

**American University of Beirut**  
**Department of English, FAS**  
**Spring 2020/21 Online**

**ENGL 292: Capstone Seminar: Literary Biography**  
**Dr. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi**

Webex meeting room: <https://aub.webex.com/meet/sm78>

Class Times: TR 11:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.

Office Hours: TR 1 - 2:30 p.m. or by appointment

Email: sm78@aub.edu.lb

From the Undergraduate Catalogue

**ENGL 292 Capstone Seminar for Literature Majors 3.0; 3 cr.**

A writing-intensive course for majors. Topics and approaches will vary depending on the instructor. Prerequisite: senior standing. Every semester.

Description

This course sets out to explore the genre of literary biography. What are literary biographies? What do they tell us about the lives and works of writers? How do they relate to literary studies and literary theory? What are some of the challenges we face, and what other disciplines do we engage with, when writing a literary biography? Whose lives are told? And what are our archives, the archives we can rely on to investigate these lives? These are some of the questions we want to explore, as we engage with critical studies about literary biography, essays on various approaches to biography, and examples of literary biographies.

This is a reading and writing intensive course. The required reading, listed in the weekly schedule below, is subject to change depending on your input and course progress. Updates are posted on Moodle. As part of the requirements you will be asked to write a research paper on a subject of your choice that relates to the questions listed above. You will work on this paper in stages—writing first an abstract, then an annotated bibliography and a revised abstract, followed by a presentation in class, and last but not least a final written paper (see course requirements and grading). In addition, we will work on specific tasks in groups.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. To critically read and engage with questions about the genre of literary biography and its relation to literary studies and theory.
2. To formulate meaningful questions about literary biography and make arguments with which we enter into scholarly conversations.

3. To develop and write a research paper.

### Course Requirements and Grading

1. Class **participation** is key to your success at university – even with online courses. In this course, it is 20% of your final grade. Please, do not miss any class. In case you cannot participate in one of our online sessions, please let me know in advance. Participation means that you must do all required reading and assignments and contribute to our discussions in an informed way. We will have brief ungraded group and individual assignments throughout the semester.

2. You have to write **three reading responses** (each c. 750 words). These can be considered part of a class journal. They are 10% each of your final grade.

3. You have to write a **research paper** of c. 4000 words. You will work on your proposal in different stages throughout the semester, which are graded separately. These consist of:

3.1. A draft **title and abstract** of c. 300 words (not graded)

3.2 A revised title and abstract and an **annotated bibliography** of 5 sources relevant to your research topic; you should add to this as you continue your research. As you gain knowledge of the sources relevant to your project, your project gains in depth. Choosing and narrowing down a topic goes hand in hand with critical reading. In order to draft research questions and formulate an argument, with which you enter a scholarly discussion, you need to develop a good understanding of the sources relevant to your topic. This is 10% of your final grade.

An annotated bibliography consists of the citation of sources relevant to your research project (these can be books, articles, films, or other written or visual material) and 2-3 short paragraphs (together not exceeding 200-300 words) in which you (1) briefly describe/summarize the source cited, (2) critically evaluate it, (3) explain its relevance to your research project, and, if adequate, compare it to other sources included in your bibliography. Note that each entry in the annotated bibliography should give the full citation of the source, following MLA style guide, at the top. Entries should be organized alphabetically by author's last name.

For MLA style guide and annotated bibliography samples, see the Purdue Online Writing Lab:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/03/>

3.3. An oral **presentation** of your research paper of c. 10 min. The presentation gives you the chance to discuss work-in-progress, before handing in a final draft. It is 10% of your final grade.

3.4. A **written research paper**, consisting of c. 4000 words. This is 30% of your final grade.

<b>1. Participation</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>2. Three reading responses</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>3. Research paper consisting of:</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>3.1. Draft title and abstract (not graded)</b>	
<b>3.2. Revised title and abstract, annotated bibliography (10%)</b>	
<b>3.3. Presentation (10%)</b>	

### 3.4 Final draft (30%)

Please, hand in all required work on Moodle. Due dates are posted on Moodle.

