ENGL 3006 – Writing the Self
Course Outline

Course Co-ordinator: Dr Keri Glastonbury
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Consultation hours: Wednesday 3pm – 5pm

Semester 1 - 2007
Unit Weighting 10
Teaching Methods Lecture Seminar Workshop

Course Overview

Brief Course Description
Examines the theory and practice of autobiography through a study of techniques of writing the self, integrating literary analysis and creative writing in an exploration of the role of memory and imagination in reconstructing and shaping the past.

Contact Hours
Seminar for 2 Hours per Week for the Full Term

Learning Materials/Texts
Tobias Wolff, This Boy’s Life (1989).
David Kelly, Fantastic Street (2003).
Martin Amis, Experience (2000).
Blake Morrison, And When Did You Last See Your Father (1993)
Joan Didion, The Year of Magical Thinking (2005)
(plus poetry and other handouts).

Course Outline Issued and Correct as at: Week 1, Semester 1 - 2007
CTS Download Date: 12/2/2007
All texts are available at the United Campus Bookshop (Shortland Union Building) except for Fantastic Street which has been photocopied and is available to purchase at Uprint (Shortland Union Building).

Course Objectives
Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to demonstrate
(1) a broad understanding of issues related to the shaping of the past in literature
(2) a detailed understanding of techniques involved in the construction of the self
through memory and narrative
(3) core skills in written and oral communication, in textual analysis and in creative
practice.

Course Content
This course will explore the processes involved in writing about the self, integrating
analysis of the autobiographical techniques of major writers with a practical
understanding of the resources of the writer through workshop exercises and
assignments. Particular attention will be paid to
The literary tradition of the autobiographical act
The creation of self and identity in and through narrative
The fictions that inform "autobiographical truth"
The nature and role of memory in the structuring of experience
The motives for memoir-writing

Assessment Items

| Essays / Written Assignments | 750-word discussion paper analysing in detail the nature and role of memory in a specific episode of a set text (15%) Due April 24th |
| Essays / Written Assignments | 750-word writing assignment on a childhood memory (15%) Due April 3rd |
| Essays / Written Assignments | 3000-word essay responding to one of the essay topics listed in the critical sections OR 3000-word creative writing assignment or equivalent (65%) Due June 4th |
| Group/tutorial participation and contribution | Attendance at seminars is compulsory. Two absences are allowable in the case of illness or other emergencies, and two more absences may be recovered by completing extra work on each of the seminars missed, but further absences will be regarded as failure to complete the course. |
| Other: (please specify) | Participation in workshop exercises (5%) |
| Other: (please specify) | Students must submit all assessment items in order to complete the course. |

Assumed Knowledge
20 units of English at 1000 level

Callaghan Campus Timetable
ENGL3006
WRITING THE SELF
Enquiries: School of Humanities and Social Science
Semester 1 - 2007
Seminar Tuesday 11:00 - 13:00 [SRLT3]
Plagiarism

University policy prohibits students plagiarising any material under any circumstances. A student plagiarises if he or she presents the thoughts or works of another as one’s own. Without limiting the generality of this definition, it may include:

- copying or paraphrasing material from any source without due acknowledgment;
- using another’s ideas without due acknowledgment;
- working with others without permission and presenting the resulting work as though it was completed independently.

Plagiarism is not only related to written works, but also to material such as data, images, music, formulae, websites and computer programs.

Aiding another student to plagiarise is also a violation of the Plagiarism Policy and may invoke a penalty.

For further information on the University policy on plagiarism, please refer to the Policy on Student Academic Integrity at the following link -


The University has established a software plagiarism detection system called Turnitin. When you submit assessment items please be aware that for the purpose of assessing any assessment item the University may -

- Reproduce this assessment item and provide a copy to another member of the University; and/or
- Communicate a copy of this assessment item to a plagiarism checking service (which may then retain a copy of the item on its database for the purpose of future plagiarism checking).
- Submit the assessment item to other forms of plagiarism checking

Written Assessment Items

Students may be required to provide written assessment items in electronic form as well as hard copy.

Extension of Time for Assessment Items, Deferred Assessment and Special Consideration for Assessment Items or Formal Written Examinations

Students are required to submit assessment items by the due date, as advised in the Course Outline, unless the Course Coordinator approves an extension of time for submission of the item. University policy is that an assessment item submitted after the due date, without an approved extension, will be penalised.

