

# LT308: Autofiction

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Office Hours: By Appointment  
Course Times: Mondays & Wednesdays 14:00-15:30

“Autofiction,” one of the most discussed and debated forms of contemporary literature, is usually understood as a hybrid genre. It mixes autobiographical and fictional events, and in doing so, displaces traditional autobiography and competes with the novel. This course will explore the causes and contexts of the emergence of autofiction in French literature of the 1970s, typically understood to be its origin, as well as parallel manifestations of the form that came about elsewhere. We will then turn to some of the principal theoretical approaches to the study of autofiction: the problem of the relation between fiction and fact, the narrative peculiarities of autofictional texts, the question of the subject, the postcolonial context of autofiction, the representation of traumatic experience, and the problem of the reception of autofiction by readers. Finally, we will explore the development of autofiction in various national literatures (German, Irish, American, French, Russian, Haitian, etc.) as we read autofictional works by W.G. Sebald, Sara Baume, Jenny Offill, Raymond Federman, Hervé Guibert, Annie Ernaux, Oksana Vasyakina, Dany Laferrière, and others.

## Requirements

### Course texts

Students are expected to purchase or borrow four texts in paper or electronic format:

W.G. Sebald, *Austerlitz*  
Sara Baume, *A Line Made by Walking*  
Jenny Offill, *Department of Speculation*  
Oksana Vasyakina, *Wound*

All other texts will be uploaded to Brightspace, the course’s learning management system.

**The syllabus on Brightspace will be the official, updated version for this course.**

The library owns copies of the course texts, which can be consulted or borrowed by students. A reserve shelf with relevant texts and suggested readings will be available for study and research connected to the course.

### Attendance

Attendance is mandatory, and active participation in discussions will be an essential part of the course. Participation consists in contributing productively to class discussion in a respectful manner,

and in demonstrating a sound knowledge of the texts assigned. Readings should be done in advance of the class for which they are assigned. Participation also requires coming to class with the relevant texts and seminar materials.

To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

### Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

### Assessment

Students will be assessed on the basis of regular participation and on the basis of written and oral assignments (listed below).

**All assignments must be completed in order to pass the course.**

#### Assignments

- Essay One: 1000 words
- Padlet posts: 1000 words in total (ongoing) - calculated as part of the participation grade
- Two response papers: 1000 words each; each paper responds to an assigned text, due the night before class on the day on which the text is assigned. Sign-up in advance.
- Final presentation: 1000 words (the presentation notes should be handed in to the instructors after the presentation and will be evaluated together with the presentation.)

### Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Assignments that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept assignments that are more than 24 hours late. If the instructors agree to accept a late assignment, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

### Grade Breakdown

Participation (including posts on Padlets):	30%
Essay 1 (1000 words)	17.5%
Response Essay 1 (1000 words)	17.5%
Response Essay 2 (1000 words)	17.5%
Final presentation (1000 words)	17.5%

## Schedule

Unit /Assignment	Week	Date	Theme	Readings
1. Origins of Autofiction	1	29 January	The Origin of "Autofiction," Serge Doubrovsky's <i>Fils</i> , Autofiction vs. Classical Autobiography	S. Doubrovsky, <i>Le livre brisé</i> (excerpts)
		31 January	Around Doubrovsky: Autofiction and the New Autobiography, "the Autobiographical Pact" (Lejeune), the "Nouvelle Autobiographie" (Alain Robbe-Grillet),	G. Perec, <i>W, ou le Souvenir d'enfance</i> (excerpts) R. Barthes, <i>Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes</i> (excerpts) P. Lejeune "The Autobiographical Pact"
	2	5 February	Autofiction vs. Diary; Trauma, Writing, Illness	Hervé Guibert, <i>Cytomegalovirus: A Hospitalization Diary</i>
Padlet #1		7 February	Other Origins of Autofiction	Excerpts from D. F. Wallace, P. Auster, L. Berlin, L. Davis Karen Ferreira-Myers, "Does Autofiction Belong to French or Francophone Authors Only?"
	3	12 February	Women and Autofiction in the 1990s	A. Ernaux <i>Happening</i>

		14 February	Women and Autofiction in the 1990s	A. Ernaux <i>Happening</i>
<b>Essay 1 (1000 words) due at 23:39</b>		16 February		
2. Theoretical Issues	4	19 February	Fictionality, Factuality, and Autofiction	Richard Walsh, "Fictionality and Mimesis"
<b>Padlet #2</b>		21 February	Fictionality, Factuality, and Autofiction	Raymond Federman, <i>Shhh... The Story of a Childhood</i> (excerpts)
	5	26 February	The Autofictional "I": The Narrating self/The Narrated self	M. Löschnigg, "Postclassical Narratology and the Theory of Autobiography"  Raymond Federman, <i>Shhh... The Story of a Childhood</i> (excerpts)
		28 February	Beyond "I": "They" or "He/She"	Annie Ernaux, <i>The Years</i> (excerpts)  Ben Lerner, <i>10:04</i> (excerpts)
	6	4 March	Trauma in Autofiction	W.G. Sebald, <i>Austerlitz</i>  A. Genon
		6 March	Trauma in Autofiction	W.G. Sebald, <i>Austerlitz</i>
	7	11 March	Autofiction, Photography, and "Photobiography"	W.G. Sebald, <i>Austerlitz</i>  H. Guibert "Ghost Image"
		13 March	Autofiction, Photography, and "Photobiography"	W.G. Sebald, <i>Austerlitz</i>
	8	18 March	Autofiction and Scandal	K. Knausgaard, <i>My Struggle</i> (excerpts)
		20 March	Debate on Scandal	K. Knausgaard, <i>My Struggle</i> (excerpts)  C. Laurens & M. Darrieussecq

	Spring Break	25 March	No class	
		27 March	No class	
3. National contexts	9	1 April	Autofiction, Art, and the contemporary Irish novel	Sara Baume, <i>A Line Made by Walking</i>
<b>Padlet #3</b>		3 April	Autofiction, Art, and the contemporary Irish novel	Sara Baume, <i>A Line Made by Walking</i>
	10	8 April	Autofiction and the American short form	Jenny Offill, <i>Department of Speculation</i>
		10 April	Autofiction and the American short form	Jenny Offill, <i>Department of Speculation</i>
	11	15 April	Autofiction and Russian oppositional literature	Oksana Vasyakina, <i>Wound</i>
<b>Padlet #4</b>		17 April	Autofiction and Russian oppositional literature	Oksana Vasyakina, <i>Wound</i>
	12	22 April	Autofiction and Memory	Maria Stepanova, <i>In the Memory of Memory</i> (passages)
		24 April	Guest Lecture	Guest Lecture
	13	29 April	Autofiction, Postcolonialism, and Migration	Dany Laferrière, <i>The Enigma of the Return</i> (excerpts)
		1 May	No class	
	14	6 May	Presentations	
		8 May	Presentations	

