

Autobiography

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1 Definition

Notoriously difficult to define, autobiography in the broader sense of the word is used almost synonymously with “life writing” and denotes all modes and genres of telling one’s own life. More specifically, autobiography as a literary genre signifies a retrospective narrative that undertakes to tell the author’s own life, or a substantial part of it, seeking (at least in its classic version) to reconstruct his/her personal development within a given historical, social and cultural framework. While autobiography on the one hand claims to be non-fictional (factual) in that it proposes to tell the story of a ‘real’ person, it is inevitably constructive, or imaginative, in nature and as a form of textual ‘self-fashioning’ ultimately resists a clear distinction from its fictional relatives (autofiction, autobiographical novel), leaving the generic borderlines blurred.

2 Explication

Emerging from the European Enlightenment, with precursors in antiquity, autobiography in its ‘classic’ shape is characterized by autodiegetic, i.e. 1st-person subsequent narration told from the point of view of the present. Comprehensive and continuous retrospection, based on memory, makes up its governing structural and semantic principle. Oscillating between the struggle for truthfulness and creativity, between oblivion, concealment, hypocrisy, self-deception and self-conscious fictionalizing, autobiography renders a story of personality formation, a *Bildungsgeschichte*. As such, it was epitomized by Rousseau ([1782–89] 1957); Goethe ([1808–31] 1932) and continued throughout the 19th century and beyond (Chateaubriand [1848/50] 2002; Mill [1873] 1989, with examples of autobiographical fiction in Moritz ([1785–86] 2006), Dickens ([1850] 2008), Keller ([1854–55] 1981; a second, autodiegetic version [1879–80] 1985) and Proust ([1913–27] 1988). While frequently disclaiming to follow generic norms, its hallmark is a focus on psychological introspection and a sense of historicity, frequently implying, in the instance of a writer’s autobiography, a close link between the author’s life and literary work.

Although 1st-person narrative continues to be the dominant form in autobiography, there are examples of autobiographical writing told in the 3rd person (e.g. Stein 1933 ; Wolf 1976), in epistolary form (e.g. Plato's *Seventh Letter* ca. 353 B.C. [1966]) and in verse (Wordsworth [1799, 1805, 1850] 1979). However, with its 'grand narrative' of identity, the classic 1st-person form of autobiography has continued to provide the generic model around which new autobiographical forms of writing and new conceptions of autobiographical selves have taken shape. At the heart of its narrative logic lies the duality of the autobiographical person, divided into 'narrating I' and 'narrated I', marking the distance between the experiencing and the narrating subject. Whereas the 'narrated I' features as the protagonist, the 'narrating I', i.e. the 1st-person narrator, ultimately personifies the agent of focalization, the overall position from which the story is rendered, although the autobiographical narrator may temporarily step back to adopt an earlier perspective. A pseudo-static present point of narration as the ultimate end of autobiographical writing is thus implied, rendering the trajectory of autobiographical narrative circular, as it were: the present is both the end and the condition of its narration. However, this apparent circularity is frequently destabilized by the dynamics of the narrative present, as the autobiographer continues to live while composing his/her narrative, thus leaving the perspective open to change unless the position of 'quasi death' is adopted, as in Hume's notoriously stoic presentation of himself as a person of the past (Hume 1778). At the other end of the spectrum of self-positionings as autobiographical narrator, Wordsworth testifies to the impossibility of autobiographical closure in his verse autobiography ([1799, 1805, 1850] 1979). Again and again, he rewrites the same time span of his life. As his life continues to progress, his subject—the "growth of a poet's mind" ([1850, subtitle] 1979)—perpetually appears to him in a new light, requiring continual revision even though the 'duration' (the time span covered) in fact remains the same, thus reflecting the instability of the autobiographical subject as narrator. Accordingly, the later narrative versions bear the mark of the different stages of writing. The narrative present, then, can only ever be a temporary point of view, affording an "interim balance" (de Bruyn [1992] 1994) at best, leaving the final vantage point an autobiographical illusion.

With its dual structural core, the autobiographical 1st-person pronoun may be said to reflect the precarious intersections and balances of the "idem" and "ipse" dimensions of personal identity pertaining to spatio-temporal sameness and selfhood as agency (Ricoeur 1991). In alternative theoretical terms, it may be related to "three identity dilemmas": "sameness [...] across time," being "unique" in the face of others; and "agency" (Bamberg 2011: 6–8; Bamberg → Identity and Narration [1]). In a more radical, deconstructive twist of theorizing autobiographical narrative in relation to the issue of identity, the 1st-person dualism inherent in autobiography

appears as a 'writing the self' by another, as a mode of "ghostwriting" (Volkening 2006: 7).