Any student:

1. who is applying for an extension of time for submission of an assessment item on
the basis of medical, compassionate, hardship/trauma or unavoidable commitment; or

2. whose attendance at or performance in an assessment item or formal written examination has been or will be affected by medical, compassionate, hardship/trauma or unavoidable commitment;

must report the circumstances, with supporting documentation, to the appropriate officer following the instructions provided in the Special Circumstances Affecting Assessment Procedure - Policy 000641.

Note: different procedures apply for minor and major assessment tasks.

Please go to the Policy at http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000641.html for further information, particularly for information on the options available to you.

Students should be aware of the following important deadlines:

- Requests for Special Consideration must be lodged no later than 3 working days after the date of submission or examination.
- Requests for Extensions of Time on Assessment Items must be lodged no later than the due date of the item.
- Requests for Rescheduling Exams must be lodged no later than 10 working days before the date of the examination.

Your application may not be accepted if it is received after the deadline. Students who are unable to meet the above deadlines due to extenuating circumstances should speak to their Program Officer in the first instance.

Changing your Enrolment

The last dates to withdraw without financial or academic penalty (called the HECS Census Dates) are:

For semester 1 courses: 31 March 2007
For semester 2 courses: 31 August 2007
For Trimester 1 courses: 16 February 2007
For Trimester 2 courses: 8 June 2007

Students may withdraw from a course without academic penalty on or before the last day of semester. Any withdrawal from a course after the last day of semester will result in a fail grade.

Students cannot enrol in a new course after the second week of semester/trimester, except under exceptional circumstances. Any application to add a course after the second week of semester/trimester must be on the appropriate form, and should be
discussed with staff in the Student Hubs.

To change your enrolment online, please refer to

http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/enrolment/changingenrolment.html

Faculty Information

The Student Hubs are a one-stop shop for the delivery of student related services and are the first point of contact for students on campus.

The four Student Hubs are located at:

**Callaghan campus**
- Shortland Hub: Level 3, Shortland Union Building
- Hunter Hub: Student Services Centre, Hunter side of campus

**City Precinct**
- City Hub & Information Common: University House, ground floor in combination with an Information Common for the City Precinct

**Ourimbah campus**
- Ourimbah Hub: Administration Building

Faculty websites

**Faculty of Education and Arts**

http://www.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/education-arts/

Contact details

**Callaghan, City and Port Macquarie**

Phone: 02 4921 5000

Email: EnquiryCentre@newcastle.edu.au

**Ourimbah**

Phone: 02 4348 4030

Email: EnquiryCentre@newcastle.edu.au

**The Dean of Students**

Resolution Precinct
Phone: 02 4921 5806
Fax: 02 4921 7151
Email: resolutionprecinct@newcastle.edu.au
Various services are offered by the University Student Support Unit:

Alteration of this Course Outline

No change to this course outline will be permitted after the end of the second week of the term except in exceptional circumstances and with Head of School approval. Students will be notified in advance of any approved changes to this outline.

Web Address for Rules Governing Undergraduate Academic Awards

Web Address for Rules Governing Postgraduate Academic Awards

Web Address for Rules Governing Professional Doctorate Awards

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR CHRONIC ILLNESS

The University is committed to providing a range of support services for students with a disability or chronic illness.

If you have a disability or chronic illness which you feel may impact on your studies, please feel free to discuss your support needs with your lecturer or course coordinator.

Disability Support may also be provided by the Student Support Service (Disability). Students must be registered to receive this type of support. To register please contact the Disability Liaison Officer on 02 4921 5766, or via email at: student-disability@newcastle.edu.au

As some forms of support can take a few weeks to implement it is extremely important that you discuss your needs with your lecturer, course coordinator or Student Support Service staff at the beginning of each semester.

