

NONFICTION CRAFT SEMINAR: THE MEMOIR AS LITERATURE**Alison Hawthorne Deming****Tuesday 12:30 – 3:00 p.m.****POETRY CENTER**

This nonfiction craft seminar will explore contemporary memoir, focusing on major works in the genre. The reading list will present students with various conventions and inventions (in terms of voice, structure, development, and the problem of the “I”) available to literary nonfiction writers with the goal of increasing each writer’s sense of the range of possibility for working in memoir form. This reading list is something of a “greatest hits” of memoir, so some of you may have read and written on some of these books for other classes. If that is the case, and you prefer to enter new territory, or if an irresistible intuition strikes that you must read Simone de Beauvoir this semester, you may substitute one or two of the books on the "Alternates" list for one or two on the primary list. Lest this become too confusing for you, me and our companions in this enterprise, I will ask you each to make those decisions by the second class meeting and to slip me a note or email to that effect. I'll adjust the class schedule accordingly.

COURSE CONTENT AND WRITING REQUIREMENTS

We will read and discuss twelve books with occasional other materials of interest to be distributed in class. You will be expected to write a **two page response paper** to each of the books and to hand it in on the day that book is discussed in class. These should be informal papers, more like letters to a friend than formal critical work. This is a craft course for writers, therefore your reading should be intuitive rather than analytical. Look for things that inspire your own writing—thematic questions, stylistic devices, a moment of epiphany, quality of voice or music, narrative or formal strategy, or a new understanding of form for your own work. Read as a writer, looking for devices that you can cull for your own work. Please pay attention to the details of structure: select a paragraph or sentence in each work that you particularly admire and be prepared to say why. In the ongoing attempt to find artful language for describing form in literary nonfiction, I invite you to bring to class--should you feel so inspired--a graphic representation (e.g., map, architectural drawing, graph, or musical score) of the book’s structure. Books are available at the UA Bookstore.

ALTERNATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Instead of writing a response paper, you may opt to write a **two page imitation** inspired by the assigned author. The imitation must be modeled stylistically (i.e., in terms of voice, diction, figurative language, rhetorical device, location of the first person narrator, developmental structure) on the assigned author and not simply a response to subject matter.

You will also be expected to share the leadership for the seminar by taking a turn leading the discussion. We will set up a structure for this on the first day of class.

GRADING

I will **not** give you a letter grade on your weekly papers, but simply a check, check plus, or check minus rating. At the end of the course you will hand in a portfolio of what you consider to be your best **six pieces** from the semester's writing, upon which I will base 50% of your grade. The other 50% will be based upon your attendance and class participation. Attendance and weekly writing based on the books assigned is required.

READING SCHEDULE: Writing assignments are due at the class meeting during which that particular book is discussed and will not be accepted at a later date.

January 17	1st class Introductions and expectations (hand-outs given)
January 24	Discussion of form in nature and art
January 31	Vladimir Nabokov, <i>Speak Memory</i>
February 7	Joan Didion, <i>Where I Was From</i>
February 14	J.R. Ackerley, <i>My Father and Myself</i>
February 21	Vivian Gornick, <i>Fierce Attachments</i>
February 28	N. Scott Momaday, <i>The Names</i>
March 7	Patricia Hampl, <i>I Could Tell You Stories</i>
March 14	Spring Break
March 21	Lucy Grealy, <i>Autobiography of a Face</i>
March 28	Floyd Skloot, <i>In the Shadow of Memory</i>
April 4	Terry Tempest Williams, <i>Refuge</i>
April 11	Richard Rodriguez, <i>Days of Obligation</i>
April 18	Wallace Stegner, <i>Wolf Willow</i>
April 25	Nick Flynn, <i>Another Bullshit Night in Suck City</i>
May 2	Last class—evaluations & goodbyes

ALTERNATES:

Tobias Wolff, THIS BOY'S LIFE

Geoffrey Wolff, DUKE OF DECEPTION

Michael Ondaatje, RUNNING IN THE FAMILY

James Baldwin, NOTES OF A NATIVE SON

Simone de Beauvoir, A VERY EASY DEATH

OFFICE HOURS

Tuesday and Wednesday, 3:30 – 5:00 p.m., ML 438 (or by appointment)

Phone 626-0799 (office)

622-0991 (home)

Email: aldeming@aol.com