ENGL 4106
Studies in Genre: Autobiography

Texts:
Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes*. University of California, 0520087836
Erauso, Catalina de. *Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World*. Beacon, 0807070734
Hong Kingston, Maxine. *Woman Warrior*. Vintage, 0072435194
Opincar, Abe. *Fried Butter*. Soho, 1569473595
Rodman, Dennis. *Bad as I Wanna Be*. Dell, 0440222664
Slater, Lauren. *Lying*. Penguin, 014200006X
Speigelman, Art. *Maus I and II*. Pantheon, 0679748407

I will be adding secondary material to this list as you raise questions that we need theoretical apparatus and practical criticism to address. These will be available either electronically or in photocopies I will make for you.

Course Description:
We’re here to study and discuss a genre: autobiography—that is, self-life-writing, though all the terms for it are constantly under barrage and scrutiny. We’ll be focused on the three terms of the title, asking questions like: what is a self, is there a self, can we describe a self, is there a self separate from the body, is there a self separate from a group, is there identity without qualifiers like race, sexual orientation, gender, class, or any other contested group? What is a life, who controls it, how do you get one, can you describe one, is life doing, being, or something else, what ends life, are some lives inherently more interesting than others, are some lives inherently more valuable than others, what does a life narrative look like, sound like, what do we expect of a life, as readers of them (consumers of them)? And what is writing, in this context, how does form affect (infect, inflect) the other two components of the genre (the self, a life), is some autobiography better suited to lives than others, is the text larger than the writing of it, how much text is there in the text of a life, how is a life in different media different? And so forth—this is hardly the beginning.

Because this is a genre course and not a creative writing course, we will be doing reading and analysis of already-written life writing. The materials you’ll be reading are chosen to help you find the questions most compelling to professional critics of the genre (and to you); they are, by and large, the texts you’ll find most frequently used to address these questions. They are also, and maybe more importantly, texts that will challenge your notions of the genre and give you a taste of how openly defined it might be.
Course Goals as Defined by the Department:

- Students will learn about the distinguishing characteristics of a literary genre and develop and appreciation of how that genre evolves into many diverse forms.
- Students will develop an advanced critical facility in the formal analysis of a specific literary genre.
- Students will be able to identify and use some of the most significant theories and methods that shape the contemporary study of a specific literary genre.
- Students will read and analyze works from a specific literary genre written during different historical eras and from different national or cultural perspectives.
- Students will demonstrate in both oral and written work a discipline-specific critical facility through convincing and well-supported analysis of related material.
- Students will demonstrate their command of academic English and the tenets of sound composition by means of thesis-driven analytical prose.
- Students will learn to use discipline-specific computer technologies related to the study of language such as listservs, word processing, and internet research.

Assignments and Grades
Class participation: Based on attendance and tardiness, preparation, willingness to talk, general attitude about the class and the work.

Journal: Series of informal responses to your reading, one per primary (non-critical) text. Each will be at least five hundred and no more than 1000 words long. Each will be graded by check-mark only (check plus, check, or check minus). A check is 100 points for full credit. Check pluses are reserved for responses that are so superlative they make me cry with joy, so don’t expect them. A check minus is 50 points: better than a zero, but you aren’t engaging well.

A journal entry will be due for each text you are assigned, on the first day that we begin that text. If we get behind, just remember: journal due on the first day we discuss the text. Journals should be typewritten.

Tests: Test one is quote identification and discussion; test two is an in-class essay based on a series of quotations you will have to identify, then use as the foundation for your thesis. Test two is cumulative. I will give you handouts on each of these tests as they approach.

Final: Your final is a ten-minute in-class presentation on your research paper.

Annotated Bibliography: Fifteen entries, all secondary (critical) sources. No internet sources, all juried publications, and in MLA format. Complete instructions on an assignment sheet to follow.

Term Paper: A roughly twenty-page page critical paper, incorporating at least five secondary sources, turned in by 5pm on Dec. 4, 2009. Topics will be given to you mid-semester.

Grades:
I use a standard 10-point grading scale. I don’t curve grades or drop low grades.
Class Participation: 15%
Journal: 15%
Test 1: 15%
Test 2: 20%
Final: 10%
Annotated Bib: 10%
Term Paper: 15%