

T D 387D PERFORMING AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Instructor: Dr. Lynn C. Miller

TEXTS:

Cast of One by John S. Gentile. Urbana: U of Illinois P., 1989.

Autobiography & Postmodernism ed. by K. Ashley, L. Gilmore, & G. Peters. Boston: U. of MA Press, 1994.

Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader. Ed. By Sidonie Smith & Julie Watson. Wisconsin, 1998.

ADDITIONAL READINGS (AVAILABLE FROM LONGHORN COPIES):

From Voices Made Flesh ed. By Miller, Taylor, and Carver:

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----Editors' Introduction

--Elyse Pineau, "Intimate Partners"

--Carolyn Gage, "The Last Reading of Charlotte Cushman"

--Stacy Wolf, "Desire in Evidence"

"Passenger on the Ship of Fools" by Laura Furman and Lynn C. Miller

"Autobiography: From Different Poetics to a Poetics of Difference"
by Shirley Neuman. From Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to
Critical Practice, U of Toronto P, 1992, ed. by Marlene Kadar:

"The Autobiographical Process" by Jerome Bruner. From The Culture
of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation ed., by
Robert Folkenflik, Stanford U Press, 1993.

"Renaissance Humanism and the Misbegotten Man" by Sidonie Smith
from *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*, U of Indiana P, 1987.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Jan. 14 introduction: autobiography, biography, performance art

21 MLK day

28 1950 to the present in *Cast of One*, pp. 118–199; Pineau,
"Intimate Partners" and Bruner essay (packet)

Feb. 4 Performance I and discussion

11 "Identity's body" in *Postmodernism*; editors' introduction to
Voices Made Flesh (packet); Smith, "Performativity..." and Benstock,
"Authorizing the Autobiographical" (Smith reader)

18 Gilmore and Bergland essays in *Postmodernism*; "Charlotte
Cushman" (packet)

25 reports; Butler, "Bodies that Matter" (Smith reader)

Mar. 4 rehearsal for Performance II (in pairs); no formal class

11 Spring break

18 Performance II and discussion

25 reports

Apr. 1 paper due; reports

8 Wolf, "Desire in Evidence" and Neumann essay (packet)

15 Irene Worth, guest artist (read "Passenger on the Ship of Fools"
in packet as preparation)

22 final projects

Apr 29 final projects

NOTE: ALL PERFORMANCES WILL BE MEMORIZED; TEXTS CAN BE USED ONSTAGE AT TIMES APPROPRIATE TO CONTEXT/PRODUCTION CONCEPT.

Some major critical/theoretical issues the class will explore:

--the conflation/differences between the forms of autobiography and biography in literary texts and in performance texts;

--the overlaps between performance art, biographical plays/performances, and the performance of autobiography and auto/biography;

--what constitutes autobiography as a genre? particularly autobiographical performance?

--the construction/deconstruction of identity(ies) inherent in autobiography and biography;

--strategies for creating and critiquing autobiographical performance.

Some performance issues the class will consider about autobiography:

--what is the context, and the subject-performer-audience relationship, of your particular performance?

--what time period are you presenting? What is your position (critical lens) on the time?

--what are the central truths/selves you wish to present about the figure you've chosen? how can you best present these selves?

--what is the style of your performance? Do you wish to construct a realistic context for a particular period? deconstruct the figure/period in some way?

-- what are your considerations for a set, given the context and historical period you've chosen? Will you require music, multi-media, etc.?

--after considering the interpretive possibilities, what do you wish your audience to go away from your performance knowing about your figure?

ASSIGNMENTS:

Performance I: Create an autobiographical text that explores your relationship to the figure you are researching for performance. This performance is your autobiographical rendering of the particular challenges and perspective you bring to your subject. This assignment will highlight the frames you try on as you focus on your subject. Our objective is to raise issues, challenges, alternative strategies in the reading/performance of autobiography.

15%

Report: This will be a progress report of the process you're undergoing as you research and prepare a script for the figure you'll be performing. Summarize the major critical works and views on the figure. What are the possibilities for constructing a performance of this figure? What are the various strategies you could employ in performing this persona? These include audience considerations (such as, what is your intention, to teach the audience historically about the figure, to create a specific cultural milieu, to critique the figure, etc.; what is your performance context, etc.).

This is an opportunity to discuss performance choices and problems with the class and to get class feedback.

10%

Paper: The written, expanded version of your oral report. Instead of a progress report, the paper explores your narrative strategies, selection of materials, audience/context considerations, central issues/challenges in performing your figure, your particular perspective on the figure, , and your own views on the issues it raises for you on auto/biography, particularly the performance of auto/biography. Length of paper @8-12 pages; provide a handout for class.

20%

Performance II: Prepare an approximately 8 minute performance from autobiographical/biographical material (can include letters, diaries, published autobiography, interviews, taped interviews, etc.). The figure you perform can be either contemporary or historical. You can put yourself into this performance either implicitly or explicitly.

15%

Performance III: Final performance of your accumulated work for the semester. Time limit: 20 minutes.

20%

Response to performances II and III: Each performer will receive an in-class critique of their work in progress by two students in the class. This response is intended to be purely constructive, an aid to the resolution of performance choices in the performance. The response needs to be detailed and specific, covering issues like: performance context, choices of how to portray the era and the character, script decisions, audience considerations, etc.

10%

Script: Turn in your completed script for your final performance. Include a bibliography and any stage directions or notes that clarify the script to a reader.

10%

Required performance: Irene Worth performing "Passenger on the Ship of Fools" (about Katherine Anne Porter) on Ap. 16 at 7:30
Brockett Theatre

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READINGS:

Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts by Nancy K. Miller. Routledge, 1991.

Studies in Autobiography, ed. by James Olney. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Interpreting Women's Lives, ed. by the Personal Narratives Group. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings, ed. by Shari Benstock. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1988.

Writing a Woman's Life. Carolyn G. Heilbrun. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.

Women's Autobiography. Estelle C. Jelinek. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.

A Poetic's of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation. by Sidonie Smith. U of Indiana P, 1987; Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body. by Sidonie Smith. U of Indiana P, 1993.

Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice. ed. Marlene Kadar. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992.

The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre.

William C. Spengemann. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, pp. 170-213, 244-45.

Estelle C. Jelinek, intro. from The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986.

Special issues of Text and Performance Quarterly: "Performing Autobiography" October, 1997 and "Solo Performance," Jan. 2000.

"Re-Presenting Women Writers Onstage: A Retrospective to the Present" by Anita Plath Helle from Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre, U of Michigan P, 1989 ed. by Lynda Hart.

"Witness to the Self: The Autobiographical Impulse in Performance Studies" by Lynn C. Miller from Communication: Views from the Helm for the 21st Century. Allyn & Bacon: 1998.

