

ENG 207-02: Forms in Creative Writing: Memoir

SPRING 2022 TR 2:00-3:15

Instructor: 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 emotional or aesthetic truths v. objective truth; veracity and memory; the ethics of writing about family and others. You’ll read like writers—analyzing the craft of short memoirs, and 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 and a final longer memoir to practice giving and receiving effective feedback. Ultimately, a goal is to explore the personal / public “I” so your memoir resonates with your audiences.

This course fulfills the English Major requirement in the “Forms in Creative Writing” in the Creative Writing Concentration, the General English Studies Concentration, and the Writing Minor.