For more information related to confidentiality and documentation please visit the Student Support Service (Disability) website at:
www.newcastle.edu.au/services/disability

------------------------------------------------------------------------ End of CTS Entry ------------------------------------------------------------------------

Online Tutorial Registration:
Students are required to register in the Seminar or Lecture and a specific Tutorial time for this course via the Online Registration system:
• http://studinfo1.newcastle.edu.au/rego/stud_choose_login.cfm
Registrations close at the end of week 2 of semester.
Studentmail and Blackboard: www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/
This course uses Blackboard and studentmail to contact students, so you are advised to keep your email accounts within the quota to ensure you receive essential messages. To receive an expedited response to queries, post questions on the Blackboard discussion forum if there is one, or if emailing staff directly use the course code in the subject line of your email. Students are advised to check their studentmail and the course Blackboard site on a weekly basis.

Written Assignment Presentation and Submission Details
Students are required to submit assessment items by the due date. Late assignments will be subject to the penalties described below.

Hard copy submission:
- **Type your assignments**: All work must be typewritten in 11 or 12 point black font. Leave a wide margin for marker’s comments, use 1.5 or double spacing, and include page numbers.
- **Word length**: The word limit of all assessment items should be strictly followed – 10% above or below is acceptable, otherwise penalties may apply.
- **Proof read your work** because spelling, grammatical and referencing mistakes will be penalised.
- **Staple the pages** of your assignment together (do not use pins or paper clips).
- **University Assessment Item Coversheet**: All assignments must be submitted with the University coversheet available at: http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/studentlinks/studentform.html
- **By arrangement with the relevant lecturer, assignments may be submitted at any Student Hub located at**:
  - Level 3, Shortland Union, Callaghan
  - Level 2, Student Services Centre, Callaghan
  - Ground Floor, University House, City
  - Ground Floor, Administration Building, Ourimbah
- **Date-stamping assignments**: All students must date-stamp their own assignments using the machine provided at each Student Hub. If mailing an assignment, this should be addressed to the relevant Hub. Mailed assignments are accepted from the date posted, confirmed by a Post Office date-stamp; they are also date-stamped upon receipt by Schools.
- **Do not fax or email assignments**: Only hard copies of assignments will be considered for assessment. Inability to physically submit a hard copy of an assignment by the deadline due to other commitments or distance from campus is an unacceptable excuse.
- **Keep a copy of all assignments**: It is the student’s responsibility to produce a copy of their work if the assignment goes astray after submission. Students are advised to keep updated back-ups in electronic and hard copy formats.

Online copy submission to Turnitin
In addition to hard copy submission, students are required to submit an electronic version of the following assignments to Turnitin via the course Blackboard website:
- 750 word short assignments.
- 3,000 word final assignment.

Prior to final submission, all students have the opportunity to submit one draft of their assignment to Turnitin to self-check their referencing. Assignments will not be marked until both hard copy and online versions have been submitted. Marks may be deducted for late submission of either version.
Penalties for Late Assignments
Assignments submitted after the due date, without an approved extension of time will be penalised by the reduction of 5% of the possible maximum mark for the assessment item for each day or part day that the item is late. Weekends count as one day in determining the penalty. Assessment items submitted more than ten days after the due date will be awarded zero marks.

Special Circumstances
Students wishing to apply for Special Circumstances or Extension of Time should apply online @ http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000641.html

No Assignment Re-submission
Students who have failed an assignment are not permitted to revise and resubmit it in this course. However, students are always welcome to contact their Tutor, Lecturer or Course Coordinator to make a consultation time to receive individual feedback on their assignments.

Remarks
Students can request to have their work re-marked by the Course Coordinator or Discipline Convenor (or their delegate); three outcomes are possible: the same grade, a lower grade, or a higher grade being awarded. Students may also appeal against their final result for a course. Please consult the University policy at: http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/forms/

Return of Assignments
Students can collect assignments from a nominated Student Hub during office hours. Students will be informed during class which Hub to go to and the earliest date that assignments will be available for collection. Students must present their student identification card to collect their assignment.

Preferred Referencing Style
In this course, it is recommended that you use the use the MLA in-text referencing system for referencing sources of information used in assignments. Inadequate or incorrect reference to the work of others may be viewed as plagiarism and result in reduced marks or failure.

An in-text citation names the author of the source and gives the page number, in parentheses. At the end of the paper, a list of references provides publication information about the source; the list is alphabetised by authors’ last names (or by titles for works without authors). Further information on referencing and general study skills can be obtained from:


Student Representatives
Student Representatives are a major channel of communication between students and the School. Contact details of Student Representatives can be found on School websites.