Plagiarism is a serious assault on academic integrity and honesty. It results in a failing grade of 40/100 and is dealt with in accordance to the AUB “Student Code of Conduct” – see *Student Handbook* and <http://pnp.aub.edu.lb/general/conductcode/158010081.html>.

#### Help and resources

##### **Writing Center:**

The Writing Center offers free, one-hour consultations for AUB writers at Ada Dodge Hall, 2nd floor balcony; West Hall 336; or Jafet Library, second floor reading room. Check the Writing Center webpage on the AUB website. Make an appointment by walking in or by logging on to <http://www.rich75.com/aub>.

##### **Library Information Services:**

Reference librarians and information specialists in the AUB libraries can support you individually with finding academic sources for your research. Jafet information librarians can be contacted in the Jafet Library lobby or by email at [libinfo@aub.edu.lb](mailto:libinfo@aub.edu.lb).

##### **Counseling Center, Student Affairs:**

The center offers counsel and help to students with a range of academic and non-academic problems. If anything happening in your life is causing you distress and influencing your academic performance, and you feel you could benefit from professional help, contact Dr. Antoine Khabbaz at ext. 3178, email: [ak28@aub.edu.lb](mailto:ak28@aub.edu.lb), or Dr. Nay Khatcherian at ext. 3158, email: [nk63@aub.edu.lb](mailto:nk63@aub.edu.lb), in West Hall 210.

AUB strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers due to a disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please inform me immediately so that we can privately discuss options. In order to help establish reasonable accommodations and facilitate a smooth accommodations process, you are encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Office:

[accessibility@aub.edu.lb](mailto:accessibility@aub.edu.lb); +961-1-350000, x3246; West Hall, 314.

#### Course Material

All required reading is available on Moodle.

Weekly Schedule and required reading

Week	Topics	Texts and Assignments
1 Jan. 28	<b>Introduction</b>	Syllabus - Literary terms: autobiography, biography, literary biography, memoir, life writing
2 Feb. 2 Feb. 4		- Scott Donaldson, <i>The Impossible Craft: Literary Biography</i> (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015), ... <a href="https://www.psupress.org/books/titles/978-0-271-06528-1.html">https://www.psupress.org/books/titles/978-0-271-06528-1.html</a> - Michael Benton, <i>Literary Biography: An Introduction</i> . (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), xiii–xxx and 1–17.
3 Feb. 9 (Holiday) Feb. 11	<b>What is a writer / an author?</b>	- Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in <i>The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism</i> , 2nd ed., ed. Vincent B. Leitch, New York: Norton, 2010, 1322–1326. - Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in <i>The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Vincent B. Leitch, New York: Norton, 2010, 1475–1490. <b>Reading response 1</b>
4 Feb. 16  Feb. 18	<b>The task of the biographer</b>	- Richard Bradford, “Introduction” and “Literary Biography, Literary Studies, and Theory: An Uneasy Relationship,” in <i>A Companion to Literary Biography</i> ed. Richard Bradford (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 1–5 and 339–356. - Lois Potter, “Writing Shakespeare’s Life,” in <i>A Companion to Literary Biography</i> ed. Richard Bradford (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 391–404. - James Shapiro on Shakespeare <a href="https://www.biography.com/writer/william-shakespeare">https://www.biography.com/writer/william-shakespeare</a>

