



# Academic Lives: Memoir, Cultural Theory, and the University Today

*Cynthia G. Franklin*

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Since the early 1990s, there has been a proliferation of memoirs by tenured humanities professors. Although the memoir form has been discussed within the flourishing field of lifewriting, academic memoirs have received little critical scrutiny. Based on close readings of memoirs by such academics as Michael Berube, Cathy Davidson, Jane Gallop, bell hooks, Edward Said, Eve Sedgwick, Jane Tompkins, and Marianne Torgovnick, *Academic Lives* considers why so many professors write memoirs and what cultural capital they carry. Cynthia G. Franklin finds that academic memoirs provide unparalleled ways to unmask the workings of the academy at a time when it is dealing with a range of crises, including attacks on intellectual freedom, discontentment with the academic star system, and budget cuts.

Franklin considers how academic memoirs have engaged with a core of defining concerns in the humanities: identity politics and the development of whiteness studies in the 1990s; the impact of postcolonial studies; feminism and concurrent anxieties about pedagogy; and disability studies and the struggle to bring together discourses on the humanities and human rights. The turn back toward humanism that Franklin finds in some academic memoirs is surreptitious or frankly nostalgic; others, however, posit a wide-ranging humanism that seeks to create space for advocacy in the academic and other institutions in which we are all unequally located. These memoirs are harbingers for the critical turn to explore interrelations among humanism, the humanities, and human rights struggles.

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