Student Communication
Students should discuss any course related matters with their Tutor, Lecturer, or Course Coordinator in the first instance and then the relevant Discipline or Program Convenor. If this proves unsatisfactory, they should then contact the Head of School if required. Contact details can be found on the School website.
Essential Online Information for Students
Information on Class and Exam Timetables, Tutorial Online Registration, Learning Support, Campus Maps, Careers information, Counselling, the Health Service and a range of free Student Support Services can be found at:


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<th>Grading guide</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>49% or less</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>An unacceptable effort, including non-completion. The student has not understood the basic principles of the subject matter and/or has been unable to express their understanding in a comprehensible way. Deficient in terms of answering the question, research, referencing and correct presentation (spelling, grammar etc). May include extensive plagiarism.</td>
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<td>50% to 64%</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>The work demonstrates a reasonable attempt to answer the question, shows some grasp of the basic principles of the subject matter and a basic knowledge of the required readings, is comprehensible, accurate and adequately referenced.</td>
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<td>65% to 74%</td>
<td>Credit</td>
<td>The work demonstrates a clear understanding of the question, a capacity to integrate research into the discussion, and a critical appreciation of a range of different theoretical perspectives. A deficiency in any of the above may be compensated by evidence of independent thought. The work is coherent and accurate.</td>
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<td>75% to 84%</td>
<td>Distinction</td>
<td>Evidence of substantial additional reading and/or research, and evidence of the ability to generalise from the theoretical content to develop an argument in an informed and original manner. The work is well organised, clearly expressed and shows a capacity for critical analysis.</td>
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<td>85% upwards</td>
<td>High Distinction</td>
<td>All of the above, plus a thorough understanding of the subject matter based on substantial additional reading and/or research. The work shows a high level of independent thought, presents informed and insightful discussion of the topic, particularly the theoretical issues involved, and demonstrates a well-developed capacity for critical analysis.</td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>Week beginning</td>
<td>Lecture Topic &amp; Assessment at a Glance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>February 19</td>
<td>Introduction/Genre/Memoir, Autobiography, the Personal Essay/Fact, Fiction/Narratives of the Self. Kim Cheng Boey</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>February 26</td>
<td>Memory and Identity. Keri Glastonbury</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>March 5</td>
<td>Beginnings/Childhood (Tobias Wolff). Kim Cheng Boey</td>
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<td>March 12</td>
<td>Growing Pains (David Kelly) David Kelly (guest lecture)/Keri Glastonbury</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>March 19</td>
<td>A Sense of Self/ Turning Points (Martin Amis). Kim Cheng Boey</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>March 26</td>
<td>The Poetry of the Self (Autobiographical poetry). Kim Cheng Boey</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>April 2</td>
<td>Note: Good Friday Holiday</td>
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<td>750 word creative assignment due 3rd April</td>
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Mid-Semester Recess: Friday 6 April to Friday 20 April 2007

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Week beginning</th>
<th>Lecture Topic &amp; Assessment at a Glance</th>
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<td>750 word critical assignment due 24th April</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>April 30</td>
<td>The Family Album/ Fathers and Mothers (Blake Morrison). Kim Cheng Boey</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>May 7</td>
<td>Place of Memory, Memory of Place (John Hughes). Keri Glastonbury</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>May 14</td>
<td>A Sense of Ending/ Age and Death (Joan Didion). Keri Glastonbury</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>May 21</td>
<td>Beyond the Self. Keri Glastonbury</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>May 28</td>
<td>In My Beginning is My End. Kim Cheng Boey</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>June 4</td>
<td>Final creative work/ essay due June 4th.</td>
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Examination period: Tuesday 12 June to Friday 29 June 2007

**Week 1: Introduction/Genre/Memoir, Autobiography, the Personal Essay/Fact, Fiction/Narratives of the Self.**
Kim Cheng Boey

**Critical**

1. Discuss how any of the authors on this course negotiates the tension between fact and fiction. Can a work be both autobiographical and fictional?

2. Simone de Beauvoir, writing about her autobiographical project explains that “one of my main reasons for undertaking it is largely my realization that one can never know oneself, but only offer an account of oneself.” Discuss this with reference to one of the texts on the course.

