

Criticism as Autobiography, or Melville's Self-in-Text

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The transgressiveness of Herman Melville's autobiography has been one of the favorite subjects of literary scholars since the onset of Melville's Revival in the late 1920s. Unsurprisingly, a grand majority of Melville scholars would concentrate their analytical efforts upon such important novels as *White-Jacket*, *Redburn*, or *Pierre*. The present study, however, attempts to offer a complementary perspective, focusing primarily on Melville-in-text, or, more precisely, on how the writers' self bleeds into texts which apparently have little to do with life-writing *per se*. The object of my reflection is Melville's unique criticism of consciousness, which I propose to analyze using, as examples, three of his critical reviews. Studying the writer's reflections on *Etchings of a Whaling Cruise* by J. Ross Browne, *The Red Rover* by James Fenimore Cooper and *Mosses of the Old Manse* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, it is possible to demonstrate how Melville, as a reviewer, gives his emotions free rein when he addresses problems raised by other writers, with which he himself would identify, how his own experiences—not infrequently traumatic—inform his writing style and, eventually, how he abandons his critical position to eventually create a text of his own, ontologically independent and motivated by the elementary principles of his own, unique philosophy, in which existence and text are inseparable and in which self is a function of language, beyond which extends the space of the ineffable, a space beyond any qualification or quantification, a space where no self is possible.

Discourse of Difference: Rosa Campbell Praed's *My Australian Girlhood*

Tihana Klepač
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Australian nationalist meta-narrative performed “cultural apartheid” (Summers) over female literary production. Excluded from official discourse and the dominant literary genres, women resorted to those available in the attempt to formulate their subjectivity. Hence their narratives became a means of talking back. Consequently, Rosa Campbell Praed's *My Australian Girlhood* (1902) demonstrates characteristics of autobiography, travel literature and adventure narrative, and at the same time transgresses the said genres in both, their intent, as well as their structural characteristics. Additionally, travelling within the colonial context, Praed inevitably participates in the discourses of imperialism, which she is, however, found rupturing as she criticises British racial policy in Australia, thus revealing her writing as double-voiced. As a female colonial writer, writing within a masculine realist literary tradition, Praed was othered by contemporary critics who either devalued her writing, or altogether dismissed it as un-Australian, ignoring numerous instances wherein she contributes to the formulation of the national identity as formulated in the 1890s. Therefore to read Praed's text means to be aware of the “historically and culturally specific discourse of identity through which women became speaking subjects” (Smith and Watson).

Henry James as a Character: Fictionalized and Literary Biography

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The present paper's aim is to demonstrate that Henry James has himself become a character in the works of Alan Hollinghurst—*The Line of Beauty*; Emma Tennant—*Felony*; Gore Vidal—*Empire: A Novel*; David Lodge—*Author, author!*; and Colm Toibin—*The Master*. What is the borderline between fiction and reality regarding Henry James, this is a matter which will be fully developed in my article. Moreover, we are going to answer the following questions: “Why has Henry James attracted the attention of so many novelists who made him a character in their novels and what is their purpose?” “Why an individual who did nothing but write books his entire existence caught the attention of contemporary writers?” “What is the purpose of having James as a character in fictional writing?”

Friday, 10:50-12:10—Session 2

Chaired by Aritha van Herk

Autobiography and the Genre of *Bildungsroman*

Šárka Bubíková
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Most literary historians agree that the tradition of the genre of *Bildungsroman* starts at the end of the eighteenth century and reflects an important paradigmatic shift both in the understanding of the importance of childhood and youth for the formation of an individual and in the understanding of time changes and history. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the *Bildungsroman*'s main theme is the "image of man in the process of becoming" and thus *Bildungsroman* is "the novel of human emergence." As such, it lends itself to authors who try to depict their own process of growing up, of emerging as individuals, and thus these two genres often seem to overlap. Novels studied critically as examples of the *Bildungsroman* genre are frequently marketed as autobiographies or semi-autobiographies. However, some critics argue that while the autobiographical aspects of many *Bildungsromane* cannot be overlooked, they are not autobiographies in the traditional sense because their compliance to the generic "rules" of the *Bildungsroman* are far more pronounced than the aims and purposes of autobiography. In my presentation I will discuss how the distinction between the two genres as well as the possible blurring of it applies to my own novel *Smaragdové město* (Emerald City, 2006).

Family History: Facts, Fiction, a Journey

Anna Lyon
University of Sussex, England

When I began to write a biography of my great-grandmother Lily Clifford (1852-1921), I was faced with the immediate problem of lack of primary source material. She left no letters or diaries that have survived, not even a photograph. She was not famous and effectively, her life only exists through the public records: births, marriages, deaths. As a writer, I decided to write her life as a work of fiction, in order to allow me fill the gaps in her story. Due to the subject matter—a bigamous marriage, secrecy and potential scandal—I chose to adopt the format of a 19th century sensation novel.

