

**Shaping Lives:
American Indian Life Narratives**
Spring 2007

English 6339-001 Office hours: T/TH 2-3:30 or by apt.; 405 Carlisle Hall
Instructor: Dr. Roemer Please schedule all appointments.
T 6-8:50PM Phone: 817-272-2729; please leave name and phone number.
Room: 100 Preston 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 collaborations, the course, after a brief introduction to American Indian literatures, focuses on life narratives performed or written, primarily in English, by American Indians in the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, especially the 20th. We will, however, discuss the best-known Indian-white collaboration, *Black Elk Speaks*. 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, in non-fiction (essay and book length), fiction, poetry, and visual images (including photography); on the Internet; and in different types of films (readings, commentary, performed vignettes, feature-length films). 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 (outcomes)/Assessment

Students who complete the readings and assignments successfully will: (1) be acquainted with more than 30 significant autobiographical texts written or performed by Native Americans, as well as (2) a knowledge of how different forms of written, written/visual (the Internet) and non-written forms of expression (song, story, visual images, and four films) represent Native lives; (3) be able to address the specific and general autobiographical issues listed above; (4) have experience representing their lives in an identity experiment; and (5) have demonstrated the ability to write 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; R = on reserve)
(in the order we will discuss them)

Ruoff, *American Indian Literatures* (especially Pt. 1)
R: Roemer, "Timeline"
CP: Huhndorf, "Literature and Politics of Native American Studies"
CP: Wong, "Native American Life Writing"
R: Johnson, "Imagining Self"
<http://faculty.csusb.edu/dcarlson/AmericanIndianAutobiography/index.html>
By This Song I Walk (available at <http://wordsandplace.arizona.edu/>)
CP: Ocom, Apess, Copway, Winnemucca
Zitkala-Sa, selections from *American Indian Stories*
CP: Eastman, Standing Bear
Neihardt & Nicholas Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks*
CP: Brumble, "Editors, Ghosts, and Amanuenses"
CP: Deloria
Mathews, *Talking to the Moon*
R: Warrior, "Talking to the Moon When No One Listens"
Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
Silko, *Storyteller*
CP: Krupat, [monologue and dialogue / *Storyteller*]
Running on the Edge of the Rainbow (available at <http://wordsandplace.arizona.edu/>)
Sarris, *Mabel McKay*
Krupat and Swann, selections from *I Tell You Now*
R: Howe, "My Uncles, My Mothers, Myself"
Alexie, *The Business of Fancydancing*
CP: Alexie, "Unauthorized Autobiography of Me"
The Business of Fancydancing (the film)
www.ShermanAlexie.com

Erdrich, *Blue Jay's Dance*
Naturally Native [Valerie Red-Horse film shown in class]
www.naturallynative.com
Sun, Moon, and Feather [Spider Woman Theater film shown in class]

Topics, Readings, Tentative Schedule

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

1/16, 23 Introductions: to the Course, to American Indian History, to American Indian Literatures, and to American Indian Life Narratives

Readings: Handouts (e.g., terminology; information on fake autobiographies; guidelines for identity experiment); Ruoff (Part 1), Roemer, "Timeline," CP (Huhndorf, Wong); R (Johnson); David Carlson's Web site (see above)

1/23 Identity Experiment Due

Singing, Telling, and Drawing the Self

1/[23], 30 Non-Written Forms of Life Narrative

Reading/Viewing: CP (Wong); *By This Song I Walk* (in Navajo; see the wordsandplace Web site above, which includes background reading)

Written Selves Transformed: Continuity, Assimilation, Resistance

1/30 18th- and 19th-Century Childhood and Adult Conversions from the Northeast

Readings: CP (Occom, Apress, Copway)

2/6 The Self as Historical / Tribal Protest from the Far West

Reading: CP (Winnemucca)

2/6, 13 Dakota Territories' Transformation: Changed Selves through Visions, Boarding Schools, and Activism

Readings: *Black Elk Speaks*; CP (Brumble); the Forward and first three chapters of Zitkala Sa's *American Indian Stories*; CP (Eastman, Standing Bear, Deloria)

2/13 Distribute First Take-Home Exam

2/20 Take-Home Exam Due

Life "Takes Place" (in Oklahoma)

2/20 Roots Deeper than Walden Pond: Osage Blackjack & Prairie Country

Reading: Mathews' *Talking to the Moon*; R (Warrior)

2/27 Roots in a Hollow Log that Speaks Three Voices

Reading/Viewing: Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain*; slides; handouts

Multi-Media Pueblo Live(s)