3. In *Confessions* St Augustine poses the question: “Why then do I put before you then the stories of so many things?” Examine the autobiographical impulse and its motivations in any of the texts on the course.
4. In writing *Angela’s Ashes* Frank McCourt says that “I could not write about my mother and her affair with her cousin until she was dead, because she couldn't live through it.” Explore the ethical issues involved in writing the self in two texts and examine how the writers deal with them.

5. Discuss the relationship between identity and self-narration in at least one of the texts (you may choose a poet).


**Week 2: Memory and Identity.**

Keri Glastonbury

**Critical:**

1. What is the nature of memory? What impact might its subjective, sensory and partial qualities have on the autobiographical writing process?

2. What kinds of retrieval techniques might be useful for stimulating memories of the past? Marcel Proust terms the types of memories produced by conscious acts (such as listening to music, or reading newspapers from the time) as voluntary memories; whereas in the famous “episode of the *madeleine*” he contrasts this with involuntary memories, those triggered unconsciously and which have the quality of deja-vu. Have you experienced any similar moments where past and present coalesce?

**Creative:**

1. Bring some family photographs to class and deconstruct the gap between lived reality and the idealised image. What went on outside the frame and what telling signs can you read into the photographs that others can’t?

2. Bring an aid memoir to class and discuss the way this object functions as a container for both your memories and as a broader cultural memory. How does the object trigger both personal memories and open the door for the reveries of others? How many different contexts can it be ‘read’ in?

**Week 3: Beginnings/Childhood (Tobias Wolff).**

Kim Cheng Boey

**Critical:**

1. “I do think that there's judgment in my work. Perhaps it might be more exact to say I hope that there's little condemnation. There's a difference between judgment and condemnation. I believe in the possibility of evil, and sometimes it appears in my work, but I wouldn't find it interesting to write completely evil people. It would be beyond my capacity to imagine them.” Discuss *This Boy’s Life* in the light of Wolff’s statement.

2. In his acknowledgements, Tobias Wolff says that *This Boy’s Life* is “a book of memory, and memory has its own story to tell.” Is there a contradiction in Wolff’s statement?
3. Examine the narrative voice and style in *This Boy’s Life* and how they relate to the themes of boyhood and growing up.

**Creative:**

1. Look at yourself in the mirror. Then dig up the photos of yourself. It could be snapshots of you as a baby, a child, or a young adult. Attempt a self-portrait and ponder what has led you to what you see in the mirror now. Where are the beginnings, the shaping years? Think about the passing of time. What has changed? What has remained constant?

2. Write about your first experience with death. Use a trigger, something that prompts the memory and reflection of death. Describe the dead person, the face in the coffin. What did that experience change you?

3. Write about your first experience of birth.

4. Write about your best friend in childhood. Think about the meaning of friendship. Describe the friend, and give plenty of visual details not just of the physical traits, but the behaviour and family background. Don’t forget to provide vivid scenes and episodes of you two together, any event that put the friendship to the test.

5. Look at how Tobias Wolff begins *This Boy’s Life*. It is a pivotal point in his life, vividly located and drawn. That scene not only tells us a lot about the mother and son relationship, but sets the tone and theme for the rest of the book. Is there an event, a scene that you recall, a central moment that can work as a beginning for an account of your childhood? What follows?

6. Think of a place where you lived as a child. Map it out. Recall the streets, the names, the topography, the neighbourhood, the inhabitants, the sense of community. Now cast your mind back to two or three memorable events that happened here, or what made living there so special. Introduce the characters, their names and living features as you would characters in fiction. Weave the selected memories together into a coherent piece about the place.

7. First memories are hard to retrieve. But they are there, if we listen and watch patiently. In “Learning to Eat Soup,” Edward Hoagland writes:

   My first overtly sexual memory is one of me on my knees in the hallway outside our fifth-grade classroom cleaning the floor, and Lucy Smith in a white blouse and black shirt standing above me, watching me.

   My first memory is of being on train which derailed in a rainstorm in Dakota one night when I was two – and of hearing, as we rode in a hay wagon toward the distant weak light of a little station, that a boy my age had just choked to death from breathing mud. But maybe my first real memory emerged when my father was dying. I was thirty-five and I dreamed so incredibly vividly of being dandled and rocked and hugged by him, being only a few months old, giggling helplessly and happily.

