

CH 345: SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION
Fall 2007
Wednesdays 2 P.M.-4:50 P.M.
Professor Diane Lobody

Required Texts:

- ❖ William Apess. "A Son of the Forest" in *A Son of the Forest and Other Writings*. Edited by Barry O'Connell. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997
- ❖ Peter Cartwright. *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, The Backwoods Preacher*. Edited by W.P. Strickland. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856. Reprint Edition. Edited by Charles Wallis. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986.
- ❖ Jarena Lee. "The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee" in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Edited by William Andrews. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986
- ❖ Anna Howard Shaw. *The Story of a Pioneer*. New York: Harper Brothers, 1915. Reprint Edition. Kessinger Press, 2007
- ❖ Frances Willard. *A Wheel Within a Wheel: How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle, With Some Reflections By the Way*. New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1895. Reprint Edition. Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 1997

Supplemental Texts (select one):

- ❖ Elizabeth Andrew. *Swinging on the Garden Gate: A Spiritual Memoir*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 2000.
- ❖ Joseph Sprague. *Affirmations of a Dissenter*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003.
- ❖ Renita Weems. *Listening for God: A Minister's Journey Through Silence and Doubt*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999.

Recommended Text (for students who have not yet taken DS 360: United Methodist History, or who do not have much background in the history of Methodism):

- ❖ Kenneth Cracknell and Susan White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

On-Line and Electronic Texts:

- ❖ Ezekiel Cooper. *A Short Account of the Life and Experience of Ezekiel Cooper in Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America. Chiefly Drawn from the Diary, Letters, Manuscripts, Documents, and Original Tracts of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper*. Compiled by George A. Phoebus. New York: Phillips and Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1887 (extracts)

- ❖ James B. Finley. *Autobiography of James B. Finley; Or, Pioneer Life in the West*. Edited by W. P. Strickland. New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1853 (extracts)
- ❖ Maxwell Pierson Gaddis. *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1856 (extracts)
- ❖ Catherine Livingston Garrettson. "Autobiography"
- ❖ Freeborn Garrettson. *The Experiences and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson, Minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church in North America in American Methodist Pioneer: The Life and Journals of The Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, 1752-1827*. Edited by Robert Drew Simpson. Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1986 (extracts)
- ❖ Christiana Malenoir. "The Experience of Christiana Malenoir, Written by Herself." *The Arminian Magazine for the Year 1792. Consisting Chiefly of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*. Volume XV
- ❖ Benjamin Rhodes. "Letter to the Rev. John Wesley." *The Arminian Magazine for the Year 1779. Consisting Chiefly of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*. Volume II. In John Telford, Ed. *Wesley's Veterans: Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Told By Themselves*. Volume VII. London: Charles H. Kelly, 1912-1914
- ❖ Tel Sono. *Japanese Reformer*. New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1892. On the Ambleside Online Website:
<http://amblesideonline.org/PR/PR04p103TelSono.shtml>
- ❖ Jacob Young. *Autobiography of a Pioneer; Or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young*. New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1857 (extracts)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Participation: Your participation in discussions and exercises is essential to the success of the class. Please come to class ready to immerse yourself in all activities.

Text Discussions: A central goal for this course is to help you cultivate the art of hearing and interpreting the life stories of individuals. Attentive discernment is a crucial part of the work of ministry. One way in which you will get to practice and refine those skills is through reading, analyzing, and interpreting the autobiographical writings of historical people. These people are dead, after all, so there's not much we can do to hurt these folks while we learn together how to listen to their stories. As we progress through the semester, we will hold regular conversations about the assigned readings. I will guide you through these discussions.

Textual Interpretation Papers: In these assignments you will have the opportunity to engage in intensive studies of two autobiographies. You will select the autobiographies from a list circulated on the first day of class. The autobiographies are clustered in topical groups, and you are to choose an autobiography from two of the three groups. Each autobiography will serve as the basis for a paper and for your active participation in the class discussion about that topic.

The work of textual study is the art of hearing the voice of the author in a new and deeper way. In each Textual Interpretation Paper, you are to analyze and interpret the autobiography in a way that does not simply re-tell the story of that person's life. Rather, you are to explore the way the author understands and describes his or her life story. Think of this exercise as something similar to an exegesis, in which you explore the text using a particular interpretive lens. You need to develop your own analytical and interpretive structure for each of the autobiographies you explore.

Here are a few of the ways that scholars have gone about interpreting spiritual autobiographies:

- Some scholars look for an underlying theme that holds the narrative together.
- Some historians unpack the language of the text and examine the images and symbols that the author uses to tell the story.
- Some people offer a theological interpretation of the text, looking for the author's understanding and experience of God or salvation or grace.
- Some interpreters consider the unspoken purposes or hidden agendas that appear to be driving the writer to tell this story.
- Some people attempt a psychological analysis of the story, drawing on particular theories of human experience and development.
- Some scholars look at the biblical references and allusions in the text and ask what these suggest about the author's self-understanding.
- Some historians investigate social location and identity (race, for example, or class or gender or ethnicity) as a shaping motif in the story.
- Some interpreters examine the autobiography an example of a specific literary genre or spiritual tradition.

