Bard College Berlin
A LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

LT308: Autofiction

Seminar Leader: James Harker
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Office Hours: By Appointment
Mondays and Wednesdays, 14:00-15:30

Course Description

"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 the global emergence of autofiction in the 2010s, which is not necessarily indebted to the French form. We will explore 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 social context of autofiction, the representation of traumatic experience, the problem of the reception of autofiction by readers, and ultimately the question of whether autofiction is indeed a genre or, as theories of the "autofictional" suggest, a rhetorical technique. We will read key works of autofiction by Serge Doubrovsky, Georges Perec, Hervé Guibert, Annie Ernaux, Lydia Davis, Karl Ove Knausgaard, Rachel Cusk, Teju Cole, Ben Lerner, Jenny Offill, and more.

Requirements

Course Texts

Participants are expected to acquire the following texts in paper or electronic format:

Lydia Davis, *The End of the Story*
Rachel Cusk, *Outline*
Teju Cole, *Open City*
Ben Lerner, *Transcription*
Jenny Offill, *Department of Speculation*

All other texts will be available on Google Classroom.

The syllabus on Google Classroom will be the official, updated version for the course.

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.

AI Policy

Chatbots such as ChatGPT or Claude can be useful for quick research purposes such as finding a publication date, getting some background on a historical event mentioned in a text,

though their accuracy should be confirmed. AI should not be used, however, for generating text for essays or for altering texts that you have written. The written assignments are as much about the process of writing as they are about the final product. To that end, for each assignment, your task is not just to write an essay but to show that you have written an essay, in the form of sustained work on the text. All assignments must be submitted as shared Google Docs with the instructor as Editor.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the Bard College Berlin Accessibility page. Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences will not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Further absences may need to be documented (i.e. a doctor's note) in order not to affect the participation grade.

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.

Assessment

Students will be assessed on the basis of regular participation in seminar discussion and on the basis of the written and oral assignments listed below.

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

Assignments

- Midterm Essay: 2000 words
- Final Essay: 2000 words
- Final Presentation: 1000 words

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays 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 essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. 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 essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. 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	30%
Midterm Essay	25%
Final Essay	25%
Final Presentation	20%

Schedule

Week One: The Origins of Autofiction

Monday, August 31
Philipe Lejeune, "The Autobiographical Pact"

Wednesday, September 2
Georges Perec, *W, ou le Souvenir d'enfance* (excerpt)
Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement"

Sunday, September 6, 19:30

Ben Lerner gives a reading from Transcription *at the Internationales Literaturfestival Berlin. (Optional)*

Week Two: *L'Autofiction* in the 1970s and 80s

Monday, September 7
Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* (excerpt)

Wednesday, September 9
Hervé Guibert, *Cytomegalovirus*: *A Hospitalization Diary*

Week Three: Annie Ernaux

Monday, September 14
Annie Ernaux, *Happening*

Wednesday, September 16
Annie Ernaux, *The Years* (excerpt)

Week Four: Theories of Autobiography, Fiction, and Autofiction

Monday, September 21
Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography* (excerpt)
Richard Walsh, "The Rhetoric of Fictionality"

Wednesday, September 23
Martin Löschnigg, "Postclassical Narratology and the Theory of Autobiography"
Karen Ferreira-Myers, "Does Autofiction Belong to French or Francophone Authors Only?"

Week Five: Lydia Davis and Meta/Autofiction

Monday, September 28
Lydia Davis, *The End of the Story*

Wednesday, September 30
Lydia Davis, *The End of the Story*

Week Six: Lydia Davis and the Ethics of the First Person

Monday, October 5
Lydia Davis, *The End of the Story*

Wednesday, October 7
Camille Laurens, "Marie Darrieussecq, or the Nest-stealing Syndrome"
Marie Darrieussecq, "Fiction in the First Person, or Immoral Writing"

Week Seven: Karl Ove Knausgaard and the 2010s Resurgence of Autofiction

Monday, October 12

Karl Ove Knausgaard, *My Struggle* (excerpt)

Wednesday, October 14
Karl Ove Knausgaard, *My Struggle* (excerpt)

Midterm Essay Due Friday, October 16

Fall Break

Week Eight: Rachel Cusk and the "Annihilated Perspective"

Monday, October 26
Rachel Cusk, *Outline*

Wednesday, October 28
Rachel Cusk, *Outline*

Week Nine: Rachel Cusk

Monday, November 2
Rachel Cusk, *Outline*

Wednesday, November 4
Myra Bloom, "Sources of the Self(ie): An Introduction to the Study of Autofiction in English"
Roberta Garrett and Liam Harrison (eds), *Rachel Cusk: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* (excerpts)

Week Ten: Teju Cole and the New Flaneur

Monday, November 9
Teju Cole, *Open City*

Wednesday, November 11
Teju Cole, *Open City*

Week Eleven: Ben Lerner and the Ownership of Stories

Monday, November 16
Ben Lerner, *Transcription*

Wednesday, November 18
Ben Lerner, *Transcription*

Week Twelve: Jenny Offill and the American Short Form

Monday, November 23
Jenny Offill, *Department of Speculation*

Wednesday, November 25
Jenny Offill, *Department of Speculation*

Week Thirteen: Genres of Refusal

Monday, November 30
Amelia Ada, *Hard and Glad*

Wednesday, December 2
Special Event: A Conversation with Amelia Ada
17:00-18:30, JJK Café

Week Fourteen: Presentations

Monday, December 7
Final Presentations

Wednesday, December 9
Final Presentations

Final Essay Due Monday, December 14