Beyond this pivotal feature of 1st-person duality, further facets of the 1st-person pronoun of autobiography come into play. Behind the narrator, the empirical writing subject, the "Real" or "Historical I" is located, not always in tune with the 'narrating' and 'experiencing I's', but considered the 'real author' and the external subject of reference. The concept of the "ideological I" suggested by Smith and Watson (eds. 2001) is a more precarious one. It is conceived as an abstract category which, unlike its narrative siblings, is not manifest on the textual level, but in 'covert operation' only. According to Smith and Watson, it signifies "the concept of personhood culturally available to the narrator when he tells the story" (eds. 2001: 59-61) and thus reflects the social (and intertextual) embedding of any autobiographical narrative. Reconsidered from the viewpoint of social sciences and cognitive narratology alike, the 'ideological I' derives from culturally available generic and institutional genres, structures and institutions of self-representation. Depending on the diverse (inter-)disciplinary approaches to the social nature of the autobiographical self, these are variously termed "master narrative," "patterns of emplotment," "schema," "frame," cognitive "script" (e.g. Neumann et al. eds. 2008), or even "biography generator" (*Biographie-generatoren*, Hahn 1987: 12). What ties this heterogeneous terminology together is the basic assumption that only through an engagement with such socially/culturally prefigured models, their reinscription, can individuals represent themselves as subjects.

The social dimension of autobiography also comes into play on an intratextual level in so far as any act of autobiographical communication addresses another—explicitly so in terms of constructing a narratee, who may be part of the self, a "Nobody," an individual person, the public, or God as supreme Judge.

At the same time, autobiography stages the self in relation to others on the level of narrative. Apart from personal models or important figures in one's life story, autobiographies may be centred on a relationship of self and other to an extent that effectively erases the boundaries between auto- and heterobiography (e.g. Gosse [1907] 2004; Steedman 1987). In such cases, the (auto)biographical "routing of a self known through its relational others" is openly displayed, undermining the model "of life narrative as a bounded story of the unique, individuated narrating subject" (Smith & Watson eds. 2001: 67). With its several dimensions of social 'relatedness', then, autobiographical writing is never an autonomous act of self-reflection, as sociological theorists of (auto-)biography have long argued (e.g. Kohli 1981: 505-16). From a sociological angle, it may be considered a form of social action making sense of personal experience in terms of general relevance (Sloterdijk 1978: 21).

Autobiographical patterns of relevance are culturally specific, diverse and subject to historical change, as the history of autobiography with its multitude of forms and writing practices demonstrates.

3 History

3.1 Autobiography in Historical Perspective

Whereas its origins ultimately date back to antiquity (Roesler 2005), with Augustine's *Confessions* ([398–98] 1961) as a prominent ancient landmark, the history of autobiography as a (factual) literary genre and critical term is a much shorter one. In German, the term *Selbstbiographie* first featured in the collective volume *Selbstbiographien berühmter Männer* (1796) [Self-Biographies by Famous Men], its editor Seybold claiming Herder as source. Jean Paul called his unfinished and unpublished autobiography *Selberlebens-beschreibung* ['description of one's life by oneself'] ([1818–19] 1987: 16). In English, D'Israeli spoke of "self-biography" in 1796 (95–110), while his critic Taylor suggested "auto-biography" (Nussbaum 1989 : 1). These neologisms reflect a concern with a mode of writing only just considered to be a distinct species of (factual) literature at the time; not until the mid-18th century did autobiography separate from historiography as well as from a general notion of biography. The latter, variously coined 'life', 'memoir' or 'history', had not distinguished between what Johnson then seminally parted as "telling his own story" as opposed to "recounting the life of another" ([1750] 1969 and [1759] 1963).