Write about your first memory or memories, incorporating reflections on the nature of memory.
Week 4: Growing Pains (David Kelly)
David Kelly (guest lecture)/Keri Glastonbury

**Critical:**

1. “When Boy George sang ‘Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?’, back in the eighties, the answer in Brisbane was a resounding yes.” (p. 175) How does Kelly deal with painful family conflict and disclosure in *Fantastic Street*?

2. Mandy Sayer in her review in the SMH refers to *Fantastic Street* as “an autobiography masquerading as a first time novel”. Discuss.

**Creative:**

1. *Fantastic Street* avoids a linear structure by telling parallel stories: the short, sharp chapters alternate between episodes from the narrator’s childhood and 1994, when he has returned to the family home to care for his terminally ill mother. Place two autobiographical fragments side by side, one from your childhood and one more recent. Experiment with the effect of the jump-cut.

2 Write an autobiographical piece which deals with family complexity (eg: cultural background, adoption, divorce, grief, sexual identity, addiction) from an adolescent perspective.

Week 5 A Sense of Self/Turning Points (Martin Amis)
Kim Cheng Boey

**Critical:**

1. “I do it because I feel the same stirrings that everyone else feels I want to set the record straight (so much of this is already public), and to speak, for once, without artifice.” Does Amis manage to “set the record straight” without resorting to artifice?

2. Examine the relationship between father and son in *Experience*.

**Creative:**

1. Can you recall the point of crossing the threshold from childhood to youth, from adolescence to adulthood? Write about one of these rites of passage. Look for the markers; the events, the moments of conflict and awakening which have shaped your consciousness. Use public and political events, or popular cultural references (eg: The Wonder Years or even the day Princess Diana died) to evoke the mood of the time.

2. What about the banality of experience? Write about the quotidian details of your everyday. Can you isolate a sequence of small epiphanies in there? Think about what you are telling the reader about yourself indirectly (in terms of what’s in your fridge door, what you thought about in the shower this morning etc.)

3. *Experience* begins with a childhood memory before it broaches a key tragic event – the disappearance of Amis’s cousin. Is there a similar event in your life that altered your perception of life, that pushed you across the threshold from the world of innocence into experience?
4. Martin Amis inserts letters that he wrote to his parents into his narrative. The letters help to map his development, giving a snapshot of the person he was at different stages in life. Do you have a diary or journal, or letters you wrote that could be used in a similar manner? Select extracts and put them together, linking them up with an autobiographical narrative, commenting on your own letters and journal entries if necessary.

5. In his books on mythology, Joseph Campbell outlines the mythic structure underpinning most narratives: the protagonist undertaking a challenge or journey that leads to a knowledge of self and the world. In the movie Stand By Me, the children are transformed by their overnight trip. Memoirs likewise are informed by this pattern; Amis’s book is about the rites of passage, being initiated into the darker mysteries of life. Write about an event, an ordeal or a journey possibly that led you to a deeper understanding of who you are.

6. “Someone is no longer here. The intercessionary figure, the father, the man who stands between the son and death, is no longer here; and it won’t ever be the same,” writes Amis about the loss of his father. If you have lost a parent, write about what the absence means, accompanying your meditation with images and scenes from your parent’s life.

7. Is there someone you knew who has disappeared completely? Write about him or her and how the disappearance has affected you. Speculate what could have happened and don’t forget to provide memories of the missing.

Week 6: The Poetry of the Self (Autobiographical poetry).
Kim Cheng Boey

Critical:

1. In an essay on Sylvia Plath, Seamus Heaney writes that “the poet's need [is] to get beyond ego in order to become the voice of more than autobiography. At the level of poetic speech, when this happens, sound and meaning rise like a tide out of language to carry individual utterance away upon a current stronger and deeper that the individual could have anticipated.” Discuss with reference to at least one poet.

2. Tony Harrison pleads: “I’m guilty, and the way I make it up’s/ In poetry, and that much I confess.” Discuss the notion of guilt and atonement in one of the poets on the course.

3. In Day by Day, Robert Lowell says that his aim is “to give my simple autobiography a plot.” Access whether Lowell has achieved this in his poetry, given the fragmentariness and discontinuities of real life and the narrative limits of the poetic mode.