As I began to write, various problems arose. My aim at first had been, rather naively perhaps to create a "true" version of Lily's life and character, but is this possible using sensation fiction? Sensation fiction relies on taking real or plausible narratives to the edge of credibility and decency, using tension, suspense and thrills along the way. Will I be able to maintain the integrity of her story, or is the telling of the story the most important factor? My understanding of this story has changed as my work has progressed, hence the journey.

Between Memories and a Story: How to Write an (Auto)Biography?

Ludmila Volná
Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic, and IMAGER Université Paris Est Créteil, France

The number of those who lost their lives in Czechoslovakia during the communist regime (1948-1989) is estimated at between six and ten thousand. Those whose lives were severely damaged in different ways are numberless. The present paper will concentrate on one of the latter, a person having been subject to persecution in the so called normalization period (after 1968). When it all started for her she was fifteen years old and finishing the ground school. The paper will trace the ways in which she is now attempting to put together her autobiography. As she moves between her memories, feelings, and her present condition, affected beyond recovery, she realizes that it is not at all easy to create a coherent story. The paper will use the authentic and unedited material of the person's experiences, gathered, with her permission, through a number of conversations with her.

Friday, 13:40-15:00—Session 3

Chaired by Thomas McConnell

Reinventing Lives into Stories: Historical Autobiography in Alice Munro's *The View from Castle Rock*

Tanja Cvetkovic
University of Nis, Serbia

The paper focuses on Alice Munro's short story cycle *The View from Castle Rock* and the way the authoress permeates her fiction with historical events and people. The stories revolve around Munro's Scottish family history, taking us back to the eighteenth century, and are based on journals, letters and research Munro did while visiting the Ettrick Valley where her forebears had lived. Munro's statement that she has written about "her self as searchingly as [she] could" points to the autobiographical dimension of her stories. By exploiting the gap between Scottish cultural markers and their referents in the New World (the U.S.A. and Canada), Munro shows that her characters have to reinvent both their selves and the world around them. One of the concerns of the author of this paper would be to single out the autobiographical elements from Munro's life in the stories drawing on Munro's idea about her fiction that "there is always a starting point in reality." The author of the paper also wants to point out that the past needs (re)interpreting when it is documented and that fiction is inherent in any attempt at reinventing the past.

The Texture of Everyday Life

Vanja Polic
University of Zagreb, Croatia

The paper will use as backdrop the two well-known examples of Canadian literature, Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* and Margaret Atwood's reinscription, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* to discuss some of the key characteristics of life writing as a genre. More precisely, the paper will explore some of the ways in which personal experience turns into life writing, the process in which a record of a life lived becomes a story. Such as: the textualization of the "texture" of life, or from body to book; the narrativization and emplotting of the incidences of life into a life narrative (Hayden White); the storying of life narratives; the heteroglossia of life writing (Mikhail Bakhtin); and the finding of voice for one's self (Paul John Eakin).

Fact or Fiction: Autobiographical Narratives in Michael Ondaatje and B. Wongar

Milica Zivkovic
University of Nis, Serbia

The purpose of the paper is to compare/contrast Michael Ondaatje's fictionalized memoir *Running in the Family* and B. Wongar's personal nonfiction *Dingoes Den* which is a rather unexpected literary juxtaposition; Michael Ondaatje and B. Wongar have little in common besides the fact that both of them are expatriates who are apparently creating their "imaginary homelands" on the politicized postcolonial terrain of Canada and Australia. The paper will concern itself with the strategies and techniques used by the writers to blur the lines between fact and fiction in their autobiographical writing. Starting with the assumption that the reader's expectations when he/she reads a memoir/autobiography are far different than when he/she reads fiction, I would like to explore a few questions: how creative are these writers with the truth? What effect do they want to produce by fictionalizing history or historicizing fiction? How successfully do these authors manage to utilize certain stylistic devices that critics identify as modern or postmodern ones for their postcolonial purposes: to re-evaluate history, the marginalized, the struggle between the centre and the periphery? Do these (auto)biographies provide us an insight into the extent to which the writers/readers have become insensitive to the questions of truth, responsibility and reality?

Prick Lit or Naked Hope? Self-Exposure in Hanif Kureishi's *Intimacy*

Petr Chalupský
Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

From his early screenplays *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1988) and debut novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) to his latest novel, *Something to Tell You* (2008), Hanif Kureishi has always drawn extensively from his own life experience. Dealing with the themes of love, race and family, accompanied typically with provokingly explicit sex scenes and brutally honest contemplations on sexuality in general, his works are peopled with characters that often bear a striking similarity not only to the author himself but, mostly to their outrageous protests, to his various relatives and ex-partners. *Intimacy* (1998) occupies a specific position in this context as it can, on one level, be read as a semi-autobiographical novel inspired by Kureishi's recent experience of leaving his wife and two children to live with a younger woman. The novel was immediately met with a storm of critical voices, particularly from female reviewers, accusing the author of immaturity, callousness and misogyny. The aim of this paper is to show that such a reading is simplifying because it reduces the novel to a purely personal level and by doing so ignores its undeniable literary value. It also argues that, despite its gloomy tone, rather than providing a hateful perspective on femininity the novel offers a variation on one of the author's idiosyncrasies—hopeful belief in love and humanity. Finally, it attempts to explore the possibilities and limitations of the genre of confessional fiction as exemplified in *Intimacy*.

