

Africana Autobiography: the Personal & Political, the Collective & Communal in Black Life Writing

Studies in Anglophone World Literature

ENG 566.001 SP19

M 6:30 - 9:15 p.m.

Dr. Maia Butler



Course Description:

Africana Autobiography makes for a neat alliterative title, but we will be diving into the much broader pool of life writing, and we will conceptualize the “writing” aspect of that genre very broadly. Our memoirs will often defy genre classification, they will range from the personal to the collective, and take up the construction and performance of complex intersectional identities. We’ll ground our thinking about the writing of the self in Smith and Watson’s definitions of positionality, performativity, and relationality, exploring these concepts in our primary readings alongside additional criticism that will provide literary, historical, and cultural contexts. Note: This course will include a public scholarship assignment; students will construct the inaugural entries of the Danticat Wiki, which will be a collective endeavor by an international body of Danticat scholars and hosted on edwidedanticatsociety.org.

Anticipated Texts:

Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson; *Jambalaya*, Luisah Teish; *Brother, I’m Dying* and *After the Dance*, Edwidge Danticat; *The Cooking Gene*, Michael W. Twitty; *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates; *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name - A Biomythography*, Audre Lorde; *Mo’ Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove*, Ahmir Questlove Thompson & Ben Greenman. We will also watch Beyoncé Knowles’s visual album, *Lemonade*; Janelle Monae’s visual album, *Dirty Computer*; Christy McGill’s *Serenade for Haiti*; and Yance Ford’s *Strong Island*.

Counts for: Diverse Literary Cultures requirement.