3/6 The Selves of a "Laguna Woman"

Reading/Viewing: Silko's *Storyteller*; *Running on the Edge of the Rainbow* (filmed reading, commentary, storytelling; see wordsandplace Web site above, which includes background readings)

3/6 Distribute Second Take-Home Exam

3/12-18 Spring Break

3/20 Take-Home Exam Due

Indian / Indian Collaboration

3/20 California Lives: Rural and Urban

Reading: Sarris, *Mabel McKay*

A Tribe of Contemporary Writers

3/27; 4/3 Lives in Essay Form

Readings: Selections from *I Tell You Now*; R (Howe)

Falls Apart Male Identities

4/10, [17] Alexie in Poetry, Prose, Film, and E-Space

Reading / Viewing: Alexie, *Business of Fancydancing*; "Unauthorized Autobiography"; *Business of Fancydancing* (film); www.ShermanAlexie.com

Female Identities: From Coast to Coast and in the Middle (Womb)

4/17, [24] Of Bodies and Birthing: The Miraculous in the Mundane

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

4/24 A Feature-Length One-Life-in-Three of a California Suburban Woman

Viewing: Valerie Red Horse's *Naturally Native* (film); www.naturallynative.com

4/[24]; 5/1 Brooklyn, Via Virginia and the Caribbean

Viewing: Spider Woman Theater's *Sun, Moon, Feather* (film)

5/1 Research Paper Due

5/1 Review for In-Class Exam

5/8 In-class Exam

Examinations

The take-home essays (approx. 1500 words) and the in-class questions will address one or more of the issues mentioned in the "Nature of the Course" section of the syllabus as applied to several of the readings. The class before the last exam I will distribute a detailed study guide. Grading criteria for the essays: how well you directly address the question posed, how well you support your arguments with relevant examples from the primary and, where relevant, the critical sources, and the logic and coherence of your argument. I will expect the essays (especially the take-homes) to be relatively free of mechanical problems (e.g., spelling, punctuation, grammar.).

Exercise

The identity experiment (due 1/23) will be a (pass/fail) exercise in outline form explained during the first class.

Research Paper

Length: approximately 3750-5000 words (approximately 15-20 pages); due date: 5/1.

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, 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 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 I am not requiring a prospectus for the paper, the following outline should help you to organize your composing and researching. Before you plunge into significant drafting, you should be able to draft:

1. A one-to-four sentence statement of the thesis that defines the primary question(s) addressed and the focus of the paper in light of the

length requirement.

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 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; if the problems are great, the paper might not be feasible for a one semester course).

Wong's "major secondary sources" list is a good place to begin looking for critical sources on autobiography. Two books she does not list (because they appeared after her essay was in press) are David J. Carlson's *Sovereign Selves: American Indian Autobiography and the Law* (Urbana: U of Illinois UP, 2005). Carlson's Web site (listed under "Required Readings / Viewings") will also be valuable. Kendall Johnson's substantial essay "Imagining Self" (see above) appeared in Eric Cheyfitz's *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States Since 1945* (New York: Columbia UP, 2006). Two useful general Web sites are: <<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>>. For a selected list of resources for studying American Indian literatures, see the listing at the end of the syllabus.

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

Approximate Grading Weights

First Take-Home Exam	20%
Second Take-Home Exam	20%
In-Class Exam	20%
Research Paper	40%

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 automatically receive an F for the semester. Excessive unexcused absences (more than three classes) will affect your grade (half grade for each set of three 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 Graduate Advisor and, if necessary, the Office of Student Success Programs (817-272-6107)

