

Fall 2020 – New and Special Course

ENG 207-01/02: FORMS IN CREATIVE WRITING: MEMOIR DR. SUSAN DEROSA

“What happens to the writer is not what matters; what matters is largely the sense that the writer is able to make of what happened....The narrator is an instrument of illumination, but it’s the writing itself that provides revelation.”

—Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative*

Why are memoirs so popular these days? Do we read memoirs just to be nosy or voyeuristic? Who cares about someone’s personal life story, anyways? Despite memoir’s popularity in recent years, many critics see the genre as egocentric writing or “navel gazing.” However, while memoirs may seem at first glance to be a simple recounting of “the story of me” or objective reporting of “facts” or “truth” (“It’s a true story, right?”), in this course, you’ll discover that memoir is quite a bit more complicated. So in part, we’ll spend some time debunking those myths.

To better understand what memoir is (and isn’t) and how the genre works, you’ll read memoirs and craft essays where memoirists wrestle with issues such as emotional or aesthetic truths v. objective truth; veracity and memory; ethics of writing about others. You’ll read like writers—analyzing the craft of short memoirs and perhaps “borrowing” some memoirists’ strategies. You’ll write “flash” memoirs to learn how scene, dialogue, character development, setting, and point of view work in a memoir. We’ll workshop your short memoirs to learn how to give and receive effective feedback. Finally, some of your flash memoirs may be used as springboards for a longer memoir that you’ll produce and workshop in class. Ultimately, one goal is to explore the personal “I” with an eye toward your audiences and how your story might resonate with them.

This course fulfills the Writing Minor requirement and fulfills the English major requirement “Writing in Forms and Genres” in the Creative Writing concentration.

Date/time: (ENG 207-01) Tuesdays/Thursdays: 9:30 – 10:45 a.m

(ENG 207-02) Tuesdays/Thursdays: 11:00 – 12:15 p.m.