English 305-01: Non-Fiction Forms
Autobiography

Session: Fall 2014
MWF 2:00 - 2:50 pm
Room: SI 027
Instructor: Dr. Rahman

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Office: Simpkins 224
Office hours: Monday and Friday 9-10 am, Wednesday 8-10 am

Course Description
In this course, we will study autobiographies in which a range of authors male and female, straight and gay, American and Pakistani, write the story of their lives. Since autobiographies are often accounts of self-discovery, we will ask what these writers learn about themselves. How do they choose to represent their identities to us, the reading public? Do they depict the fragmentation of their lives, or do they insist on wholeness and integration? In addition, since outside forces shape individual lives, we will explore the ways in which family, gender, nationality, sexuality, and politics shape each of the lives we read about. We will also consider how the imagination and the life of the mind influences the life one leads. Throughout this course, we will ask ourselves what we can learn from each of these representations of human life.

Texts
Art Spiegelman. Maus I: My Father Bleeds History
Art Spiegelman. Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began
Maxine Hong Kingston. The Woman Warrior.
Gloria Anzaldua. Borderlands/La Frontera
Abida Sultaan. Memoirs of a Rebel Princess
Audre Lorde. Zami: New Spelling of my Name
You will also be expected to read a blog and articles from our library for class

Methods of Teaching and Learning
Our class will function primarily on the basis of discussion rather than lectures. While I may at times lecture, this is not a lecture class. This means that it will be very important for you to come to class prepared by having read the material carefully. The success and quality of this course is in your hands. I will expect you to raise questions, make comments, agree and disagree with each other in a respectful manner. Our discussions will help you think more deeply about the texts and eventually write better papers.

* Take readings notes, marking areas to help you understand and engage the material.
* Consider not only the texts but also the larger issues they raise.
* Interrogate the concepts and assumptions made by the reading.
* Bring 2-3 critical comments/discussion questions to class every class meeting.
*(Though I will not regularly collect these, I will spot check depending on class discussion.)
Your discussion questions should be open-ended, have multiple answers, and provoke discussion that helps us understand not only the work in question but also how the work shapes our understanding of the topic at hand. Avoid questions that can be answered with yes, no, or some other simple sentence.

**Required Work**

This course will require regular attendance and active engagement with the issues under discussion and writing. The major writing requirement of this course will be 3 formal essays of varying lengths. I expect you to bring the rough drafts of each of your formal essays to class for peer review. I also expect you to hand in your rough draft and your peer’s comments along with your final draft so that I can track your improvement as well as your peer’s editing. **I will not accept the three formal essays without a rough draft and peer's comments. As a result, you must attend all peer review classes.** Your final copy of each of the three formal papers should be examples of good writing.

Your class participation grade will comprise not only in-class discussion but also the quality of the editing that you perform for your peers. In addition, you will be required to submit 4 response letters to 4 of the memoirs mentioned above. These responses will be in the form of letters and will help you think about the books analytically and provide an informal place for you to rehearse your ideas for the formal essays. I expect you to integrate the ideas of Smith and Watson into your response letters. Because there is no final exam for this class the 7 papers you write for me (3 essays and 4 response letters) should be about at least 6 different autobiographers. In this way, you will be writing about everything we read for class.

**Breakdown of grades:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essay #1</th>
<th>3 pages or 750 words</th>
<th>10%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essay #2</td>
<td>4 pages or 1000 words</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay #3</td>
<td>5 pages or 1250 words</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Response letters</td>
<td>2 pages</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>Peer review</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Discussion; presentations</td>
<td>10%</td>
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</tbody>
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**Grading Scale**

- **A** = 93-100%
- **A-** = 90-92%
- **B+** = 87-89%
- **B** = 83-86%
- **B-** = 80-82%
- **C+** = 77-79%
- **C** = 73-76%
- **C-** = 70-72%
- **D+** = 67-69%
- **D** = 63-66%
- **D-** = 60-62%
- **F** = 59% and below
Policies

- Accommodations for special learning needs are gladly given. Contact me ASAP.
- Attendance and active participation are required. If you are absent more than twice or if you do not take part in class discussion in a way that shows me that you have done the reading, your class participation grade will suffer.
- Under-prepared students may be asked to leave class. Reading and bringing course texts is part of preparation.
- Ethical and professional conduct is required. I expect academic honesty and collegiality in class.
- Feedback from you regarding the course is welcome at any time. Contact me, put a note in my mailbox, or speak to Prof. Mark Mossmann, chair of English and Journalism.
- Keep all graded assignments. Keep track of grades.
- Late work is not accepted unless you have prior permission from me.