The emergence of autobiography as a literary genre and critical term thus coincides with what has frequently been called the emergence of the modern subject around 1800. It evolved as a genre of non-fictional, yet 'constructed' autodiegetic narration wherein a self-reflective subject enquires into his/her identity and its developmental trajectory. The autobiographer looks back to tell the story of his/her life from the beginning to the present, tracing the story of its own making—in Nietzsche's words, "How One Bec[ame] What One Is" ([1908] 1992). As it tends to focus on the autobiographical subject as singular individual, auto-biography in the modern sense is thus marked by the secularization and the "temporalization (*Historisierung*) of experience" (Burke 2011: 13). In contrast, pre-modern spiritual autobiography, which followed the tradition of Augustine's *Confessions* and continued well into the 19th century, constructed its subject as exemplum, i.e. as a typical story to be learnt from. Little emphasis was put on life-world particularities (although these tended to acquire their own popular dynamics as in *crime confessions*). Dividing life into clear-cut phases centred round the moment of conversion, the spiritual autobiographer tells the story of self-renunciation and surrenders to providence and grace (e.g. Bunyan [1666] 1962). Its narrative becomes possible only after the key

experience of conversion, yielding up a 'new self'. Accordingly, Augustine commented on his former self with great detachment: "But this was the man I was" ([387–98] 1961: 105). While on the level of story, then, the division in spiritual autobiographies is one of 'before' and 'after', the level of narrative being ruled by the perspective of 'after' almost exclusively: only after and governed by the experience of conversion to Christian belief can the story be told at all. The moment of *anagnōrīsis* and narrative present do not coincide.

The narrative mode of modern autobiography as a literary genre, firmly linked to the notion of the individual, evolved to some extent by propelling the moment of self-recognition towards the narrative present: only at the end of one's story can it be unfurled from the beginning as a singular life course, staging the autobiographer as subject. The secular self accounts for itself as autonomous agent, (ideally) in charge of itself. This is the narrative logic of autobiography in its 'classic shape' that also informed the autobiographical novel. By 1800, the task of autobiography was to represent a unique individual, as claimed by Rousseau for himself: "I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not like any of those who are in existence" ([1782] 1957: 1). Most prominently, Goethe explicitly writes of himself as a singular individual embedded in and interacting with the specific constellations of his time ([1808–31] 1932). Autobiography thus focuses on the life of a singular individual within its specific historical context, retracing the "genetic personality de-ve-lop-ment founded in the awareness of a complex in-ter-play bet-ween I-and-my-world" (Weintraub 1982: 13). In this sense, it may be seen to represent the "full convergence of all the factors constituting this modern view of the self" (XV). Its central figure is that of a Romantic self-constitution, grounded in memory.

As memory informs autobiography, self-consciously reflected upon since Augustine (Book XX, *Confessions*), the boundaries between fact and fiction are inevitably straddled, as Goethe's title *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*) ([1808–31] 1932) aptly suggests. In the face of the inevitable subjectivity (or fallibility) of autobiographical recollection, the creative dimension of memory, and thus autobiography's quality as verbal/aesthetic fabrication, has come to the fore. In this respect, the history of autobiography as a literary genre is closely interrelated with corresponding forms of autofiction/the autobiographical novel, with no clear dividing lines, even though autobiographical fiction tends to leave "signposts" of its fictionality to be picked up by the reader (Cohn 1999). In any case, autobiography's temporal linearity and narrative coherence has frequently proved prone to deliberate anachronisms and disruptions—programmatically so in Nabokov (1966). Indeed, by the early 20th century there was an increasing scepticism about the possibility of a cohesive self emerging through autobiographical memory. Modernist

writers experimented with fragmentation, subverting chronology and splitting the subject (Woolf 1985, published posthumously; Stein 1933), foregrounding visual and scenic/topographical components, highlighting the role of language (Sartre [1964] 2002), conflating auto- and heterobiography or transforming lives into fiction (e.g. Proust [1913–27] 1988).

3.1 Critical Paradigms in Historical Perspective

From its critical beginnings, then, autobiography has been inextricably linked to the critical history of subjectivity. In his monumental study of 1907, Misch explicitly surveyed the history of autobiography as a reflection of the trajectory of forms of subjective consciousness ([1907] 1950: 4). He thus acknowledged the historical specificity of forms of autobiographical self-reflection. With his concept of autobiography as “a special *genre* in literature” and at the same time “an original interpretation of experience” (3–4), Misch aligned with the hermeneutics of Dilthey, who considered autobiography the supreme form of the “understanding of life.” Such understanding involves selection as the autobiographical self takes from the infinite moments of experience those elements that, in retrospect, appear relevant with respect to the entire life course. The past is endowed with meaning in the light of the present. Understanding, according to Dilthey, also involves fitting the individual parts into a whole, ascribing interconnection and causality ([1910] 2002: 221–22). Autobiography thus constructs an individual life course as a coherent, meaningful whole. Even if autobiography’s aspect of re-living experience, of rendering incidents as they were experienced at the time, is taken into account, the superior ‘interpreting’ position of the narrative present remains paramount, turning past events into a meaningful plot, making sense (*Sinn*) of contingency.

