

Early American Life Writing

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(Teaching Note: This is a newly developed upper-division undergraduate course; I welcome your feedback.)

Description

Puritans and heretics, ministers and merchants, Quakers and witches, settlers and displaced American Indians, exemplary citizens and criminals, captives, prisoners, and slaves: how did the diverse populations of early America "compose" themselves and adapt their complex personal experiences into legible literary forms?

This course will introduce students to a range of early American life writing composed between 1600 and 1830, including conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies, captivity and slave narratives, travel narratives and secular accounts of exemplary lives; students will acquire a range of tools and strategies for analyzing life writing prior to the emergence of "autobiography" as a formal genre.

Assignments include short analysis papers, group work, and a longer essay (10 pages) involving primary and secondary research.

Required texts:

1. Coursepak
2. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* [Teaching Note: The toolkit is excellent and the historic range of texts discussed is surprising and useful]
3. Wendy Martin, ed. *Colonial American Travel Narratives*. Penguin Classics; ISBN 0-14-039088-X [Teaching note; *Journeys In New Worlds: Early American Women's Narratives* can be swapped off]
4. Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography and Other Writings*. Penguin Classics; ISBN 9780142437605
5. *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18th Century*. Ed. Vincent Carretta; U Press of Kentucky; ISBN 9780813190761.
6. Sharon Halevi, *The Other Daughters of the Revolution*.

Assignments and Grading:

Homework A (Write Yourself Three Ways)	10%
[Brief description: creative assignment Adapted from Smith/Watson appendix: Compose a cover letter for a job, a personals or shared interests ad, and your own obituary. Then supply a two-page reflection on the following: Contrast the self presentations in all 3 and discuss how their intended audience, including how each narrative's "site" (Smith 56-58), shaped what you put in or left out.]	
Homework B (4-5 pages; Analyze a Narrative of Your Choice from Unit B drawing from the Smith/Watson "Toolkit" Resource)	20%
[Questions to help prompt brainstorming: What toolkit strategies or questions lend themselves best to analyzing your chosen narrative? What components make this life narrative distinct?]	
Homework C (5 pages; Analyze a Narrative of Your Choice from Unit C)	20%
Final Essay (8-10 page paper integrating secondary sources and research)	30%
Regular participation & preparation	20%
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	100%

[Note: Final essay is largely open topic: chose one or two narratives from the course and engage, either directly via the thesis or indirectly, through the development of their paper, with one of the following claims; these claims are largely drawn from our readings and the class debates in Unit D:

- "Post-Revolutionary readers and writers were fascinated by textual selfhood" (Arch, *After Franklin*, 41).
- "During and after the Revolution, authors whose primary interest was secular worked within three related frames of reference about how personal identity comes into existence: the notion that selves are typical and that therefore they are formed through imitation; the notion that selves are [formed in accordance with an] ideal and therefore they are formed through emulation; and the notion that selves are original or singular and that therefore they are formed uniquely" (Arch, *After Franklin*, 43).
- The postrevolutionary and early national periods were "periods of self-invention and renegotiation" (Haveli, *Other Daughters*, 3).
- "Autobiographical writing allows the previously illiterate and disenfranchised to adopt a language sufficiently acceptable to be published, and, at the same time, it enables them to envisage new possibilities in the interstices between discourses or to weave them together in new hybrid forms" (Felicity Nussbaum, qtd. in Haveli, *Other Daughters*, 6).

Schedule of Readings

Note: Schedule is based on a Tuesday session of 50 minutes and Thursday session of 100 minutes.

Unit A: Introduction and Foundations

Week 1:

- R 8/22 Course Overview, Requirements, and Expectations.
- ELS site demo (accessed via <http://lss.at.ufl.edu>)
 - About Life Narrative
 - About Homework A

Week 2:

Tu 8/27 About Life Writing. To prepare for class:

- "Autobiographical Acts" by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, from *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*.
- Consult the online archive "First-Person Narratives of the American South" (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/>) Analyze the beginning of one life narratives of your choice, paying attention to when and how the narrator begins his or her story. Per the "Autobiographical Acts" reading, attempt to identify the coaxer/coercer of your chosen narratives? (pages 50-56) How might you describe the "site" of the narrative? (pages 56-58). Bring your ideas to class for discussion. This will not be graded.

- R 8/29 Continue discussion of life writing.
Preparation: Bring a draft of the following homework (Homework "A") to class.

The final version of Homework A is due by Sunday 9/1 by 10pm to ELS

Unit B: Pre-18th Century Life Writing

Week 3: Early Encounters with the Unknown.

Tu 9/3 Cabeza de Vaca, excerpts from *Relation of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca* (1542), on ELS.

R 9/5 Captain John Smith, from *General Historie of Virginia* (1624); Richard Frethorne, "Letters to His Parents from Virginia" (1623), on ELS.

Week 4: Puritan Autobiography

Tu 9/10 Thomas Shepard, *Autobiography* (1646) plus Ann Bradstreet, "To my Dear and Loving Children" (1660s), Coursepak.

R 9/12 Michael Wigglesworth, from the *Diary of Michael Wigglesworth* (1653-1657), Coursepak.
In class activity: Attempt to recast an episode from your life narrative in the genre of spiritual autobiography.

Week 5-6, Indian Captivity Narratives

Tu 9/17 Mary Rowlandson, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682), in Martin, *Colonial American Travel Narratives*: 1-48.

