**Department of American Studies**

**School of English and American Studies**

**Eötvös Loránd University**

**Budapest**

**Autobiography in American Literature**

Instructor: Ágnes Bodnár

e-mail: agi.bodnar@gmail.com

**Course Description:**

The course aims to provide a detailed and profound understanding and knowledge about a very peculiar genre of American literature, the autobiography. The autobiography performs an important role not only in literature, as it also has historical, social, and cultural implications. We will look at a variety of autobiographical texts ranging from the Puritan journals through Indian captivity stories, slave narratives, and the life writing of minorities to contemporary American autobiographies. The main themes of the course include autobiography as a literary genre, critical background of autobiography research, subjectivation, and performance and performativity.

**Course Requirements:**

* read the assignments for each class, bring the texts for every lesson (using e-texts is allowed);
* contribute to the discussion of the seminars;
* give one in-class presentation; the presentation length is 15 minutes, (areas to be covered: brief life of the author, summary of the given text, application of course materials, especially the respective theoretical apparatus: performative, performance, autobiographical pact etc.)
* Requirements of a term paper: length: 1200-1500 words, areas to be covered: biography of the author, autobiographical elements in the text, main themes, appropriate literary criticism (a survey of the views of critics on the given work). Grading aspects: contents, grammatical correctness, appropriate style, structure. In all matters of form use MLA format. Use Times New Roman font, typed in number 12, line spacing 1.5. No late paper policy, deadlines are not negotiable. Plagiarism will not be tolerated;
* final grading will be based on the results of the mid-term quiz, the in-class presentation, and the term paper.

**General Rules:**

* do not be absent more than twice in the semester;
* tardiness and early departures are not allowed;
* no cell phones are permitted.

**Schedule of topics and assignments:**

1. Orientation, Introduction to autobiography, key concepts
2. Puritan journals: The Journal of John Winthrop (1630-49), Jonathan Edwards, Personal Narrative
3. The Captivity Narrative 1: Mary Rowlandson (1682)
4. The Captivity Narrative 2: Rachel Plummer (1838)
5. Travelogue: *The Journal of Madame Knight* (1705)
6. The Slave Narrative: Frederick Douglass, Briton Hammon (midterm quiz)
7. Henry David Thoreau: *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (1854)
8. Native American autobiography: Gertrude Bonnin (Zitkala Sa) “Schooldays of an Indian Girl “(1900)
9. Gertrude Stein: *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933)
10. Black autobiography: Richard Wright: *Black Boy* (1945)
11. Modern Travelogue: John Steinbeck: *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* (1960)
12. Mexican-American autobiography: Sandra Cisneros: *The House on Mango Street* (1984)
13. Course wrap-up

**Readings:**

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street.* New York: Vintage Books, 1984. Print.

Douglass, Frederick. “The Narrative of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave.” *The Norton Anthology of American Literature.* Eds. Nina Baym et al. New York: Norton, 1989. 833-864.Print.

Edwards, Jonathan. “Personal Narrative,” (1740). *An Early American Reader* Ed. J.A. Leo Lemay. Washington D.C.: USIS,1988. 324-36. Print.

# Hammon, Briton. *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings, and Surprizing Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man, ---Servant to General Winslow, of Marshfield, in New-England.* Gale Ecco, Print Editions, 2010.Print.

Knight, Sarah, Kemble. *"*The Journal of Madam Knight*.*" *The Puritans*. Ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson. New York: American Book Company, 1938. http://eada.lib.umd.edu/text-entries/journal-of-madam-knight/

Plummer, Rachel. “A Narrative of the Capture and Subsequent Sufferings of Mrs. Rachel Plummer, Written by Herself.” *Held Captive by Indians. Selected Narratives*. 1642-1836. ed. Richard VanDerBeets. Knoxville: U of Tennesse P, 1994. 333-366.Print.

Rowlandson, Mary. “The Sovereignty and Goodness of God. . . being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson.” *Held Captive by Indians. Selected Narratives.* 1642-1836. ed. Richard VanDerBeets. Knoxville: U of Tennesse P, 1994. 41-90. Print.

Stein, Gertrude. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas.* NY: Penguin Inc., 1966.

Steinbeck, John. *Travels with Charley: In Search of America.* NY: Penguin Inc., 1962.

Thoreau, Henry David*. Walden, or, Life in the Woods.* USA:Princeton UP, 2004. Print.

