RELG 370: Spiritual Autobiography

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Course Description:
How does religion contribute to the shaping of a life, consciously or unconsciously? How, in turn, does individual life experience shape one's personal religion and religiousness? Situated in time and place, culturally bound, homo religiosus is expressed in a product of voluntary choices and involuntary influences. The course explores narratives of the self--the represented self--as formed by significant engagement with "religion" defined variously, as appropriate to individual lives.

Is it possible to know the self fully or to write about it honestly? What kind of truth can autobiography produce or "tell?" We are interested in the particular spiritual struggle or depth conveyed by the completed form of each autobiographical text. We are interested in the particular structural and stylistic decisions these writers have made in order to tell the story which reconstructs their actual life in the image they wish to publicize.

We will explore five literary "lives" (and several shorter poems) in which religion of some sort plays a significant role as a major instrument of self-definition. Autobiography is artful "life writing." As Picasso suggested, "Art is a lie that tells the truth"--skillful interpreters needed! Literary and historical background, theology, and psychological theory of personality formation will be introduced where relevant.

Learning outcomes:
Students who successfully complete this course should acquire a more discerning, critical grasp of strategizing form as well as degree of self-understanding and maturity in these authors writing about effects of religious belief in their lives.

Students will receive 30% of the information in this course from lectures, 10% from discussion, 35% from the readings, and 25% from the assignments and tests

Course Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete the course should be able to

Required Texts:

*Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce
*Waiting for God*, Simone Weil
*Sun and Steel*, Yukio Mishima
*Night*, Elie Wiesel
*Black Elk Speaks*, John Neihardt
Briggflatts, Basil Bunting (Packet, copy Pick-up)
Fatal Interview, Edna St. Vincent Millay (Packet, copy Pick-up)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Two 6-10 page essays on two of the writers discussed in class (one will form the basis of a report in class). The first due by Week 5. The second due by Week 12. (60%)

Final Exam (30%)

Grading will be on a 100-point scale as follows:
A = 94-100 / B+ = 90-93 / B = 84-89 / C+ = 80-83 / C = 74-79 / D+ = 70-73 / D = 64-69 / F = 63 or less

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Keep up with the reading. Class participation expected. (10%)

Week 1
   Introduction
   Introduction

Week 2
   The Confessions
   The Confessions

Week 3
   The Confessions
   The Confessions

Week 4
   Portrait of the Artist
   Portrait of the Artist

Week 5
   Portrait of the Artist
   Portrait of the Artist

Week 6
   Freud and Erikson on the life trajectory
   Briggflatts

Week 7
   Briggflatts
   Briggflatts

Week 8
   Black Elk Speaks
   Black Elk Speaks

Week 9
   Black Elk Speaks
   Black Elk Speaks

Week 10
   Fatal Interview
   Fatal Interview
Week 11
  Waiting for God
  Waiting for God
Week 12
  Waiting for God
  Waiting for God
Week 13
  Night
  Night
Week 14
  Night Night
  FINAL EXAM