		<p>Conversations with colleagues/faculty in the department</p> <p>(Draft questions – group work)</p>
<p>5</p> <p>Feb. 23</p>		<p>- Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders (eds.), <i>Biography in Theory: Key Texts with Commentaries</i> (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Edward Saunders, “Introduction: Theory of Biography or Biography in Theory,” 1–8.</li> <li>2. Samuel Johnson, “The Rambler 60 (13 October 1750)” and “The Idler 24 (24 November 1759),” 9–14.</li> <li>3. Caitríona Ní Dhúill, “Samuel Johnson’s Advice to Biographers,” 15–18.</li> </ol> <p>- <i>The Literary Encyclopedia</i>: “Samuel Johnson”  <a href="https://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&amp;UID=2387">https://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&amp;UID=2387</a></p> <p>- Johnson’s House,  <a href="https://www.drjohnsonshouse.org/index.html#">https://www.drjohnsonshouse.org/index.html#</a></p>
<p>Feb. 25</p>		<p>- Leo Damrosch, <i>The Club: Johnson, Boswell, and the Friends Who Shaped an Age</i> (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2019), 1–137, 403–419.</p> <p>Reading response 2</p>
<p>6</p> <p>March 2</p> <p>March 4</p>	<p>“Betwixt and between”</p>	<p>- Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders (eds.), <i>Biography in Theory: Key Texts with Commentaries</i> (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Virginia Woolf, “The New Biography (1927)” and “The Art of Biography (1939),” 119–130.</li> <li>2. Manfred Mittermayer, “The Biographical Craft: Virginia Woolf’s Contributions to the Theory of Biography,” 131–135.</li> </ol> <p>3.1 Research paper: draft title and abstract</p>
<p>7</p> <p>March 9</p> <p>March 11</p>		<p>- Virginia Woolf, <i>Orlando</i> (1928; Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1998),  <a href="https://onemorelibrary.com/index.php/en/books/liter">https://onemorelibrary.com/index.php/en/books/liter</a></p>

		<p><a href="https://www.oxfordjournals.org/lookup/book/engli.../orlando-a-biography-2174">ature/book/english-literature-172/orlando-a-biography-2174</a>.</p> <p>- Sally Potter, <i>Orlando</i>, film, 1992, 93 min., selection.</p> <p><a href="https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107756/?ref=vp_ba...ck">https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107756/?ref=vp_ba...ck</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSEpv1GuQOo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSEpv1GuQOo</a></p>
<p><b>8</b></p> <p>March 16</p> <p>March 18</p>		<p>- Hermione Lee, <i>Virginia Woolf</i> (London: Vintage, 1996), chapter 1.</p> <p>Biographies of Virginia Woolf</p> <p><b>(Different approaches – group work)</b></p>
<p><b>9</b></p> <p>March 24</p> <p>March 25 (Holiday)</p>	<p><b>Anthropology and Sociology</b></p>	<p>- Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders (eds.), <i>Biography in Theory: Key Texts with Commentaries</i> (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017):</p> <p>1. James Clifford, “Hanging Up Looking Glasses at Odd Corners’: Ethnobiographical Prospects (1978),” 186–197.</p> <p>2. Edward Saunders, “Provincializing the Biographical Subject: James Clifford’s Manifesto for a ‘Less Centred’ Biography,” 198–203.</p>
<p><b>10</b></p> <p>March 30</p> <p>April 1</p>	<p><b>History and Literature</b></p>	<p>- Wilhelm Hemecker and Edward Saunders (eds.), <i>Biography in Theory: Key Texts with Commentaries</i> (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017):</p> <p>1. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Biographical Illusion (1986),” 210–216.</p> <p>2. Marie Kolkenbrock, “Life as Trajectory: Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘The Biographical Illusion’ (1986),” 217–228.</p> <p>- Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” in <i>The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism</i> ed. Vincent B. Leitch et al, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Norton, 2010), 1533–1553.</p> <p><b>Reading response 3</b></p>
<p><b>11</b></p> <p>April 6</p>		

<p>April 8</p>		<p>- Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," <i>Small Axe</i> 26 (June 2008), 1–14.</p> <p>- Omnia El Shakry, "'History without Documents': The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East," <i>American Historical Review</i> (June 2015), 920–934.</p> <p>- Sherene Seikaly, "How I Met My Great-Grandfather: Archives and the Writing of History," <i>Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East</i> 38.1 (2018), 6–20.</p> <p>3.2. Revised title and abstract, annotated bibliography</p>
<p>12 April 13 April 15</p>	<p><b>Excuse: Moving Biography and Arabic literary biographies</b></p>	<p>- Tarif Khalidi, <i>Images of Muhammad: Narratives of the Prophet in Islam across the Centuries</i> (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 1–19.</p> <p>- Marilyn Booth, <i>May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politic in Egypt</i>, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, xiii–xxxviii, 1–34, 213–330.</p>
<p>13 April 20 April 22</p>		<p>3.3. Presentations</p>
<p>14 April 27</p>		<p>3.3. Presentations</p>