Hermeneutics continued to dominate the theory of autobiography, lagging behind its poetic practices. Gusdorf defined autobiography as “a kind of apologetics or theodicy of the individual being” (1980: 39), yet shifted the emphasis somewhat by prioritizing its literary over its historical function. Anglo-American theories of autobiography similarly tended to focus on such a poetical norm of autobiography as a literary work devoted to “inner truth” (Pascal 1960), with Rousseau’s/Goethe’s autobiography as the recognizable generic model. “Any auto-biography that resembles modern auto-biographies in structure and content is the modern kind of au-to-biography”; these are “works like those that modern readers instinctively expect to find when they see *Autobiography*, *My Life*, or *Memoirs* printed across the back of a volume” (Shumaker 1954: 5). Whether hermeneutics- or New Criticism-inspired, the history of autobiography as “art” (Niggli 1988: 6) is seen to culminate around 1800, while its more immediate forerunners are often located in the Renaissance or earlier (e.g. Petrarch [1326] 2005; Cellini [1558–66] 1995). With

regard to the primary role of the autobiographer as subject of his work, Starobinski argued that his/her singularity was articulated by way of idiosyncratic style (1970, [1970] 1983).

Only in the wake of the various social, cultural and linguistic turns of literary and cultural theory since the 1970s did autobiography lose this normative frame. Relying on Freud and Riesman, Neumann established a social psychology-based typology of autobiographical forms. Aligning different modes of narrative with different conceptions of identity, he distinguished between the external orientation of *res gestae* and memoir, representing the individual as social type, on the one hand, as opposed to autobiography with its focus on memory and identity (1970: esp. 25), on the other hand. Only autobiography aims at personal identity whereas the memoir is concerned with affirming the autobiographer's place in the world.

More recent research has elaborated on the issue of autobiographical narrative and identity in psychological terms (Bruner 1993) as well as from interdisciplinary angles, probing the inevitability of narrative as constitutive of personal identity (e.g. Eakin 2008) in the wake of "the twin crisis of identity and narrative in the twentieth century" (Klepper 2013: 2) and exploring forms of non-linearity, intermediality or life writing in the new media (Dünne & Moser 2008). The field of life writing as narratives of self—or of various forms of self—has thus become significantly broader, transcending the classic model of autobiographical identity qua coherent retrospective narrative. Yet whatever its theoretical remodelling and practical rewritings, even if frequently subverted in practice, the close nexus between narrative, self/identity, and the genre/practice of autobiography continues to be considered paramount. The underlying assumption concerning autobiography is that of a close, even inextricable connection between narrative and identity, with autobiography the prime generic site of enactment. Moreover, life narrative has even been promoted in modernity to a "general cultural pattern of knowledge" (Braun & Stiegler eds. 2012: 13). (While these approaches tend to address autobiographical writing practices claiming to be or considered non-fictional, their relevance extends to autofictional forms.)

Next to narrative and identity, the role of memory in (autobiographical) self-constructions has been addressed (Olney 1998), in particular adopting cognitivist (e.g. Erll et al., eds. 2003) and psychoanalytical (Pietzcker 2005) angles as well as elaborating the neurobiological foundations of autobiographical memory (Markowitsch & Welzer 2005). From the perspective of 'natural' narratology, the experiential aspect of autobiography, its dimension of re-living and reconstructing experience, has been emphasized (Löschnigg 2010: 259).

With memory being both a constitutive faculty and a creative liability, the nature of

the autobiographical subject has also been revised in terms of psychoanalytical, (socio-) psychological or even deconstructive categories (e.g. Holdenried 1991; Volkening 2006). 'Classic autobiography' has turned out to be a limited historical phenomenon whose foundations and principles have been increasingly challenged and subverted with respect to poetic practice, poetological reflection and genre theory alike. Even within a less radical theoretical frame, chronological linearity, retrospective narrative closure and coherence as mandatory generic markers have been dis-qualified, or at least re-conceptualized as structural tools (e.g. Kronsbein 1984). Autobiography's generic scope now includes such forms as the diary/journal as "serial autobiography" (Fothergill 1974: 152), the "Literary Self-Portrait" as a more heterogeneous and complex literary type (Beaujour [1980] 1991) and the essay (e.g. Hof & Rohr eds. 2008). While autobiography has thus gained in formal and thematic diversity, autobiographical identity appears a transitory phenomenon at best. In its most radical deconstructive twist, autobiography is reconceptualized as a rhetorical figure—"prosopopeia"—that ultimately produces "the illusion of reference" (de Man 1984: 81). De Man thus challenges the very foundations of autobiography in that it is said to create its subject by means of rhetorical language rather than represent the subject. Autobiography operates in complicity with metaphysical notions of self-consciousness, intentionality and language as a means of representation.

