

Fall 2016 REL/SAS 123 Mon-Wed 3:45-5:05pm @ HL 211

Religious Auto/Biography

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Office Hours: Mon 10:15-12:15 and by appointment, HL 514

In this course we will examine how people reflect on themselves and their life experiences, how they contemplate larger questions of life and how they write about it. We will explore why the act of writing itself deserves particular attention. We will read one full book (*Gandhi: An Autobiography - The Story of My Experiments with Truth*) and excerpts from autobiographies written in different periods, belonging to different geographies and traditions. What makes these texts religious is not their authors, who may or may not be religious. Rather, what is *religious* about these texts is that they all tackle questions about religion, existence, meaning and the self.

This course fulfills the requirement for writing-intensive course outside of the Writing Program.

Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will

- develop critical and analytical skills by reading and understanding literary works about religion and religious experience
- become familiar with some of the important theoretical scholarship on the genre of autobiography
- develop their writing skills by writing different kinds of assignments (i.e. shorter, in-class assignments such as responses, and longer, out-of-class assignments such as essays) and revising their work with the feedback from the instructor on different facets of their writing

Required Texts

All texts will be available on Blackboard.

You can access in e-book format to the complete book *Gandhi: An Autobiography - The Story of My Experiments with Truth* through Syracuse University Library by logging in with your NetID:

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu.libezproxy2.syr.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb02431.0001.001>

A hard copy of the book will also be available on 2-hour Reserve at the Bird Library.

Please print all the texts and bring them to class. Students who do not have the hard copies of the assigned texts will be marked absent for that day.

Policy on Electronic Devices

Students may use electronic devices during class time on the dates that we discuss Gandhi in order to access the e-book in class. Electronic devices are not allowed in any other class meetings.

ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade will be based on:

- 1) Four Responses: 25 points
- 2) Essay: 65 points
- 3) Attendance and Active Participation: 10 points

Extra Work: Academic Research 3 points

Total: 103 points

1) Responses (25 points in total)

You will write four responses in class. Here is how much each response is worth:

1st Response: 4 points

2nd Response: 7 points

3rd Response: 7 points

4th Response: 7 points

You will write your response in the old fashion way of writing with pen on paper during class time. Each response should be 300 words (+/- 30 words). The dates of these assignments are indicated on the syllabus. I will bring questions to class on the assigned dates. You will choose one of them and answer that question in your response during class time. The questions will refer to specific points discussed in the texts as well as to class discussions. Therefore doing the readings in a timely manner and taking notes in class discussions are essential to be able to answer them.

In addition to an explanation of an aspect of the text, the questions will also ask students to explore it in a critical way. That is, you will need to offer your own critique of the text and support it with textual evidence. Spending some time reflecting on the readings is one great way to prepare for this second part. Try to recognize what jumps out at you from the text, or what sticks with you, and think about why. If no such thing happens with one particular text, then think about possible reasons. Again, you need to be grounded in that text and be specific about your answer. Such thought experiments will help you move from an explanation of the text to an exploration of it.

2) Essays (65 points in total)

You will write two Essays: 1st Essay: 1250 words (-/+ 50 words), and the 2nd Essay: 1750 (+/- 50 words). The due dates are indicated on the syllabus. After you submit each essay you will receive feedback from me within two weeks at the latest. You will work on your essay and revise it accordingly, and submit this revised version as well. This revised version will be graded as a separate work. Here is how much each essay is worth:

1st Essay: 10 points

1st Essay Revised: 15 points

2nd Essay: 15 points

2nd Essay Revised 25 points

I will upload the essay questions on Blackboard in advance. The syllabus indicates the dates when the questions will be uploaded for each essay, when we will have the writing workshops, and when each essay is due. You will have some time to reflect on the questions, and choose which question you want to answer in your essay. For each essay we will have a writing workshop where we will discuss how to write an academic essay, as well as go over the questions. You will have a chance to share your ideas about your potential work, hear other students' thoughts, and ask questions. Along with the essay questions, I will also provide a guideline as to what I will look for in each essay.

