

English 316—Women’s Autobiography (Spring 2014-116 ESL)

Professor Mary Wood
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Office: 445 PLC
Hours: M 3-5, W 10:30-11:30

Goals of the Course: This course seeks to introduce students to the various forms of life writing, including autobiography, memoir, letters, journals, testimony, creative nonfiction, autobiographical fiction, and autobiographical poetry. We will examine the ways that autobiographers employ techniques to fiction and poetry to tell their life stories. We will also explore the ethics of life writing, asking how each writer defines truth and fiction. Course assignments will focus on research and writing skills, including skills in archival research and in literary and cultural analysis and interpretation.

Texts: Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*
Achy Obejas, *We Came All the Way From Cuba So You Could Dress Like This?*
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Turquoise Ledge*
Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons*
Brenda Serotte, *The Fortune Teller’s Kiss*
Kate Bornstein, *Queer and Pleasant Danger*
Cathy Song, *Land of Bliss*

Books are available at the University of Oregon Duckstore. Other readings listed below are available on the class Blackboard site.

Course Requirements:

- 1) Attendance is mandatory. The class is primarily discussion-based with some lecture, so it’s important that you come to class having done the reading listed for that particular day. Bring the reading we are discussing that day because we will refer repeatedly to the text.
- 2) **3-4-page close reading essay. Due April 28th in class.**
- 3) **Life writing archive project presentation.** In groups of 4-5, you will research unpublished life writing in University Special Collections. Each of you will present your work to the class and turn in a 1-2-page description of your part of the project. Each student will take on a clear task as part of the project, such as history and social context of the work, close reading of a particular passage, or discussion of the larger archive containing the particular work. We will discuss this project at length in class and visit Special Collections as a group. **Presentations last week of class.**
- 4) **Reading responses.** Every Monday, please turn in a one-paragraph response to the readings for the week that is just beginning. You don’t have to cover every reading for the week; that’s up to you. Just write about at least one of the readings. We’ll start this in the second week, and you may skip two during the course of the term, so you should **turn in seven altogether.**

- 5) **Final project (7 pages)**. Write a 4-page autobiography. Use any form you like, though I'd like for it to be written (since I need to evaluate and help you with your writing as part of the course). You can even make it up given that we will be discussing myriad definitions of "truth" in autobiography. After you've written it, write a 3-page analysis discussing your approach and comparing it to two works read in class. **Due Wednesday of Finals Week.**

Grade Distribution: Attendance and participation—10%; 7 weekly responses—15%; 3-4-page close reading essay—20%; Archive project and presentation—25%; Final project—30%.

READING SCHEDULE:

Histories and Forms

Monday, March 31st—Introductions.

Wed., April 2nd—Excerpt from Margery Kempe's autobiography and Jarena Lee's journal. **Blackboard.**

Friday, April 4th—Writings by Zitkala-Sa and Mary Antin, **Blackboard.**

Slave Narrative as Life Writing and Testimony

Monday, April 7th—Excerpt from *Dear Tiny Heart*, **Blackboard.**

Wed., April 9th—Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince*, first half.

Friday, April 11th—*Prince*, second half.

Nation, Family, Self

Monday, April 14th—Achy Obejas, *We Came All the Way From Cuba*, first half.

Wed., April 16th—*Cuba*, second half.

Friday, April 18th—*Cuba*, continued discussion.

Illness, Disability, and the Remaking of Identity

Monday, April 21st—Brenda Serotte, *Fortune Teller's Kiss*, first half.

Wed., April 23rd—*Fortune Teller*, second half.

Friday, April 25th—*Fortune Teller*, continued.

Graphic Memoir

Monday, April 28th—Lynda Barry, *One Hundred Demons*, first half. **Close Reading Essay Due.**

Wed., April 30th—*Demons*, second half.

Friday, May 2nd—*Demons*, continued. Guest speaker Veronica Vold, graphic novel specialist.

Story-Telling and the Undoing of Bildungsroman

Monday, May 5th—Leslie Marmon Silko, *Turquoise Ledge: A Memoir*, first third.

Wed., May 7th—*Ledge*, second third.

Friday, May 9th—*Ledge*, final third.

Life Writing and Gender

Monday, May 12th—*Ledge*, continued.

Wed., May 14th—Kate Bornstein, *A Queer and Pleasant Danger*, first half.

Friday, May 16th—*Danger*, second half. Guest speaker Sarah Ray Rondot, trans life writing specialist.

Feminist Memoir in the Twenty-First Century

Monday, May 19th—*Danger*, continued.

Wed., May 21st—Catch-up day and discussion of archive projects.

Friday, May 23rd—Excerpt from Carmen Gimenez Smith, *Bring Down the Little Birds*,
Blackboard.

Poetry as Life Writing

Monday, May 26th—No class. Memorial Day.

Wed., May 28th—Cathy Song, poems from *Land of Bliss*.

Friday, May 30th—Cathy Song, more poems.

Life Writing in the Archives

Monday, June 2nd—Presentations.

Wed., June 4th—Presentations.

Friday, June 6th—Presentations.

**No in-class final. Final project due Wednesday, June 9th, under my office door,
445 PLC, by 6 p.m.**