Whereas de Man's deconstruction of autobiography turned out to be of little lasting impact, Lejeune's theory of the "autobiographical pact" has proven seminal. It rethinks autobiography as an institutionalized communicative act where author and reader enter into a particular 'contract'—the "autobiographical pact"—sealed by the triple reference of the same proper name. "Autobiography (narrative recounting the life of the author) supposes that there is *identity of name* between the author (such as s/he figures, by name, on the cover), the narrator of the story and the character who is being talked about" ([1987] 1988: 12; see Genette [1991] 1993). The author's proper name refers to a singular autobiographical identity, identifying author, narrator and protagonist as one, and thus ensures the reading as autobiography. "The autobiographical pact is the affirmation in the text of this identity, referring back in the final analysis to the *name* of the author on the cover" (14). The tagging of the generic status operates by way of paratextual pronouncements or by identity of names; in contrast, nominal differentiation or content clues might point to fiction as worked out by Cohn (1999).

While Lejeune's approach reduces the issue of fiction vs non-fiction to a simple matter of pragmatics, he acknowledges its own historical limitations set by the "author function" (Foucault [1969] 1979) along with its inextricable ties to the middle-class subject. As an ideal type, Lejeune's autobiographical pact depends on

the emergence of the modern author in the long 18th century as proprietor of his or her own text, guaranteed by modern copyright and marked by the title page/the imprint. In this sense, the history of modern autobiography as literary genre is closely connected to the history of authorship and the modern subject and vice versa, much as the scholarship on autobiography has emerged contemporaneously with the emergence of the modern author (Schönert → Author [2]).

In various ways, then, autobiography has proved prone to be to “slip[ping] away altogether,” failing to be identifiable by “its own proper form, terminology, and observances” (Olney ed. 1980: 4). Some critics have even pondered the “end of autobiography” (e.g. Finck 1999: 11). With critical hindsight, the classic paradigm of autobiography, with its tenets of coherence, circular closure, interiority, etc., is exposed as a historically limited, gendered and socially exclusive phenomenon (and certainly one that erases any clear dividing line between factual and fictional self-writings).

As its classic markers were rendered historically obsolete or ideologically suspicious (Nussbaum 1989), the pivotal role of class (Sloterdijk 1978), and especially gender, as intersectional identity markers within specific historical contexts came to be highlighted, opening innovative critical perspectives on strategies of subject formation in ‘canonical’ texts as well as broadening the field of autobiography studies. While ‘gender sensitive’ studies initially sought to reconstruct a specific female canon, they addressed the issue of a distinct female voice of/in autobiography as more “multidimensional, fragmented” (Jelinek ed. 1986: viii), or subsequently undertook to explore autobiographical selves in terms of discursive self-positionings instead (Nussbaum 1989; Finck 1999: esp. 291–93), tying in with discourse analytical redefinitions of autobiography as a discursive regime of (self-)discipline and regulation that evolved out of changes in communication media and technologies of memory during the 17th and 18th centuries (Schneider 1986). Subsequently, issues of publication, canonization and the historical nexus of gender and (autobiographical) genre became subjects of investigation, bringing into view historical notions of gender and the specific conditions and practices of communication within their generic and pragmatic contexts (e.g. Hof & Rohr eds. 2008). The history of autobiography has come to be more diverse and multifaceted: thus alternative ‘horizontal’ modes of self, where identity is based on its contextual embedding by way of diarial modes, have come to the fore. With respect to texts by 17th-century autobiographers, the notion of “heterologous subjectivity”—self-writing via writing about another or others—has been suggested (Kormann 2004 : 5–6).

