

Introduction

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Introduction

The articles within the present special issue of *Brno Studies in English* examine critically the ways in which the genres of autobiography and biography, as well as other forms of life writing, have, especially in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, employed various transgressive strategies, both formally and thematically, strategies that often problematize our thinking about writing our own or others' lives. Perhaps nowhere have the debates about how to re-present a life as a form of cultural production been interrogated as closely as in the disciplines of history and literature. Among more general readers, there has been an enormous interest in popular auto/biographies—ranging from the ghost-written autobiographies of celebrities to narratives of struggle and suffering in various parts of the world, from historical/biographical documentaries to oral-history projects—all of which are predominantly consumed as “truthful” depictions of reality. Meanwhile and conversely, scholarly studies of auto/biography and life writing have increasingly come to challenge the very concept of “truthful representation” by analyzing: the ways in which our selective memories intervene in the construction of “facts,” the ways in which these “facts” have been crafted to fit particular ideologies, and the ways in which various representations of lives can be deconstructed and appropriated for artistic and other purposes. Issues of ethicality and authenticity, both of which are ever-present in the depiction of a life, have increasingly become central considerations of contemporary critical analyses.

These considerations and challenges infuse this volume, and point to developments in, and responses to, both subject and genre treatment. As one would expect, a number of the articles in the present special issue explore, in diverse ways, the problematic intersection of auto/biography and fiction, raising questions about the degree to which the “factual” and the “fictional” can be, or ever are, merged, and whether and why this should actually matter to the writer or the reader. Since different approaches spring from different theoretical backgrounds and contexts, these articles understandably employ a variety of terms to answer a similar set of questions and to explore similar terrain. *Fictional(ized) auto/biography* is, for instance, the most analyzed and theorized concept in the present collection. In an article that serves to bridge many of the others within this collection, Vanja Polić

outlines the crucial points in auto/biography theory, i.e. the ways in which a life becomes “textured” and textualized. Éva Zsizmann and Julia Novak employ the term *fictionalized biography* to examine narratives based on biographies of real historical persons that nonetheless maintain some space for speculation, appropriation, and/or re-writing; and the authors relate these to more specific narrative categories such as *biofiction* and *historiographic metafiction*. Closely linked to the above are the terms *fictional auto/biography* and *auto/biographical fiction*, presumably deployed with regard to which element (auto/biography or fiction) prevails: *fictional autobiography* here refers to a first-person narrative by a fictional narrator, a technique sometimes used to foster allegory or juxtaposition, as in the paralleling of an individual’s life and a nation’s history considered in the article by Evelyn Hanquart-Turner. Even more intricate strategies surface at the intersection of autobiography, biography, and fiction: while Milada Franková uses the term *auto/biographical pastiche* to describe the intervention of the author’s “I” in the already-fictionalized biography, Wendy Ward points to fictional auto/biography as *antibiography*, which, in her interpretation, presents not one but multiple fictional selves. Finally, Bernice Schrank brings in an equally complex issue, the presence or absence of autobiographical authenticity in *fictionalized non-fiction*, a topic that expands into another set of related articles, those that examine the relationship between the auto/biographer and the subject, be it the projection of the author’s life into his/her fiction or the liability of reading novels as autobiographical (as in the article by Petr Chalupský), or the complex relation between the biographer and the biographical subject and the spaces in which these meet and interact (as in the articles by Rob Baum and Brigitte Bourdeau). By extension, three of these articles examine feminist interventions into the genre of life writing, accentuating their oppositional character in relation to men’s auto/biographies and articulating issues argued as typical for women’s life writing – the relationality and political character of minority women’s autobiographies (as in the article by Nina Bosničová), the double-voiced texts of both resistance and complicity (as in the article by Tihana Klepac), and the use of life writing as a source of artistic inspiration (as in the article by Katalin Kürtösi). Lastly, Christoph Houswitschka invites us to reflect on the uses made of life writing and oral history within historical research.

By employing a wide range of focus, we believe that the present collection has managed to articulate and compass many of the most interesting issues in the contemporary study of auto/biography and life writing. Hopefully these articles will encourage further consideration of the genre and its potential to transgress boundaries.

The Editors

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