Auto/biography in the Islamic World (ISLA 581)
Winter 2016

Location: Morrice Hall, Room 328

Times: Thursday 3.35 – 5.25

Professor: Prashant Keshavmurthy

Institute of Islamic Studies

Office 311, Morrice Hall

Office hour: Wednesday, 2.00 – 3.00 or by appointment

Description: This course addresses the rhetoric of selfhood. That is, rather than only ideas of the self, it is the linguistic forms of such ideas that will mainly preoccupy us. This emphasis on how language informs the ways in which the self was understood in the past will keep our attention focused on the wider cultures of rhetoric – courtly speech-situations, intimate circles of Sufi adepts, trans-national print-communities – in which apparently abstract ideas of selfhood circulated.

We will read both biographies and autobiographies to pose the following questions among others: does the act of writing play a constitutive or representative role in the telling of a life? Is the self in question conceived of as unique or as transpersonal? Is it gendered and, if so, how? What are the articulations of individual and public memory? In answering these questions aspects of narrative design, the interplay of poetry and prose, state and self-censorship, the uses of painting embedded in writing and the logics of genre will form only some of our foci of attention.
Method of Evaluation: 25% of the final grade will depend on your participation in class discussions, including attendance. A further 25% will be based on a 20 to 25 minute class presentation on one of the prescribed texts. You are welcome to make more than one presentation. The remaining 50% will be assigned on the basis of your final paper. The final paper is due on April 29th.

Khosraw’s *Book of Travels* (State University of New York Press, 1986).

The remaining texts will be sent to you as PDF files.

**Weekly readings**

**Weeks 1 & 2**


**Weeks 3 & 4**


**Weeks 5 & 6**


**Week 7**

Naser-e Khosraw’s *Book of Travels* (State University of New York Press, 1986).

**Week 8**


**Weeks 9 & 10**


**Weeks 11 & 12**


**Weeks 13 & 14**

Two supplementary bibliographies

1) More autobiographies from the Islamic world:


Scholarship on autobiographies from the Muslim world:

Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia, Afghanistan and India*
(1483 - 1530).


\textit{Many Ways of Speaking about the Self: Middle Eastern Ego-documents in Arabic, Persian and Turkish (14th-20th Century)}, Ralf Elger and Yavuz Köse, eds. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010).


\textit{Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic}


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https://research.sabanciuniv.edu/289/1/3011800000903.pdf


Afshan Bokhari, Masculine Modes of Female Subjectivity: Jahan


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,”Infamous Women and Famous Wombs: Biography, Gender, and Islamist Concepts of Community in Contemporary Egypt” in Mary Ann Fay (ed.), Auto/Biography and the Creation of Identity and Community in the Middle East from the Early


A bibliography of philosophical studies of selfhood and the soul would be longer than is pertinent for the purposes of this course. However, the following two books will serve as comprehensive and critical introductions to the range of philosophical interest in question of selfhood and the soul. The first book, by Sorabji, covers these topics with reference to multiple civilizational contexts, including the Islamic, while the second, by Charles Taylor, confines itself to a Euro-American canon:


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*In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.*

*Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).*