

**Shaping Lives:
American Indian Life Narratives**
Spring 2006

English 3344-001 Office hours: T/TH 3:30-5 or by apt.; 405 Carlisle Hall
Dr. Roemer Please schedule all appointments.
T/TH: 11-12:20 Phone: 817-272-2729; please leave name and phone number.
Preston Hall 100 roemer@uta.edu (note: I prefer phone messages.)

Nature of the Course

Autobiography is one of the most popular and most controversial forms of Native American literature. There are hundreds of compelling collaborative and single-authored narratives. There are also fake life stories and misleading as-told-to collaborations between Native and non-Natives that have mislead generations of readers. Instead of emphasizing the latter, the course focuses on life narratives performed or written, primarily in English, by American Indians in the 18th, 19th, and especially the 20th centuries. The focus invites questions particular to Native American writing--for instance, concepts of self that blur communal and individual boundaries and negotiations between written and oral literature, as well as issues relevant to all written creations of "lives" -- for example: how the selection, ordering, and interpretation of experiences, how the intended audiences and presumed intentions of the author/performer, and how literary forms define the written or performative self. Form will be especially important to our discussions (hence the title "Shaping Lives.") We discuss the self defined in song, pictograph, and oral narrative; in Christian conversion and other forms of assimilation narratives; in blends of cultural history, natural history and protest manifestos; in collaborations between two Indians; in collections of mythic recreations, non-fiction, fiction, poetry, and visual images (including photography); and in different types of films (readings, interviews, performed vignettes, feature-length). I also suggest the diversity of the literature by including personae as young as six-year old and (almost) as old as a century, men and women from different tribes, eras, and regions; and narrative times-spans as broad as several centuries and as concentrated as a pregnancy and birth.

Goals/Assessment

Students who complete the readings and assignments successfully will: (1) be acquainted with 13 significant autobiographical texts written by Native Americans, as well as a beginning knowledge of how song, story, visual images, and four films represent Native lives; (2) have knowledge of the importance of the various forms of written and performed literature indicated above; (3) be able to address the specific and general autobiographical issues listed above; (4) have experience representing their lives in two forms of written expression; and (5) have demonstrated the ability to write a brief research paper on American Indian autobiography.

For methods of achieving these goals and evaluating student performance, see the Topics, Readings, Tentative Schedule; Examinations; Exercises; Papers; and Approximate Grading Weights sections.
Required Readings/Viewing (CP = course packet)

CP: Wong

<http://fa.culty.csusb.edu/dcarlson/AmericanIndianAutobiography/index.html>

By This Song I Walk [film shown in class]

CP: Occom, Apess, Copway, Winnemucca

Zitkala-Sa, *American Indian Stories*

CP: Eastman, Standing Bear

Mathews, *Talking to the Moon*

Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

CP: Deloria

Silko, *Storyteller*

Running on the Edge of the Rainbow [film shown in class]

Sarris, *Mabel McKay*

Erdrich, *Blue Jay's Dance*

Naturally Native [film shown in class]

Sun, Moon, and Feather [film shown in class]

Topics, Readings, Tentative Schedule

To indicate changes over time and the importance of historical/cultural contexts, I organized the course materials chronologically. As Hertha Wong indicates in her essay, there are many other approaches to organization (e.g., form, region, tribes, gender).

1/17, 19 Introductions: to the Course, to American Indian History, to American Indian Literatures, and to American Indian Life Narratives

Readings: Handouts; CP (Wong); David Carlson's Web site (see above)

1/19 Identity Experiment Due

Singing, Telling, and Drawing the Self

1/19 Non-Written Forms of Life Narrative
Reading/Viewing: CP (Wong); *By This Song I Walk* (in Navajo)

1/24 Short-Answer Exam on Wong's Essay

Written Selves Transformed: Continuity, Assimilation, Resistance

1/24,26 18th- and 19th-Century Childhood and Adult Conversions from the Northeast
Readings: CP (Occom, Apress, Copway)

1/31,2/2 The Self as Historical / Tribal Protest from the Far West
Reading: CP (Winnemucca)

2/7, 9,14 Gender and Immersion Transformation: Boarding-School Cases Studies from "Dakota Territories"
Readings: the Forward and first three chapters of Zitkala Sa's *American Indian Stories*; CP (Eastman, Standing Bear)

2/16 Essay Exam

Life "Takes Place" (in Oklahoma) [Momaday quote]

2/21,23,28 Roots Deeper than Walden Pond: Osage Blackjack & Prairie Country
Reading: Mathews' *Talking to the Moon*

3/2,7,9 Roots in a Hollow Log that Speaks Three Voices
Reading: Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

3/13-19 Spring Break

3/21 Essay Exam

3/23 Three-Voice Identity Exercise Due

Autobiography & Manifesto

3/23 A Dedicated Life
Reading: CP (Deloria)

Multi-Media Pueblo Live(s)

3/[23],28,30, The Selves of a "Laguna Woman"
4/4 Reading/Viewing: Silko's *Storyteller*; *Running on the Edge of the Rainbow* [film]

