

Course: LS 816, fall 2022 **Course Schedule: Zoom meeting most Weds. 6:00 – 8:50 pm**
Instructor: Sasha Colby **Sat. Sept. 24th, Oct 15th 10 am – 12 pm live**
Contact: scolby@sfu.ca **Or watch recordings of Saturday talks**
Office hours: Flexible – Zoom by appointment – please send email to schedule

LS 816: Writing the Modern Self

Despite the widespread popularity of auto/biography, important questions remain about how these forms should be undertaken and the opportunities and challenges of representing a life. This ambiguity extends to “life writing,” a larger term that includes all forms of personal narrative – from memoir to Instagram Story. In this live-Zoom seminar course and in conjunction with our partners at the Oxford Centre for Life Writing and other guests, we will probe critical questions in life writing studies, the emergence of modern subjectivity, and the roles and responsibilities of representing lives. To do this, we will look at several forms including biographical drama, biographical documentary, auto/biographical poetry, *romans à clef* and “long biography” to better understand these forms, what they seek to accomplish, and how they contribute to the emergence and definition of the modern self. For the purposes of the course, the running historical focus will be writers and artists living in or around London and Paris 1860 -1945 – in other words, those who were, in their lives and work, forging what it meant to “be modern.” As an additional layer of investigation, we will also consider the lives, methods, and representations of those who depict these figures – notably through Hermione Lee’s full-scale biography of British (biographical) playwright, Tom Stoppard.

Our multi-tiered, multi-genre study will be enhanced by GLS’ Jim Babcock Lecture in Liberal Studies, this fall a three-part online series (all lectures free and open to the public):

- **“What is Life Writing?”** Dr. Kate Kennedy, co-director, Oxford Centre for Life Writing in conversation with Dr. Charlie Lee Potter, Department of English, University of Oxford, Saturday, September 24th at 10 a.m. (Zoom)
- **“The Role of the Biographer”** Dr. Hermione Lee, Co-director, Oxford Centre for Life Writing, in conversation with Kate Kennedy. Saturday, October 15th at 10 a.m. (Zoom)
- **“Being Josephine: Reconstructing Black Historical Lives”** Tymisha Harris, star of the one-woman biographical drama about Josephine Baker, *Josephine: A Burlesque Cabaret Dream Play*, Wednesday, November 9th at 6 p.m. Date TBC. (Zoom)

For the final assignment, students will submit a critical academic essay or theoretically framed creative auto/biographical project drawing on our major themes and approaches, which we will workshop throughout the term. This work will be presented to the class in a student showcase at the end of the course.

Assignments

Biographical Presentation	15%
Draft and workshop	20%
Final Paper	50%
Participation and reading	15%

Required Books:

David Hare. *The Judas Kiss*. Grove Press, 1998.

Tom Stoppard. *The Invention of Love*. Grove Press, 1998.

Hermione Lee. *Tom Stoppard: A Life*. Vintage, 2022. (*Recommended summer reading)

Mina Loy. *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997.

F. Scott Fitzgerald. *Tender is the Night*, Penguin, 2002.

Zelda Fitzgerald. *Save Me the Waltz*. Handheld Press, 2019.

Other:

Theoretical and contextual readings, correspondence, poetry, online sources on Canvas

Required Viewing:

Josephine Baker: The First Black Superstar.

Oscar Wilde: Spendthrift of Genius.

Paris: The Luminous Years (excerpt in class)

Course Schedule:

Wednesday, September 7th

Introduction

What is Life Writing Video

Wednesday, September 14th

Theory on Canvas:

Bourdieu, "The Biographical Illusion"

Woolf, "Modern Biography"

Margadant, "Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective"

Wednesday, September 21st

The Judas Kiss

Oscar Wilde: Spendthrift of Genius (watch via SFU Library)

"The Ballad of Reading Gaol"

Saturday, September 24th

"What is Life Writing?" Dr. Kate Kennedy, co-director, Oxford Centre for Life Writing in conversation with Dr. Charlie Lee Potter, Department of English, University of Oxford, Saturday, September 24th at 10 a.m. (Zoom)

Wednesday, September 28th

Meeting with writing groups – 1 hour

Wednesday, October 5th

The Invention of Love, Act I

Tom Stoppard: A Life – Part 1

Wednesday, October 12th

The Invention of Love, Act II

Tom Stoppard: A Life, Part 2

Post draft or statement of intent to Canvas

Saturday, October 15th

“**The Role of the Biographer**” Dr. Hermione Lee, Co-director, Oxford Centre for Life Writing, in conversation with Kate Kennedy. Saturday, October 15th at 10 a.m. (Zoom)

Wednesday, October 19th

Meeting with writing groups – draft discussion – 1 hour

Wednesday, October 26th

Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*

McAlmon, *Being Geniuses Together* (excerpt on Canvas)

Stephen Scobie, *McAlmon’s Chinese Opera* (Canvas)

Wednesday, November 2nd – Writing Week

Watch *Josephine Baker: The First Black Superstar* (YouTube)

Video clips or live performance of *Josephine: A Burlesque Cabaret Dream Play*

Wednesday, November 9th – Date TBC

“**Being Josephine**” Tymisha Harris, star of the one-woman biographical drama about Josephine Baker, *Josephine: A Burlesque Cabaret Dream Play*

Wednesday, November 16th

Tender is the Night – 1st half

Save Me the Waltz – 1st half

Correspondence and contextual articles on Canvas

Wednesday, November 23rd

Tender is the Night – 2nd half

Save Me the Waltz – 2nd half

Student Showcase Part I

Wednesday, November 30th

Student showcase Part II