

UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

School of Literature and Creative Writing

MA IN LIFE-WRITING

Spring 2008

Tutor: Professor Kathryn Hughes

LITEM014 AUTOBIOGRAPHY

This module, which is compulsory for students on the MA in Life Writing, will look at the history of autobiographical writing, from St Augustine to Wayne Rooney by way of J S Mill. Along the way we will encounter the 'Puritan' tradition of the seventeenth century which places a particular emphasis on the self, as well as those distinctive questionings of identity posed by Romanticism and Modernism. We end by looking at the modern-day appetite for confessional celebrity memoir as well as so-called 'misery' narratives.

Crucially, we will not confine ourselves to texts which present themselves as autobiographical. We will also look at ostensibly non-autobiographical texts in which the character of the writer nonetheless plays a defining part: autobiographical impulses find themselves expressed in a particular sense of place, in a presiding neurosis, or are concealed in the crevices of a novel or a biography.

Assessment is by a 5,000 essay. **Please note that this module is not designed for those wishing to write their own memoir or autobiography.**

Primary Texts

This is a provisional reading list.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Confessions

Edmund Gosse, Father and Son

Siegried Sassoon, Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man

Virginia Woolf, Moments of Being

Bertrand Russell, Autobiography, Vols 1 and 2.

Flora Thompson, Lark Rise to Candleford

Gertrude Stein, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas

Janet Malcolm, The Silent Woman

Vladimir Nabokov, Speak, Memory

Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar, The Journals of Sylvia Plath, Ariel.

Jeanette Winterson, Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit

Maya Angelou, I Know Why The Cage Bird Sings

Tobias Wolff, This Boy's Life

## Secondary Reading

Autobiography is a growth area in academic criticism. There are obvious reasons why personal identity and experience should be of importance to critics interested in subjectivity, the fragmented self, all brands of feminism and post-colonial identities.

Sidone Smith and Julia Watson, eds, Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader

Robert Folkenflik, ed, The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation

Roy Pascal, Design and Truth in Autobiography

Robert Fothergill, Private Chronicles