Selected List of American Indian Literatures Resources

Reference resources/surveys: A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, *American Indian Literatures* (a revised ed. is forthcoming); Kenneth Roemer and Joy Porter, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*; Kathy J. Whitson, *Native American Literatures*; Roemer, ed., *Native American Writers of the United States* (Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 175); Andrew Wiget, ed., *Handbook of Native American Literature*; Wiget, *Native American Literature*; Janet Witalec, ed., *Native North American Literature*; Suzanne Eversten Lindquist, *Native American Literatures*; Daniel Littlefield and James Parins, *A Bibliography of Native American Writers*; H. David Brumble, *An Annotated Bibliography of American Indian and Eskimo Autobiographies*; Louis Owens & Tom Collonese, *American Indian Novelists*; Kay Juricek and Kelly Morgan, *Contemporary Native American Authors*. **Historical and literary cultural / political / legal contexts:** Jack Utter, *American Indians* (rev. ed.); Shari Huhndorf, *Going Native*; Craig Womack's *Red on Red*; Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live; Other Words*; Louis Owens, *Mixedblood Messages*; Chad Allen, *Blood Narratives*; Robert Dale Parker, *The Invention of Native American Literature*; Eric Cheyfitz, ed., *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States Since 1945*. **Literary critical sources (general)** Abraham Chapman, ed., *Literature of the American Indian*; Paula Gunn Allen, ed., *Studies in American Indian Literature*; *The Sacred Hoop*; Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance*; Arnold Krupat, *Voice in the Margin*; *Ethnocriticism*; *The Turn to the Native*; David Murray, *Forked Tongues*; Brian Swann, ed., *Recovering the Word and* (with Krupat) *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism*; Roger Dunmore, *Earth's Mind*; **(regional)** Eric Gary Anderson, *American Indian Literature and the Southwest*; **(oral literatures)** William M. Clements, *Native American Verbal Art*; Karl Kroeber, ed., *Traditional Literature of the American Indian*; Kroeber, *Artistry in Native American Myths*; Jarold Ramsey, *Reading the Fire*; Dell Hymes, *In Vane I Tried to Tell You*; Brian Swann, ed., *Smoothing the Ground*; Clements, *Oratory in Native North America*; **(life narratives)** H. David Brumble, *American Indian Autobiography*; Arnold Krupat, *For Those Who Come After*; Hertha Wong, *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years*; Kay Sands, *Telling a Good One*; David Carlson, *Sovereign Selves*; **(poetry written in English)** Michael Castro, *Interpreting the Indian*; Kenneth Lincoln, *Sing With the Heart of the Bear*; Norma Wilson, *Native American Poetry*, Robin Riley Fast, *The Heart as a Drum*; **(drama)** Hanay Geiogamah, ed., *New Native American Drama; Stories of Our Way*; Mimi

Gisolphi D'Aponte, ed., *An Anthology of Native American Plays*; **(fiction)** Charles Larson, *American Indian Fiction*, Louis Owens, *Other Destinies*, Richard Fleck, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*, James Ruppert, *Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction*, Catherine Rainwater, *Dreams of Fiery Stars*, Sid Larsen, *Captive in the Middle*, Susan Berry Brill de Ramirez, *Contemporary American Indian Literatures and the Oral Tradition*, Joni Adamson's *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ethnocriticism*; **(non-fiction)** Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets; The People and the Word*; Maureen Kronkle, *Writing Indian Nations*; **(children's literature)** Doris Seale and Beverly Slapin, ed., *A Broken Flute*. Important **journals** include: *SAIL (Studies in American Indian Literatures)*, which has its own excellent Web sites (see below), *American Indian Culture and Research Journal (AICRJ)*, *American Indian Quarterly (AIQ)*, and *Wicazo Sa Review*. Some excellent articles have also appeared in less specialized journals such as *Critical Inquiry*, *College English*, *American Literary History*, *PMLA*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, and *American Literature*. **Surveys of scholarship**: Elvira Pulitano, *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*; Shari Hudendorf, "Literature and Politics of Native American Studies." *PMLA* 120 (2005): 1618-26; Philip Deloria, "American Indians, American Studies, and the ASA." *American Quarterly* 55 (2003): 669-702. **Bibliographical guides** to articles and books on specific authors can be found in recent issues of *American Literary Scholarship*, the *PMLA Bibliographies*, *SAIL*, *AICRJ*. Many **Web sites** can provide information on Native writers in general and on specific authors. Besides the *SAIL* site mentioned above (<<http://oncampus.richmond.edu/faculty/ASAIL/>>), there is a good Listserv for ASAIL members. One of the best general sites is <www.anpa.ualr.edu>, the American Native Press Archives. Another excellent Web site is the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers (<www.wordcraftcircle.org/>). For children's literature oyate@oyate.org. **Individual author books** include the new MLA *Approaches to Teaching* volume on Erdrich and an earlier volume on Momaday. For a sampling of the hundreds of **individual author Web sites**, see <www.google.com>. See also: <nativeauthor.com>, <www.ipl.org/ref/native/>, <www.english.uiuc.edu/maps> (e.g., Momaday homepage), and <users.mwci.net/~lapoz/MBio.html>. There is a general "American Indian Resources" Web site: <jupiter.lang.osaka-u.ac.jp/~krkvis/naindex.html>. The Fall 1998 issue of *Wicazo Sa* (13.2) offers an outdated but useful overview of Internet resources in Native American studies. For information on American Indian literatures and the American literature canon, see <www.uta.edu/english/roemer/ctt> -- a resource guide for American literature anthologies.