R 9/19 Rowlandson, continued. Toolkit Assignment in-class practice and discussion.

Tu 9/24 John Gyles, *Memoirs of Odd Adventures, Strange Deliverances, & etc.* (1736), coursepak.

Unit C: Composing 18th-century Selves: Travelers, Servants, Criminals, and Slaves

Week 6-7, Travel Narratives

R 9/26 Sarah Kemble Knight, *The Journal of Madam Knight* (1704-05, pub. 1825), in Martin, *Colonial American Travel Narratives*, plus Martin's introduction on travel narratives as a genre and the genre's importance.

Tu 10/1 Begin William Byrd II, *The Secret History of the Line* (1729, unpublished until 1929), in Martin, *Colonial American Travel Narratives*, 77-172;

R 10/3 Finish Byrd's "Secret History," plus excerpts from Byrd's *Secret Diary*, coursepak.

Homework B Due by Sunday 10/6 by 10pm

Week 8: How do criminals adapt the genre of religious conversion and religious confession to write themselves into print?

Tu 10/8 Patience Boston, *The Faithful Narrative of the Wicked Life and Remarkable Conversion of Patience Boston* (1738), coursepak and background on the genre by Daniel Cohen, from *Pillars of Salt*, Coursepak.

R 10/10 Joseph-Bill Packer, *A Journal of the Life and Travels of Joseph-Bill Packer* (1773), coursepak
Rachel Wall, *Life, Last Words, and Dying Confession* (1789), coursepak
Johnson Green, *The Life and Confession of Johnson Green, who is to be Executed* (1786), in *Unchained Voices*.

Week 9: How do marginalized female Quaker indentured servant and "free" black writers adapt the genre of religious conversion narrative to write themselves into print?

Tu 10/15 Elizabeth Ashbridge, Elizabeth Ashbridge, *Some Account of the Fore Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge* (1755), plus excerpt from Susan Imbaratto from *Declarations of Independency*, Coursepak.

R 10/17 Britton Hammon, *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man* (1760) and John Marrant, *Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (1785), both in *Unchained Voices*. [Teaching note: consider assigning Hammon alongside Thomas Brown's narrative to better scrutinize Hammon's modes of self construction?]

Week 10, Slave Narratives

Tu 10/22 Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life . . .* (1789; 1794), in *Unchained Voices*; Plus William Andrews, from *To Tell a True Story* (on Early African American autobiography), on ELS.

R 10/24 Finish Equiano and continue discussion of Andrews's excerpt. Also read: Belinda, "Petition of an African Slave, to the Legislature of Massachusetts" (1782), in *Unchained Voices*, taking note of how personal autobiography is integrated into Belinda's petition.

Tu 10/29 Small groups, student-led discussions, come prepared. Follow these instructions.
[Note, can tailor with any text from anthology you think the students capable of self-teaching by now in class. I cheated on the "Am Lit to 1800" title and added Northrup b/c the film came out mid semester.]

If your last name begins with the letters A through La, read the following for Tues class: Venture Smith, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa* (1798), in Carretta.

If your last name begins with the letters Le through Z, read the following for Tues class:
Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave* (link to google book on ELS).

To prepare: what interested you most in these narratives? What information from Andrews might be useful to keep in mind when reading/analyzing your narrative? What questions prompt good discussion and thinking about this text? By the end of the class, your group will design 3-4 discussion questions for the students who did not yet read this text to guide them on Thursday.

Thurs 10/31 Small groups, student-led discussion, come prepared.

If your last name begins with the letters A through La, read the following for Thurs class:
Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*

If your last name begins with the letters Le through Z, read the following for Thurs class:
A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, A Native of Africa (1798), in Carretta,

To prepare, brainstorm responses to the discussions questions that your fellow students provided for you on Tuesday. Also: what else interested you in the narratives, and what information from Andrews might be useful to keep in mind when reading this narrative?

Homework C Due (Textual Analysis of Unit 3 subject of interest) by Sunday 11/3 by 10pm to Sakai.

Unit D: The Emergence of Modern Autobiography

Tu 11/5 *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, Part 1* (composed in 1771).

R 11/7 *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, Part 2* (composed in 1784). Also read Stephen Carl Arch, from *After Franklin: The Emergence of Autobiography in Post-Revolutionary America, 1780-1830*, coursepak

Week 13

Tu 11/12 Franklin, Scan Part 3 (composed in 1788); Discuss film, *Twelve Years a Slave*.

R 11/14 Stephen Burroughs, *Sketch of the Life of the Notorious Stephen Burroughs, Given by Himself* (1811; first published 1798), coursepak

Week 14:

Tu 11/19 Burroughs, cont'd, plus Arch, "The Enigmatic Character of Stephen Burroughs," Coursepak.

R 11/21 K. White, *Narrative of the Life, Occurrences, Vicissitudes and Present Situation of K. White* (1809), plus Halevi intro.

Week 15/16

Tu 11/26 Elizabeth Munro Fisher, *Memoirs of Mrs. Elizabeth Fisher of the City of New York* (1810), in Halevi.

R 11/28 Thanksgiving holiday, no class...

Tu 12/3 Peer workshop on final essays: *Mandatory Attendance* (see Final Essay Guidelines)

****Final essay due by Sunday 12/8, 10pm to ELS****