SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

RELG 370
Professor Daniel M. Stuart
Spring 2015

Meetings: Monday/Wednesday 3:55-5:10pm
Office Hours: by appointment
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Course Overview

What are humans doing when they write about themselves? What does the genre of autobiography tell us about the human condition? How do we read literature—from various cultures and traditions—in which feelings, beliefs, and desires from the religious past and present speak to us in a personal voice? This course will take up these questions and many more as we explore a series of six autobiographies connected with Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic traditions. A close reading of these texts reveals that they are not simply works of religious importance. Rather, we will read them as works in which literary practice and convention have as much to do with what is (and is not) expressed as religious sentiments, needs, and ideologies.
Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

• describe and explain how the literary genre of autobiography functions socially, ideologically, and religiously in various cultures and traditions
• practice close reading of primary texts
• analyze primary texts from both etic and emic perspectives
• demonstrate competence in and the appropriate vocabulary for discussing and debating issues of literary, social, political, and religious relevance in autobiographical texts

Required Texts

• Links to course readings on Blackboard

Course Requirements and Grading Breakdown

• 20% Class Participation—This includes regular attendance and participation in class discussion. Attendance is mandatory, and if you miss more than four class sessions, you will lose 5% of your participation grade for every additional class missed.
• 50% Completion of six short critical reflection papers—These short reflections offer a valuable opportunity to think about the assigned readings at the end of each unit of material. You will be provided with a series of prompts to help you decide how you want to engage the topics—literary, religious, historical, or social—that have been presented as we engage the various forms of literature and religious traditions.
• 30% Final Essay: Essays will be assigned on -- and due on -- (a short guide describing what is expected for the papers will be distributed when the essay is assigned).
In-class Engagement—active engagement in the classroom forms an important part of the course. Meaningful contributions to class discussions and other in-class activities enhance everyone's learning experience. Consistent contributions can lift a student's final grade by as much as one full grade, e.g., from a B+ to an A. Students should feel free to discuss the quality of their class participation with the instructor at any point during the semester.

Note taking: Laptops and electronic devices are NOT permitted in class. This means that you cannot use your cellphone, smartphone, PDA, etc. If you use any such device during class time, you will be asked to leave and be counted as absent. Students should take notes using pen/pencil and paper.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: As students at USC, you are bound by the University of South Carolina Honor Code. All work produced for RELG 370 must be your own. The professor does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism under any circumstances. By enrolling in the course and accepting the terms of this syllabus, you indicate your acceptances of this policy. Instances of cheating will immediately result in a zero for the assignment, and the professor reserves the right to pursue more drastic action with the Office of Academic Integrity and the University administration.

Grading Scale 100-90 A; 89-87 B+; 86-80 B; 79-77 C+; 76-70 C; 69-67 D+; 66-60 D; below 60 F

Class Schedule and Assigned Readings

Week 1—Autobiography: Genre and Self-expression
Folkenflik, ed. 1993, pp. 1–20; Alter 1989, pp. 23–48

Week 2—Confession and Self-surveillance
Accounting for the self
Confessions (First half)

Week 3—Confession and Self-surveillance
Self-appraisal as didactic tool
Confessions (Second half)

Week 4—Ecstasy and Effacement
(Re)presenting a path
Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila (First half)
Week 5— **Ecstasy and Effacement**  
Writing away the self

*Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila* (Second half)

Week 6— **Zen Sickness**  
Poetic departures

*Wild Ivy* (First half)

Week 7— **Zen Sickness**  
Courting and overcoming the disease of the self

*Wild Ivy* (Second half)

Week 8— **Memory and the Miraculous**  
Prefiguring incarnation

*Autobiography of a Yogi* (First half)

Week 9— **Memory and the Miraculous**  
Composition for compassion

*Autobiography of a Yogi* (Second half)

Week 10— **Seclusion and Exile**  
Writing ritual reality

*Lord of the Dance* (First half)

Week 11— **Seclusion and Exile**  
Self-representation: tradition in modernity

*Lord of the Dance* (Second half)

Week 12— **Antiquity Imagined**  
The ethnographic self

*In an Antique Land* (First half)
**Week 13— Antiquity Imagined**  
*Othering Islam*

*In an Antique Land* (First half); **Final paper topics distributed**

**Week 14—Speaking for the self**  
*Representation and the onus of reading*


**Final Papers due:** --. Papers should be submitted in hard copy to the religious studies office on the third floor of Rutledge.