The Vitality of Old and New Lives

4/[6], 11,13 Indian / Indian: A California Collaboration
Reading: Sarris's *Mabel McKay*

4/13 Research Paper Prospectus Due

4/18,20,25 Of Bodies and Birthing: The Miraculous in the Mundane

Reading: Erdrich's *Blue Jay's Dance*

Indian Women's Lives on Stage and in Film, Coast to Coast

- 4/27; [5/2] One Life-in-Three of a California Suburban Woman
Viewing: Valerie Red Horse's *Naturally Native* [film]
- 5/2 Brooklyn, Via Virginia and the Caribbean
Viewing: Spider Woman Theater's *Sun, Moon, Feather* [film]
- 5/4 Review for Final
- 5/9 Final Exam**

Examinations

The first exam will be a short answer / identification exam based on a list of terms, names, and concepts from Wong's essay. The other exams will have two parts. The first will be a closed-book short-answer / identification exam drawn from the readings and classes. The second part will be an open-book essay exam. The question(s) will address one or more of the issues mentioned in the "Nature of the Course" section of the syllabus. The class before the exam I will distribute a detailed study guide to both parts of the exam. Grading criteria for the essays: how well you directly address the question posed, how well you support your arguments with relevant examples, and the logic of your argument.

Exercises

The first exercise (due 1/19) will be a (pass/fail) outline explained during the first class. The second (due 3/23) will be a personal application of Momaday's three-voice approach to written identity creation: i.e., you will use three voices to create a section similar to one of Momaday's 24 sections using stories, "facts," and memories from your own life. I will distribute a detailed guide and samples.

Research Paper

Length: approximately 2,000 words (approximately eight pages); due date: 5/4.

Criteria: The paper should demonstrate your ability: (1) to select a focus appropriate for the paper length and an argument that you can justify as being significant to readers; (2) to integrate your own ideas and the ideas of scholars and critics (at least five); i.e., enter the critical conversation about the text(s); (3) to support arguments adequately and to organize them in logical and convincing ways; (4) to master basic mechanics of writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.). (The Writing Center, 4th floor Library, can offer assistance. Bring this syllabus to inform them about the paper.) The focus should be strongly influenced by the length requirement. Too broad a focus will invite a superficial paper; focusing too narrowly can lead to repetition. Students may wish to concentrate on one text or to do a comparative study.

Although the prospectus (due 4/13) will be graded, it should not be perceived as a straight jacket. Major changes are appropriate if they will improve the quality of the paper. The prospectus (approximately 1 - 3 pages typed) must include:

1. A one-to-three sentence statement of the thesis that defines the primary question(s) addressed and the focus of the paper.
2. A one-to-four sentence statement of the significance of the thesis/question.
3. A one-to-five sentence statement of the anticipated method(s) used (e.g., biographical, feminist, ethnic studies, New Critical) and why the method(s) are appropriate.
4. A one-to-five sentence initial and tentative description of the organization of the paper.
5. A brief, short-title list that indicates the major critical sources (indicate any problems anticipated obtaining these sources).

Wong's "major secondary sources" list is a good place to begin looking for critical sources on autobiography. One book she does not list (because it is "brand new") is David J. Carlson's *Sovereign Selves: American Indian Autobiography and the Law* (Urbana: U of Illinois UP, 2005). His Web site (listed under "Required Readings / Viewings" will also be valuable as are two general Web sites on Native American literatures: <http://ipl.si.umich.edu/div/natam> and the Web site for the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures (ASAIL): <http://oncampus.richmond.edu/faculty/asail>. Another useful initial site is <http://nativeauthor.com>.

The MultiCultural Collection on the second floor of the Central Library is an excellent place to search for written and Internet sources.

Approximate Grading Weights

Short Answer Exam 5%
Two Exercises 10%

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| First essay Exam | 20% |
| Second Essay Exam | 15% |
| Final Exam | 20% |
| Research Paper | 30% (5% for prospectus) |

Constructive Warnings

Professors are no longer allowed to drop students for excessive absences. If you plan to withdraw from the course, you must follow University procedures. If you do not, you will receive an F for the semester. Excessive unexcused absences (more than FIVE classes) will affect your grade (half grade for each set of FIVE absences), since the group discussions / presentations are a significant part of the class time.

In the past I have had few problems with plagiarism or other forms of academic dishonesty. An excellent definition of plagiarism is included in the *MLA Handbook*, 6th ed. (Chapter 2). Instances of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will be turned over to the office of the Associate Vice-President for Student Affairs.

Encouragement

Intangible grading factors: improvement and consistent class participation (especially in the group discussions and presentations) have turned many a C+ into a B- and quite a few B+s into A-s. I am very willing to accommodate disabled students. Early in the semester, they should present their authorized documents from appropriate University offices. Students needing academic or personal counseling should consult the English Undergraduate Advisor and if necessary the Office of Student Success Programs (817-272-6107)