Winthrop, John. “John Winthrop’s Christian Experience.” *Heath Anthology of American Literature.* Ed. Paul Lauter. Vol 1. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Co, 1990. 199-203. Print.

Wright, Richard. *“Black Boy.*” Harper and Brothers, 1945. Print.

Zitkala-Sa. "The School Days of an Indian Girl." [aka Gertrude Simmons Bonnin] *American Indian Stories*. Washington: Hayworth Publishing House, 1921. pp. 47-80. Print.

**Assigned readings are also accessible via Internet.**

**Presentation topics:**

**Barbary Coast narrative:**

--Royall Tyler. *The Algerine Captive*. <https://archive.org/details/algerinecaptive00tylerich>

**Convent narratives:**

--*Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*

[https://archive.org/stream/cihm\_38362#page/n15/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/cihm_38362%23page/n15/mode/2up)

--*Six months in a convent, or the Narrative of Rebecca Theresa Reed* <https://archive.org/details/sixmonthsinconve00reediala>

**Slave Narratives:**

--*Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/bibb/bibb.html>

--William Wells Brown*. The American Fugitive in Europe.*

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brown55/menu.html>

--*The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea* <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jeajohn/menu.html>

--Harriet-Ann Jacobs*. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/jacobs/menu.html>

--Solomon Northup. *Twelve Years a Slave*

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/northup/menu.html>

--Mary Prince. *The History of Mary Prince*

<http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/prince/menu.html>

**Indian captivity narratives:**

--Fanny Wiggins Kelly, *The Narrative of My Captivity among the Sioux Indians*

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=moa;idno=ABB5283.0001.001>

--“A Narrative of the Lord’s Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant” in VanDerBeets, Richard, ed. *Held Captive By Indians.* Knoxville:U of Tennessee P, 1994. 177-201.

**Ethnic autobiography:**

*Mexican American:*

--Richard Rodriguez: *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* <http://res.cloudinary.com/kabooks/raw/upload/Free-Download-Hunger-Memory-Education-Richard-Rodriguez.pdf>

*Native American:*

--Charles Eastman: *Indian Boyhood* <http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/digi152.pdf>

*Chinese American:*

--Maxine Hong Kingston: *The Woman Warrior* <https://imgur.com/Gke5sxE>

*African-Americans:*

--Maya Angelou: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* <https://www.google.hu/search?q=maya+angelou+i+know+why+the+caged+bird+sings+pdf&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws_rd=cr&ei=9nEoWMmCHoqpsAGxuYuoDg>

-- *M*alcolm X: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*

<http://al-rasid.com/shared_uploads/The.Autobiography.of.MalcolmX.pdf>

-- Eldridge Cleaver: *Soul on Ice*

<https://herman.memoryoftheworld.org/Eldridge%20Cleaver/Soul%20on%20Ice%20(75)/Soul%20on%20Ice%20-%20Eldridge%20Cleaver.pdf>

*--Filipino American:*

Carlos Bulosan: *America is in the Heart*

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015000566789;view=1up;seq=1>

*Dutch American:*

--Edward Bok: *The Americanization  of Edward Bok*

<http://pdfbooks.co.za/library/EDWARD_WILLIAM_BOK-THE_AMERICANIZATION_OF_EDWARD_BOK.pdf>

**Requirements of the presentation:**

Length 15 minutes

Areas to be covered: biography of the author, autobiographical elements in the text, main themes, appropriate literary criticism, (a survey of the views of critics on the given work).

**Suggested Literature:**

Bollobás, Enikő. *They Aren’t, Until I Call Them: Performing the Subject in American Literature*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010. Print.

Couser, G. Thomas. *Altered Egos:* *Authority in American Autobiography*. Oxford: OUP, 1989. Print.

Faery, Rebecca, Blevins: *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation.* Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1999. Print.

Heilbrun, Carolyn. *Writing a Woman’s Life.* New York: Ballantine, 1988. Print.

Lejeune, Philippe. “The Autobiographical Pact.” *On Autobiography*. Ed.Paul John Eakin. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989. 3-30. Print.

Séllei, Nóra. *Tükröm, tükröm: Írónők önéletrajzai a 20. század elejéről.* Debrecen: Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadó, 2001. Print.

Tarnóc, András. *Erőszak és megváltás: az indián fogságnapló mint az amerikai eredetmítosz sarokköve.* Eger: Líceum Kiadó, 2015.Print.

“Biography and autobiography”-*Columbia Literary History of the United States.* Gen ed. Emory Elliott. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. 67-82. Print.