Creative:

1. Read Elizabeth Bishop’s poem “In the Waiting Room.” It is about a moment of awakening, when the child’s consciousness registers its first awareness of pain. Notice how precisely Bishop locates the moment in time and space. Now take a moment in childhood when something akin to Bishop’s experience happened, a moment that made you aware of who you were. Find the details to recreate that moment as seen from the child’s point of view.
2. Attempt a sequence of poems that make up a family album.

3. Write a poem or a sequence of poems about a place in childhood.

4. Read Mark Strand’s poem “Pot Roast.” The poem is about the memory of food, and the food of memory. Can you think of a meal that has remained vivid in your mind? The smell, the texture of the food, the way it was served, the occasion. Write a meal or food or recipe poem or prose piece, linking the present and past. You may want to search for a trigger, something in the present to precipitate the recall.

5. Read Robert Frost’s “Directions.” Do you have something like that in your childhood, something that for some reason has remained very important to you, a personal symbol that lends meaning to your life? It could be an object or a place, a memory that you come back to again and again for sustenance.

6. Write a poem about your first memory or memories. Use anaphora and do a bit of automatic writing, letting one image trigger the next. You can use “I remember” or “My first memory” as a repeating phrase.

7. Attempt a journey poem that leads not just to an intimate knowledge of a place but of yourself and the world.

8. Attempt an elegy mourning the death of a person you loved.

**Week 7: Confessional Poetry? Keri Glastonbury**

**Critical:**

1. What are some of the dangers of confusing the confessional “I” of the poem directly with the poet. Discuss with reference to the work of Sylvia Plath.

2. Do you read Anne Sexton’s “The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator” as merely therapeutic? How else might it be read in terms of feminist poetics?

**Creative:**

1. Write a poem about a personal crisis that takes the reader into your confidence. Try to resist clichés and work with the power of poetic language to express something more idiosyncratic.

2. Write a poem which resists the confessional mode (perhaps drawing on irony), yet is clearly steeped in emotional disclosure. Refer to Frank O’Hara’s ‘Mayokovsky’ as an example.

**Week 8: Going Back/Roots and Origins (Michael Ondaatje). Kim Cheng Boey**

**Critical:**

1. In his acknowledgements Ondaatje says that “Truth disappears with history and gossip tells us in the end nothing of personal relationships” and adds that “While all these names may give an air of authenticity, I must confess that the book is not a history but a portrait or “gesture”. And if those listed above disapprove of the fictional air I apologize and can only say that in Sri Lanka a well–told lie is worth a thousand
facts.” Examine the way Ondaatje negotiates between fact and fiction in *Running in the Family*.

2. Examine the relationship between photography and autobiography in *Running in the Family*.

3. In an interview Ondaatje reveals: “I go back there a lot now and I go back to complete myself.” Examine the notion of return and postcolonial subjectivity in *Running in the Family*.

**Creative:**

1. Think of the family stories you have heard. Is there one that has remained in your mind, troubling you perhaps, one with a little unresolved mystery? Is there something that happened in the distant past that still echoes, that still asks you to listen, go back and salvage it? Tell it like a story; do not explain or give too much information. Work on the vital scenes, the character portrayal. Break up the chronology if and use the present tense if it helps to focus the theme of the piece.

2. Dig into your ancestral past like Ondaatje in *Running in the Family*. Think about your ethnic, cultural and linguistic roots. If you possess heirlooms or any object, photographs handed down from several generations back, dust them off and look at them carefully. Meditate on them, these tokens of continuity. Speculate about what happened or could have happened, and how you ended up here. You can shift back and forth between past and present, and switch between different tenses.

3. Tolstoy remarks in *Anna Karenina* that “All happy families are alike, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Begin an essay about your family or idea of family with an observation like Tolstoy’s, moving into intimate portraits of your family, showing why it is a special family, even if it is an ordinary and happy one.

4. Write about your family or one of the family members using photographs like Ondaatje.

**Week 9: The Family Album/ Fathers and Mothers (Blake Morrison).**

**Kim Cheng Boey**

**Critical:**

1. In his most recent book about his mother *Things My Mother Never Told Me*, Blake Morrison says that he feels bound by “a demand for honest reporting” in “honouring the truth of who she was.” Do you think that there is “honest reporting” in *And When Did You Last See Your Father*?