WIU Policies

- **ADA:** In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. For the instructor to provide the proper accommodation(s) you must obtain documentation of the need for an accommodation through Disability Support Services and provide it to the instructor. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor’s attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e. fire, tornado, etc.) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Support Services at 309-298-2512 for additional services.
- **Student Rights and Responsibilities:** [http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php](http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php)
- **Academic Integrity Policy:** Scholastic dishonesty of any kind will result in an F in the course and will be reported to CAGAS. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes scholastic dishonesty. I will also be happy to answer any questions you may have. You should also consult the University policy at [http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php](http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php)
- **Disruptive Student in Class Procedure:** [http://www.wiu.edu/policies/disrupst.php](http://www.wiu.edu/policies/disrupst.php)

Grading Criteria for Formal Papers

The final copy of your formal papers should be well-structured around a thesis, provide textual evidence for the argument and be written in standard English relatively free of mechanical errors.

An **A** paper is a tightly structured, well-written, nuanced argument which provides plenty of textual evidence to back up its claims. The first paragraph contains a clearly-articulated thesis with a roadmap briefly stating the points which will be elaborated later.

An **B** paper might provide a thesis in the first paragraph but the paper itself may not be as well-organized around that thesis. For instance, sometimes these papers do not clarify how each paragraph relates to the thesis. As a result, these papers may contain material that seems irrelevant. **B** papers are thus not as convincing as **A** papers.
A C paper might provide an argument that only reveals itself at the end of the paper. This kind of paper usually lacks a thesis in the first paragraph because the writer has not rewritten the introductory paragraph to match the final version of the paper.

A U paper is unacceptable. One reason for this might be that there is no thesis let alone an argument. Random thoughts are not a paper. Another reason might be that the thesis is completely negated by the paper itself. Or, sometimes too many mechanical errors will make it impossible for the paper to argue a thesis because the reader can’t follow the writer’s thoughts. You will have the option of rewriting the first and second papers within one week to bring your grade up to a C.

The U paper and the University Writing Center
The University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available at the Writing Center is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The University Writing Center is located in Simpkins Hall 025 and Malpass Library 3rd floor. Call for an appointment (298-2815) and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.

If you earn a U on either the first or second formal paper, you must meet with me to discuss how to improve. I will recommend that you go to the writing center for help in rewriting the paper which will be due in a week. This will help you bring your grade up to a C. If you do not meet with me and rewrite within a week, you will receive the original F for that paper.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1: Definitions and Distinctions
25 August 2014: Introduction
27 August 2014: Smith and Watson. pages 1-19
29 August 2014: Maxine Hong Kingston. *The Woman Warrior.* pages 1-16

Week 2: Asian American memoir
1 September 2014: *Labour Day; no class*
3 September 2014: Maxine Hong Kingston. *The Woman Warrior.* pages 17-53

Week 3: Memory
8 September 2014: Maxine Hong Kingston. *The Woman Warrior.* pages 113-160
12 September 2014: Smith and Watson. pages 21-49 Letter #1 Due

Week 4: Blogs as memoir
15 September 2014: Margaretheo.com/blog. “Outing” “Why is it great to be a queer icon?”
19 September 2014: Peer Review; Essay #1 Rough Draft Due

Week 5: African American memoir
22 September 2014: Smith and Watson. pages 63-88 Essay #1 Due
24 September 2014: Audre Lorde. Zami pages 1-42
26 September 2014: Audre Lorde. Zami pages 42-85

Week 6: Biomythography
29 September 2014: Audre Lorde. Zami pages 85-124
1 October 2014: Audre Lorde. Zami pages 124-176
3 October 2014: Audre Lorde. Zami pages 176-214

Week 7: Intersectional Identities
6 October 2014: Audre Lorde. Zami pages 214-256 Letter #2 Due
10 October 2014: Fall Break; no class

Week 8: Nation, Citizenship, and Life-Writing

Week 9: Pakistani memoir

Week 10: The Visual-Verbal-Virtual Contexts of Life Narrative
27 October 2014: Smith and Watson pages 167-191
31 October 2014: Peer Review; Essay #2 Rough Draft Due

Week 11: Jewish American memoir
3 November 2014: Art Spiegelman. Maus I pages 1-40 Essay #2 Due
5 November 2014: Art Spiegelman. Maus I pages 41-93
7 November 2014: Art Spiegelman. Maus I pages 95-159

Week 12: Autographics
10 November 2014: Art Spiegelman. Maus II pages 1-37
14 November 2014: Art Spiegelman. Maus II pages 75-100 Letter #3 Due

Week 13: Acts of Witnessing
17 November 2014: Art Spiegelman. Maus II pages 101-117
19 November 2014: Peer Review; Essay #3 Rough Draft Due

24-28 November 2014: Thanksgiving Break; no classes

Week 14: Chicana memoir
1 December 2014: Smith and Watson pages 213-234 Essay #3 Final Draft Due
3 December 2014: Gloria Anzaldua. Borderlands pages 1-45
5 December 2014: Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands* pages 47-86

Week 15: Wrap-Up and concluding discussion
8 December 2014: Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands* pages 87-135
10 December 2014: Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands* pages 137-181
12 December 2014: Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands* pages 182-225 Letter #4 Due