The essays are to be submitted through the Blackboard.

Do not email them. I will not accept them through email.

If you submit your work within the 24 hours after the due date, I will accept it but will mark it down (i.e. if the work earns an A, it will receive A-).

I will not accept any work after that 24-hour time limit.

3) Active Participation and Attendance (10 points in total)

Active Participation: Students may earn up to 5 points for actively participating in class throughout the semester. Remember that 5 points makes the difference between a B+ (89) and an A (94). And you must be an active participant to earn those 5 points. Being an active participant means:

- ✓ Reading the assigned material and reflecting on it before coming to class
- ✓ Coming to class ready to share at least one thought/comment about the readings
- ✓ Engaging in the class discussions in a respectful manner
- ✓ Asking questions for clarification
- ✓ Having the assigned texts in class in the appropriate format

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class. Students may earn up to 5 points for being present in class throughout the semester. Late students will be marked absent.

Extra Work: Academic Research (3 points)

If you find any of the literary and philosophical texts we are reading for our class particularly interesting, you have the option to do some extra work about it to add to your grade. If you choose to take this option, you are expected to find one article published in an academic journal accessed through Syracuse University Library about the excerpt itself or the book from which it has been taken. Choose one sentence or one paragraph from that article that expresses the most significant or interesting point for you and write a 500-word Response to it. I encourage you to contact Ms. Lydia Wasylenko, the Subject Librarian for Religion, at lwwasyle@syr.edu to consult about searching for academic journals.

Extra Work: Academic Research Response is to be submitted through Blackboard by the last day of the class December 7th, Wednesday. Please email me the article itself when you submit your work. Note that the 2nd Essay Revised is also due the same day.

Grading Scale

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D/Pass	65-69
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	F	64 and below
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72		

IMPORTANT NOTES

Please contact me about any concerns or questions you may have about the class, about the readings, or any difficulties or challenges you may be experiencing that affect your participation in the class (including the class discussions as well as written assignments). It is very important that you do not wait until the end of the semester to share your concerns or questions with me. The sooner you contact me, the more time we will have to attend to it, and find a way that enables you to participate in the class more fully.

Respect:

In order to create an intellectually stimulating learning environment together, it is very important that we respect each other as thinkers, and provide space for everyone's contribution. Such respect means that we pay utmost attention to every question or comment in class discussions, and engage with it in a respectful manner whether we agree or disagree with it.

Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Examples of inappropriate classroom conduct include repeatedly arriving late to class, using a cellular telephone, or talking while others are speaking. No eating in class, please.

Email guide:

Emailing is a genre with its own rules—very different from the rules of texting—that you need to learn, both for college and for the professional business world beyond college. In every professional email please include the following:

- A subject line that includes which class you are enrolled in and something informative that points toward the subject of the email (e.g., “Religious Autobiography: Question about the first paper”)
- A professional salutation that includes my title (e.g., “Dear Ms. Yeni” or “Hello Ms. Yeni”)
- A message that is well written (i.e., correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation) and polite
- A closing salutation (e.g., “Sincerely,” “Best wishes,” or “Thank you”)
- A signature (i.e., your name)

Disability Statement:

If you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>. The office is located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue. You may also call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Inclusive Language Statement:

We are all a part of creating a space for dialogue and engagement where the importance of differences in relationships are engaged in a substantive manner. The goal of this class is to think carefully about the words we use and the images, metaphors, similes, and linguistic ideas that we are invoking. In keeping the vision of thinking thoughtfully about language, it is expected that all participants use inclusive language in all verbal and written assignments especially with respect to humanity, cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, races, and religions, with regard to characteristics such as sex, gender/sex, sexual identities, social class, age, and dis/abilities.

Statement on Academic Dishonesty:

As in all academic settings, students in this course must ensure that their work conforms to principles of academic integrity (honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility). Students should therefore familiarize themselves with the Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy that holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Syracuse University sets high standards for academic integrity. Those standards are supported and enforced by students, including those who serve as academic integrity hearing panel members and hearing officers. Students should review the Office of Academic Integrity online resource “Twenty Questions and Answers about the Academic Integrity Policy” (available at <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/what-does-academic-integrity-mean/>) and confer with instructor about course-specific citation methods, permitted collaboration (if any), and rules for examinations. If you have any questions about the policy, please contact me.