2. Discuss how the narrative structure and techniques in *And When Did You Last See Your Father* enable Morrison to assemble a coherent narrative of father and son against the discontinuity of death.

**Creative:**

1. Notice how Blake Morrison begins his memoir: a vividly crafted memory that revealed a lot about his father and himself. Is there a particular episode in your childhood that reveals some uncomfortable truth about your father or yourself?
2. Write about a death in the family.

3. Write about an outing with your father or mother. It could be a day at the beach, a visit to the zoo, or a bushwalk. Craft the scene, the way your father walks, talks, his quirks, or any telling detail. Dramatise incidents that reveal his character or the relationship between him and you. Use dialogue, use present tense if it makes it more vivid.

4. Using objects, memories, pivotal moments or incidents, give us a portrait of your father. Reflect also on what it means to be a father, the responsibilities, the loneliness, etc.

**Week 10: Place of Memory, Memory of Place (John Hughes).**
Keri Glastonbury

**Critical:**

1. “Walter Benjamin has written that the most distinctive trait of a collection is its intransmissibility, that the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning when the collection loses its owner” (p. 58). Discuss with reference to “My Mother’s House”.

2. How has your family dealt with possessions and personal belongings following a death in the family? Do you know any hoarders/collectors and what does their collection say about cultural attitudes to memory and forgetting?

3. In what ways does *The Idea of Home* disrupt the genre of memoir stylistically?

**Creative:**

1. Remember your grandparents’ house (or the house of someone significant to you from a different generation). By remembering houses, the different rooms and objects within, how might we salvage memories of those who live(d) in them? Focus on your memories of the house and the objects inside to structure this piece.

2. The title of John Hughes’ collection of essays ‘The Idea of Home’ suggests that ‘home’ is not simply something concrete, but a construct or idea. Have you ever returned to a place you have been homesick for to find that it has changed irrevocably? Write a piece about a return to a place which also meditates philosophically on the ‘idea of home’ you’ve carried with you.

**Week 11: A Sense of Ending/Age and Death (Joan Didion).**
Keri Glastonbury

**Critical:**

1. “We might expect if the death is sudden to feel shock. We do not expect this shock to be obliterative, dislocating to both body and mind. We might expect that we will be prostrate, inconsolable, crazy with loss. We do not expect to be literally crazy, cool customers who believe that their husband is about to return and need his shoes.”

What is the ‘magical thinking’ Didion is referring to in the title of her book? How does Didion negotiate the contradictions of her grief using the ‘cool’ reportorial eye of personal journalism? How is she both mourner and reporter?
Creative:

1. Chose a quote or short passage from Didion’s *My Year of Magical Thinking* which particularly resonated with you and put it at the top of your own reflective piece on the experience of grief/loss, letting it prompt your writing.

2. Write a diary structured around illness or caring for someone with an illness.

Week 12: Beyond the Self.
Keri Glastonbury

Critical:

1. Read the preface to Dave Eggers’ *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (handout).

Why might contemporary authors of memoir and autobiography be riddled with anxiety in claiming that their life is worth writing about?

2. “And identity is funny being yourself is funny as you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself. That is really the trouble with an autobiography you do not of course you do not really believe yourself why should you, you know so well so very well that it is not yourself, it could not be yourself because you cannot remember right and if you do remember right it does not sound right and of course it does not sound right because it is not right. You are of course never yourself”. (Gertrude Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, 1937)

How might experimental writing come closer to gesturing to autobiographical ‘truths’ than conventional life narratives?

3. In what ways has contemporary autobiography, memoir and life writing proliferated beyond the bounds of literary genre in less commercial ways than autobiographies of sports stars and the like? Look at specific examples such as on-line journals (weblogs) and zines and discus the characteristics of these DIY cultures.

4. In his seminal essay on the genre, “The Autobiographical Pact,” Philippe Lejeune says that all autobiographical works are marked by an agreement with the reader that the author, narrator and protagonist are the same person. Is there any work on the course that violates this pact?

Creative:

1. Write your own Heartbreaking Work of Staggering “Stupidity” in the style of Dave Eggers.

2. Write an experimental autobiography that uses some surrealist techniques (eg automatic writing).

Week 13: In My Beginning is My End.
Kim Cheng Boey
Recommended Reading


