

Module Title: Modernist Life Writing 2025-26

Lecturer: Dr Melissa Alexander

Year: SS

Term: MT

This module traces continuities and transformations in the conventions of life writing during the modernist period, exploring various writers' use of the genre to grapple with the limits of understanding the self and of understanding others. Addressing how the genre invokes the life of solitude and the life of society, engages with temporality and practices of memorialisation, and alternates between the obscure and the epiphanic, the module explores the variety of modern engagements with life writing and their affective dimensions. The module will begin with modernist/contemporary theorisations of life writing, provide examples of modernist memoirs, and then proceed to thematically discuss modernists' experiments with writing childhoods, the confessional or self-reflective narrative, imaginary and fictive biographies, the satirical sketch or caricature, the new biography, rewriting the lives of obscure figures from the past, and the construction of identities. Primary texts may include essayistic theorisations of life writing (such as Lytton Strachey's introduction to *Eminent Victorians*), modernists' memoirs and recollections from childhood (such as Virginia Woolf's *Sketch of the Past* and Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Scenes of Childhood*), as well as more heterogeneous works such as Walter Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, Elizabeth von Arnim's *The Solitary Summer*, excerpts from Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, May Sinclair's *The Three Sisters*, Stella Benson's *I Pose*, Somerset Maugham's *The Moon and Sixpence*, Harold Nicolson's *Some People*, and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.