The genre of memoir is complex and contested. James Frey’s “memoir” *A Million Little Pieces* led to heated discussion on how we define this genre and how we think about issues of truth, memory, and imagination. While some believe memoir is a mere transcription of reality or “the facts” about a writer’s past experiences, most memoirists would say it’s not quite that simple. Memoirists argue that memory fades and truth is subjective, and writing is an exploration of those fluid constructs—and of the writer’s self, the private and the public “I.”

In this seminar, we’ll challenge myths about memoir, a genre described by some critics as the art of “navel gazing,” a kind of confessional or crisis writing—the emotional train wrecks of writer’s lives at which readers may gawk. Some memoirists contend that memoir may be read as acts of resistance, personal/public discourse that disrupts official narratives of history, politics, the status quo—of “Truth.” We’ll examine memoirs as genres of exploration—exploration of self, identity, place and as genres of disruption. We’ll look at representations of self in memoir—the private/public “I”—as they are influenced by nationality, ethnicity, gender, geography and cultural factors. In doing so, we’ll examine how memoir may invite alternate versions of histories and truths to be told, the memories, stories, and voices that otherwise might remain silenced.