dec. 2** Albright (*Das Leben der anderen, The Lives of Others*)

**Dec. 9** assessing the genre: purpose for the author and for the audience

**Requirements:**

- Attendance and close reading of all assignments, along with consistent and thoughtful participation each class, including updates/presentations on final paper throughout the semester.

- Short reflections on the readings and films, on your understanding of the genre, either literary or critical analyses.

- Final paper due Dec 18 (final exam date), a combination of research and theory that revolves around one of the texts
Selections Referenced in Syllabus:

James Olney
- Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing, University of Chicago Press, 1998
  Ch. 1: Memory and the Narrative Imperative, pp1-83
  Ch. 3: Not I, pp229-269
  Postlude: pp405-422

  “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” Georges Gusdorf, pp28-48
  “The Style of Autobiography” Jean Starobinski, pp73-83
  “Some Principles of Autobiography” William Howarth, pp84-114
  “Confessions and Autobiography” Stephen Spender, pp115-122
  “Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film” Elizabeth Bruss, pp296-320

  “A Theory of Autobiography”, pp3-50
  “Synthesis”, pp317-332

Augustine
-Confessions: Book X

Italo Calvino
  “American Diary 1959-1960” pp16-120
  “Political Autobiography of a Young Man” pp130-156
  “Hermit in Paris” pp167-175

We will work from Olney, whose interdisciplinary approach redefines and reinterprets the expansive and quite complex genre of autobiography. Olney’s literary, philosophical and psychological analyses/essays (Memory and Narrative, Autobiography, Metaphors of Self) reflects the evolution of the genre and the adaptations surrounding the author’s intention in relationship to the audience throughout the centuries. I have added a few films that highlight variations in interpretations of the genre as an additional approach to interpretation. We will expand our studies, guided by traditional understanding of the genre, as developed in Augustine and Rousseau and literary criticism of Olney. Gusdorf’s essay brilliantly defines the concept of the writer’s pact and offers essential critical background for each of us to consider in examining ideas connected to our own life experience. Olney’s Augustine’s and Rousseau’s confessional works stand as the model for this genre, as demonstrated in literary criticism and discussion of autobiographical literature. For that reason, I have included both books, though I know that it will not be possible to read the texts in their entirety. I suggest that you begin with Book X of Augustine’s Confessions, along with the opening of Rousseau’s autobiographical account so that you can better understand the literary criticism.

Beginning with the genre, as originally developed by Augustine and refined by Rousseau, we will focus on re-interpretations throughout the centuries. We will conclude the semester with
an analysis of the changing landscape of autobiography and memoir, as we discuss the adaptations since Augustine’s initial effort and the effectiveness of any changes in style, content, and format. Building upon this framework, you may select an author (or film adaptation) from the secondary list or another of your choice from the vast realm of autobiographical writings, as part of your class presentation/brief lecture (we will revise the schedule accordingly at our first meeting).

I would ask that you review the many options and come to class with your own ideas/understanding of the genre and your personal literary interests. In this way, we can enrich our class discussions and inspire one another.

**Suggested Readings, Films as Sources and Resources for Your Consideration:**


Montaigne, *Essays*

Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*,

Novalis, *Hymns to the Night*

Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard*

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*

Gustave Flaubert, *A Sentimental Education*

Veronica Franco, *Veronica Franco: Poems and Selected Letters*

Ugo Foscolo, *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*

Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

Giovanni Verga, *Mastro Don-Gesualdo, The She-Wolf, Collected Stories*

James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*

T.S. Elliot, *The Wasteland*

Anna Akhmatova, *Selected Poems*

Elie Wiesel, *Night*

Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*, Plume/Penguin, NY 1990


**Isn’t Everything Autobiographical?**

8 ½, *A Family Thing*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *A Single Man*, *Age of Innocence*, *Amacord*, *Angels in America*, *Ann of 1000 Days*, *Arrested Development*, *Autumn Sonata*, *Away from Her Barry Lyndon*, *Bright Star*

*Cinema Paradiso*, *Il Conformista*

*Dancing with Wolves*, *Dangerous Beauty*, *Death in Venice*, *Doctor Zhivago*, *The Dresser*, *Driving Miss Daisy*

*El Norte*, *Everything is Illuminated*

*Fanny and Alexander*, *Finding Forrester*, *La finestra di fronte (Standing Windows)*, *Forest Gump*, *Frida (Kahlo)*

*Il Gattopardo (The Leopard)*, *The Graduate*, *Gone with the Wind*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Harold and Maude*, *The Hours*, *Howards End*

*In the Bedroom*, *The Invention of Lying*, *Io sono l’amore (I am Love)*, *Invictus*, *Iris (Murdoch)*

*Jean de Fleurette*, *Julia (Lillian Hellman)*, *Julie and Julia*

*The King’s Speech*

*Last Temptation of Christ*, *Life is Beautiful*, *Life Itself*, *Like Water for Chocolate*


*Le Notti di Cabiria (Nights of Cabiria)*, *La Notte di San Lorenzo (Night of Shooting Stars)*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Out of Africa*

*The Piano*, *Playing for Time*, *Portrait of the Artist*

*Radio Days*, *Reds*, *Remains of the Day*, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, *Roger and Me*

*Silkwood*, *The Soloist*

*Tender Mercies*, *La Terra Trema*, *Tom and Viv*, *Tre fratelli*, *Tree of Life*, *Two Family House*, *Two Women*

*Up*

*Volver*

*Waitress*, *The World According to Garp*, *Wuthering Heights*

*You Kill Me*