We will experiment with a variety of interpretive methods during our class discussions of the assigned texts, and we will read some examples of scholarly treatments of specific autobiographies as well. You are welcome to try one of these methods yourself. Or you might choose to interpret this text in some other way entirely. The point is for you to see (and help your reader see) some of what is hidden in this autobiography. **Remember: Your paper is to be a work of interpretation, and not merely a re-telling of the author's life story.**

Here is what you need to do:

1. Read the autobiography with care.
2. Do the historical research to help you understand this text more fully. Look for scholarly studies of the text itself, the author, the specific historical and cultural context in which this work was written, and anything else that will add your ability to interpret this autobiography intelligently.

3. Decide on a specific method of interpretation. Re-read parts or all of the autobiography with your method in mind. Then start writing.
4. Begin with a brief (one- to two-page) synopsis of the text. You need to do this in order to orient your reader to the author's life and narrative, but I am also including this requirement so you can directly confront your desire to re-tell the story and get it out of your system.
5. After the synopsis, move on to your interpretation of the autobiography. You must support your interpretation with ample evidence, including carefully and critically chosen passages from the autobiography. The entire paper should be ten to twelve pages long (2500-3000 words).
6. Attach to your paper an annotated bibliography of all the secondary sources you have consulted in your research.

Each Textual Interpretation Paper is due in class on the day we are scheduled to discuss the wider topic. You may bring the paper to class in hard copy or post it to the CH 345 website by 2 P.M. No late papers will be accepted. Our class discussion that day will be shaped by the contributions and insights made by those students who have written papers.

Each Textual Interpretation Paper will contribute one-third to your final grade.

Sharing Our Own Stories : In this course, you will have the opportunity to hear the life stories of your classmates and to tell your own story in a variety of ways. Weekly homework assignments and in-class exercises will prompt you to remember parts of your own life history. In class you will reflect upon those memories by sharing them with other people. That process will help you as you structure and write your spiritual autobiography. The people in this class will be the hearers and guardians of your life story--- the bearers of your witness--- as you experiment with telling your story. As such, we must consider our work together as holy and covenantal, and so I ask that you do the following:

- Speak openly to one another.
- Listen carefully to each other.
- Respect the diversity of one another's life experiences.
- Hold all things shared in confidence unless agreed otherwise.
- Be faithful in your class attendance.

Your Spiritual Autobiography: The third major writing assignment for this course is your own spiritual autobiography. The homework assignments and class exercises are intended to help you remember and reflect upon your life history. **The written spiritual autobiography provides an occasion for you to tell your story in a coherent and unified narrative.** As you will have discovered by the time you sit down to do this, personal narratives vary in format and length. I leave the format to you, but the length needs to be 12-16 pages (about 3000-4000 words). The spiritual autobiography is due on December 14. You may submit it through the CH 345 website or in hard copy. This assignment will contribute one third to your final grade.

Class Schedule

- 8/29** Introduction to the Journey
Interpreting Autobiographies
- 9/5** What's the Real Story?
Reading assignment for today:
Catherine Livingston Garrettson, *Autobiography*
- 9/12** Evangelical Autobiography
Reading assignment for today:
Benjamin Rhodes, "Letter to the Rev. John Wesley"
Christiana Malenoir, "The Experience of Christiana Malenoir"
- 9/19** Autobiography and Social Location
Reading assignment for today:
William Apess, *A Son of the Forest*
Jarena Lee, *Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*
- 9/26** Ritual Narratives
Reading assignment for today:
Selections from autobiographies of early American circuit riders
- 10/3** Mythic Stories
Reading assignment for today:
Peter Cartwright, *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*
- 10/10** Midterm Break
- 10/17** Autobiography and Apologia
Reading assignment for today:
Anna Howard Shaw, *The Story of a Pioneer*
- 10/24** Methodist Militants: Critics, Reformers and Agents of Change
Textual Interpretation Papers on autobiographies from Topic Cluster One are due today
- 10/31** Memory and Metaphor
Reading assignment for today:
Frances Willard, *A Wheel Within a Wheel*
- 11/7** Living in Two Worlds
Reading assignment for today:
Tel Sono, *Japanese Reformer*
- 11/14** Cross-Cultural Narratives: Missionaries, Converts, and Strangers
Textual Interpretation Papers on autobiographies from Topic Cluster Two are due today
- 11/21** Thanksgiving Break

11/28 Many Gifts in the Wider World: Teachers, Artists, Politicians, etc.
Textual Interpretation Papers on autobiographies from Topic Cluster Three are due today

12/5 Autobiography as Ministry

Reading assignment for today (select one):

Elizabeth Andrew, *Swinging on the Garden Gate: A Spiritual Memoir*

Renita Weems, *Listening for God*

Joseph Sprague, *Affirmations of a Dissenter*

12/12 Final Week--- No Class

12/14 LAST DAY OF THE SEMESTER. YOUR SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY IS DUE BY 4:30 P.M. TODAY. IF YOU NEED ADDITIONAL TIME, YOU MUST APPLY FOR A FORMAL EXTENSION FROM THE DEAN. PETITION FORMS ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE REGISTRAR. INFORMAL INCOMPLETES CANNOT BE GRANTED.