Faith Tradition Observance:

Syracuse University does not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). SU’s religious observances policy:

http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm, Please make sure to notify me of any religious observances so that we can make alternative arrangements for any missed class deadlines.

SCHEDULE

I. Self as an Artist, Life as an Artwork

Aug 29 Mon: Introduction

Aug 31 Wed: Religion: Some Basics
Life Narrative: Definitions and Distinctions

Sept 5th Mon: NO CLASS/ LABOR DAY

Sept 7th Wed: The Autobiographical Contract
“Letter to His Father” by Franz Kafka

Sept 12th Mon: Film Screening: *Stranger than Fiction* (2006) dir. Marc Forster

Sept 14th Wed: Art Imitating Life Imitating Art: Literary Narrative and Autobiographical Narrative

Sept 19th Mon: In-class writing exercise: **First response**

II. Self as a Philosopher, Life as a Philosophy

Sept 21st Wed: Autobiographical Subjects
What is a Philosophy of Autobiography?

Sept 26th Mon: *Deliverance from Error* by Al-Ghazali (excerpts)
Meditations by Descartes (excerpts)
Topics for the 1st Paper posted on Blackboard after class

Sept 28th Wed: Life Narrative in Historical Perspective
Confessions by Saint Augustine (excerpts)

Oct 3rd Mon: Writing workshop for the 1st Paper

Oct 5th Wed: *The Life of Teresa of Jesus: the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila* (excerpts)
Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs Jarena Lee by Jarena Lee (excerpts)
* **1st Paper due** (upload to Blackboard) Oct 5th Wed 11:59pm

Oct 10th Mon: Self, Other, and Community: Jewish Women's Autobiography
The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism (excerpts)

Oct 12th Wed: Women's Autobiography in Islamic Societies: Towards a Feminist Intellectual History
I Speak for Myself: American Women on Being Muslim (excerpts)

Oct 17th Mon: In class writing exercise: **Second response**

III. Self as an Author, Life as a Book

Oct 19th Wed: Autobiographical Subjects (Review)
Gandhi: An Autobiography - The Story of My Experiments with Truth (Intro+Part I)
*I will return 1st Papers with comments by Oct 19th Wed

Oct 24th Mon: *Gandhi: An Autobiography* (Part II)

Oct 26th Wed: *Gandhi: An Autobiography* (Part III)
* **1st Paper Revised due** (upload to Blackboard) Oct 26th Wed 11:59pm

Oct 31st Mon: *Gandhi: An Autobiography* (Part IV)

Nov 2nd Wed: *Gandhi: An Autobiography* (Part V+Farewell)

Nov 7th Mon: The Dual Plot of Gandhi's *An Autobiography*

*Topics for the 2nd Paper posted on Blackboard Nov 7th Mon after

Nov 9th Wed: In class writing exercise: **Third response**

Nov 14th Mon: Writing workshop for the 2nd Paper

Nov 16th Wed: A tool Kit: Twenty Strategies for Reading Life Narratives

***2nd Paper due** (upload to Blackboard) Nov 16th Wed 11:59pm

Nov 21st Mon: NO CLASS/ THANKSGIVING BREAK

Nov 23rd Wed: NO CLASS/ THANKSGIVING BREAK

Nov 28th Mon: Autobiographical Acts

The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr. (excerpts)

Nov 30th Wed: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* by Malcolm X (excerpts)

Malcolm X and the Black Muslim Search for the Ultimate

*I will return 2nd Papers with comments by Nov 30th Wed

Dec 5th Mon: In class writing exercise: **Fourth response**

Dec 7th Wed: Wrap up

* **2nd Paper Revised due** (upload to Blackboard) Dec 7th Wed 11:59pm

Extra Work: Academic Research due Dec 7th Wed 11:59pm