

Methods and Materials: Memoir  
Summer, 2019  
1-5 PM, Kresge 159  
June 24-28, July 1, 2, 3, 5 (no class July 4<sup>th</sup>)  
Micah Perks, email [meperks@ucsc.edu](mailto:meperks@ucsc.edu)

(Micah can be available to meet before class most days, email or talk to her in class to make an appointment. I will also check my email each night and every morning.)

Michelle Tea's description of writing memoir: "an ecstasy of communion with yourself that facilitates the transcendence of your self"

James Baldwin: "You cannot describe anything without betraying your point of view, your aspirations, your fears, your hopes. Everything... What you say about somebody else, anybody else, reveals you... I'm not describing you when I talk about you, I'm describing me." And "When I write a play or a novel, I write the ending and am responsible for it. Tolstoy has every right to throw Anna Karenina under the train. She begins in his imagination, and he has to take responsibility for her until the reader does. But the life of a living human being, no one writes it. You cannot deal with another human being as though he were a fictional creation."

George Orwell: "All writers are vain, selfish, and lazy, and at the very bottom of their motives there lies a mystery. Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven on by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand. For all one knows that demon is simply the same instinct that makes a baby squall for attention. And yet it is also true that one can write nothing readable unless one constantly struggles to efface one's own personality. Good prose is like a windowpane."

#### Course Description:

This course is an exploration of the memoir genre. We will read creative and craft-oriented texts, from Augustine through contemporary experimental writers, in order to explore some fundamental sites of tension in the genre: truth, imagination, memory, identity formation, the self as cultural/historical subject, the self as narrative in relation to other narratives.

What I hope you get out of the course: a basic understanding of memoir as a thinking practice that employs both imagination and analysis; the stakes and preoccupations of the genre in relation to other genres; practice in risk-taking when writing about the self; practice in the process of questioning your own perceptions or "circling;" practice in the delicate art of workshopping memoir; practice in close reading one's own memoir, the memoirs of other students, and professional memoir; practice editing your own work and the work of your peers; practice in treating others' work and points of view (both in class and in your own writing) with respect; practice seeing from multiple angles to get the best view.

### Required Reading:

Reader, at Bay Tree and some additional readings emailed to you as pdfs or handed out in class.

You are required to check your UCSC email every evening.

### Required Writing:

Four experimental creative/critical responses written during the first week outside of class. 500-1000 words, twelve-point font, double-spaced, paginated. These are always broken into two parts: critical reader response and creative reader response. You can staple/paperclip them together or hand them in separately. ALWAYS do *the daily reading and critical response before you begin writing your creative piece.*

7-12 page memoir, 12 point font, double-spaced (1750-3000 words); draft due the day before your scheduled workshop during second week in class; final revision due Friday, July 12th, emailed to me by midnight in a pdf document with the email subject: Memoir Final. This prose memoir can be a series of short pieces or one piece or even a chapter from a longer work. Feel free to email the final draft to me sooner if you wish.

Frequent in-class writing. You will need something to write with every day.

Note about printing: you are required to type and print all your work for me. It is up to you if you want to make printed copies of your work for your small groups and for your large group workshop. I think you will find that you receive better feedback when you print it out, but you must weigh that against the costs of printing.

### Grading Policy:

There are three areas in which you will be graded/evaluated:

Responsibility: no absences, timely attendance, daily, respectful participation in seminar as evidence that you have read and thought about the work, no texting or going on-line during class (except during breaks in class), handing in of all required written work on time. Obvious care taken with the work—paginated, name on it, checked for typos and grammar, etc...Note: if you are online during class workshops/discussions you will be counted as absent for that day. You may want to move your phone away from you.

Experimentation/Revision: hard work on revising according to teacher's comments and peer comments, bold and sincere attempts to experiment with the concepts introduced in class. Pushing yourself/responding to be being pushed to try new things and willingness to work in the "discomfort zone" (ie. take risks).

Working: excellence in terms of the craft/ theoretical concepts introduced in class (depth of engagement with reflection and retrospection, voice, tone, significant, sensory details,

experimenting with form, vivid language, search for meaning, “circling,” a question, complicated characters, setting, etcetera...)

Letter Grade System:

If you accomplish all of the requirements under responsibility, you will receive some sort of B.

If you accomplish all of the requirements under responsibility and excel at Experimentation /Revision, Responsibility and/or Working, you will receive some sort of A.

If you do not accomplish all of the requirements under responsibility, you will receive less than a B, unless you are doing something outstanding in one of the other two areas. It is advisable not to count on doing something outstanding for your grade.

Any of the following will lower your grade and may get you a failing grade: one or more absences, disrespect of the teacher and/or students and/or students' written work, more than two tardies (arriving ten minutes or more after class starts), failure to hand in any of your work, failure to hand in rough draft and final version of memoir by deadlines.

A note about respect: it is very likely that someone will say or write something during our class that you find offensive, disturbing and/or troubling. Feel free to respectfully let the person know that the writing or verbal comment troubled you, and why. However, remember that it is not your job to silence, shame or shut down others in this class. I want us to have nuanced, thoughtful conversations that open up discussions, not close them down. We are encouraging each other to take risks. When people take risks, they stumble. We will work together to make those stumbles productive sites for artistic growth rather than sites of shame or silencing.

If you have DRC accommodations or extenuating circumstances that may affect your participation in the class, please let me know right away by giving me your form and/or make an appointment to talk to me about it and/or email me.

**Content Advisories:** As writers of memoir, we sometimes explore events and experiences that can uncover trauma and pain, and invoke a strong emotional response from both readers and writers in the classroom. We will be sharing our writing in this class, so please take a moment to ask yourself if you are emotionally prepared to workshop your piece and the potentially triggering work of others. Additionally, I ask that students consider the following:

- I aim to foster a space where each person feels respected; but you will not be protected from disturbance and trouble, because those are tools of a writer's trade and the place where our artistic work begins. However, feeling trauma is different from feeling offended, disturbed or troubled. What should we do if we feel overwhelmed by something we've read? Let's decide as a class together.
- Please put a content advisory at the end of your work, last page, those who want to go to that first, can. Understand that people might forget or might not know what others will find traumatic. Let's see how this goes, and check in midway. If people feel comfortable, they can tell us (or

email me) what in particular they would like an advisory about. If you find that writing or reading about a particular issue has provoked more than ordinary anxiety or concern, I encourage you to contact the campus Counseling and Psychological Services. UCSC Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides a wide range of short-term and long-term mental health services. Counseling services are confidential and free of charge to all UCSC students. For more information, contact CAPS at 831-459-2628 or visit <http://caps.ucsc.edu/>.

- **If you seem to be writing about yourself as a danger to yourself or others, expect me to check in with you, and I am legally obligated to contact CAPS.**