If gender studies exposed autobiography’s individualist self as a phenomenon of

male self-fashioning, postcolonial theory further challenged its universal validity. While autobiography was long considered an exclusively Western genre, postcolonial approaches to autobiography/ life writing have significantly expanded the corpus of autobiographical writings and provided a perspective which is critical of both the eurocentrism of autobiography genre theory and the concepts of selfhood in operation (e.g. Lionett 1991). In this context, too, the question has arisen as to how autobiography is possible for those who have no voice of their own, who cannot speak for themselves (see Spivak's 'subaltern'). Such 'Writing ordinary lives', usually aiming at collective identities, poses specific problems: sociological, ethical and even aesthetic (see Pandian 2008).

Following the spatial turn, the concept of 'eco-autobiography' also carries potentially wider theoretical significance. By "mapping the self" (Regard ed. 2003), eco-biography designates a specific mode of autobiography that constructs a "relationship between the natural setting and the self," often aiming at "discover[ing] 'a new self in nature'" (Perreten 2003), with Wordsworth or Thoreau ([1854] 1948) as frequently cited paradigms. Phrased in less Romantic terms, it locates life courses and self-representations in specific places. In a wider sense, eco- or topographical autobiographies undertake to place the autobiographical subject in terms of spatial or topographical figurations, bringing into play space/topography as a pivotal moment of biographical identity and thus potentially disturbing autobiography's anchorage in time. In any case, the prioritizing of space over time seems to question, if not to reverse, the dominance of temporality in autobiography and beyond since 1800.

Whatever the markers of difference and semantic foci explored, the notion of autobiography has shifted from literary genre to a broad range of cultural practices that draw on and incorporate a multitude of textual modes and genres. By 2001, Smith and Watson (eds. 2001) were able to list fifty-two "Genres of Life Narrative" by combining formal and semantic features. Among them are narratives of migration, immigration or exile, narratives engaging with ethnic identity and community, prison narratives, illness, trauma and coming-out narratives as much as celebrity memoirs, graphic life writing and forms of Internet self-presentation. These multiple forms and practices produce, or allow critics to freshly address, new 'subject formations' within specific historical and cultural localities. Finally, scholars have engaged with the role of aesthetic practices that "turn 'life itself' into a work of art," developing "*zoography* as a radically post-anthropocentric approach to life narrative" (van den Hengel 2012: 1), part of a larger attempt to explore auto/biographical figures in relation to concepts of "posthumanism."

4 Related Terms

Whereas autobiography, as a term almost synonymous with life writing, signifies a broad range of ‘practices of writing the self’ including pre-modern forms and epistolary or diarial modes, ‘classic’ autobiography hinges upon the notion of the formation of individual identity by means of narrative. With its historical, psychological and philosophical dimensions, it differs from related forms such as memoirs and *res gestae*. Memoirs locate a self in the world, suggesting a certain belonging to, or contemporaneity with, and being in tune with the world (Neumann 1970). However, all these forms imply a certain claim to non-fictionality which, to a certain degree only, sets them off from autobiographical fiction/the autobiographical novel, with highly blurred boundaries and intense generic interaction (Müller 1976; Löschnigg 2006).

Biography is used today both as a term synonymous with “life writing” (hence the journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1978ff.) as well as denoting *heterobiography*, i.e. the narrative of the life of another. (The term “life writing” also includes heterobiography.) While in narratological terms experimental forms of autobiography may collapse the conventional 1st- vs 3rd-person boundary (§ 2), viewing the self as other, hetero-biography has generated its own distinct poetics and theory, extending from an agenda of resemblance as “the impossible horizon of biography” (“In *biography*, it is *resemblance* that must ground identity”; Lejeune [1987] 1988: 24) to specific considerations of modes of representing the biographical subject, of biographical understanding, or knowledge, and the ethics of heterobiography (Eakin ed. 2004; Phelan → Narrative Ethics [3]).

5 Topics for Further Investigation

The intersections of hetero- and autobiography remain to be further explored. Significantly, ‘natural’ narratology’s theorizing of vicarious narration and the evolution of FID (Fludernik 1996) makes the limits of non-fictional heterodiegetic narration discernible: in its conventional form and refraining from speculative empathy, it must ultimately fail to render “experientiality” or resort to fiction, while autobiography’s experiential dimension invites further investigation (Löschnigg 2010). Additional study of the experimental interactions of life writing with no clear dividing lines between auto- and hetero-biography might yield results with interdisciplinary repercussions.

Finally, the field of self-representation and life writing in the new media calls for more research from an interdisciplinary angle.

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6.1

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