***The Red Queen*: Margaret Drabble's (Auto)Biographical Pastiche**

Milada Franková
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

Margaret Drabble's 2004 novel *The Red Queen* transgresses the generic borderlines between autobiography, biography, fiction and metafiction.

Inspired by memoirs and biography of eighteenth-century Korean Crown Princess, Lady Hong or Hyegyong, the novel employs a first person narrative voice as that of the Princess's ghost speaking to twenty-first century readers, occasionally comparing the time past with the time present. Although Drabble voices some doubts about having appropriated the (auto)biographical material in this manner, she defends her right of a novelist to do so. She balances her right to interpret and fictionalize with deep admiration and respect for the disturbing original.

This paper will consider Drabble's multiple transgressions in the novel within the context of her writing and the context of the contemporary British novel.

Palimpsests of Guilt: Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*

Katarína Labudová
The Catholic University, Ružomberok, Slovakia

The fictive autobiography of Joan Forster offers several fictive and realist versions of her life which never fit together. The novel does not have a unified generic identity. Instead, the autobiography rewrites traditional Gothic motifs; recycles elements from fairy tales and many allusions to Hollywood films. The coexistence and parody of the reality alongside fantastic, intertextual allusions to classic escapist Harlequin Romances and traditional fairytales produces a non-escapist postmodern patchwork. Joan's life story is completed with parts from her Gothic romances, which mirror her everyday life in a far more exciting and glamorous light. The guilt-soaked autobiographical book and the Kunstlerroman, *Lady Oracle*, becomes a product of her (fat) female body. Joan's transforming body (from fat to thin, from long red haired to mud brown) and a multitude of new names (Louise K. Delacourt, Joan Forster) represent her continuous effort to write a new, perfect self. In this sense, her body as well as her text, becomes a type of palimpsest. To emphasize this idea this paper interprets Atwood's novel within the frame of Hélène Cixous's seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), written a year before the novel *Lady Oracle* was published.

Friday, 17:00-18:00—Session 5

Workshop with Sharon Butala, Amanda Hale, and Theresa Kishkan

Transgressions in African American Autobiography

Nina Bosničová
Gender Studies, o.p.s.

My paper will analyze various aspects in which African American autobiographies transgress the simplest definition of the genre demarcating its representatives as true life stories of their authors. The explanation for these deviations in black American life writing (perhaps in somewhat of a contrast to their white counterparts), should not be looked for so much in the autobiographers' inner artistic and personal motivations as in the external context of their destinies experienced at the intersections of race, gender and class. Among the issues discussed in the paper will be the questions of literacy, authorship, censorship, authenticity and genre mixtures. The analysis will use concrete textual examples, starting with Frederick Douglass's (1845) and Harriet Jacobs's (1861) slave narratives produced in the 19th century, through Richard Wright's *The Black Boy (American Hunger)* (1945) and Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), which sprang into existence in the first half of the 20th century, and finishing with activist autobiographies of Angela Davis (1974) and Malcolm X (1965) from the turbulent Civil Rights and Black Power eras.

At the Membrane of History, Chemistry and Literature: Refashioning Identity through (Auto)Biography

Catalina Botez
University of Konstanz, Germany

Primo Levi's most original work *The Periodic Table* (1975) engages in an elegant and fascinating manner with such overlapping concepts as (auto)biography, memoir, history and poetical myth by proposing a charismatic literary hybrid made up of episodes of personal life and fictitious tales, significantly correlated with elements of Mendeleev's periodic table. The result is an insightful, universalising glance at his own (pre- and post-) WWII experience, as seen through the double lens of science and humanistic culture. The manifold perspectives through which Levi sees the story of his life range from that of a chemist-physicist, a partisan, an Auschwitz survivor and a skilled writer, all of which combine to render a self-proclaimed "micro-history" organised in 21 chapters named after the inorganic elements of Mendeleev's table. This particular stylistic form (the story begins with *Argon* and ends with *Carbon*, i.e. the so-called element of life) illustrates, I argue, Levi's deep understanding, respect and knowledge of life's wondrous *material* complexity. As such, the overarching truth governing every individual's life is that we, humans, are discrete and equally important sequences of the "millennial dialogue between the elements and man," in that we are particles of a logical, albeit changing, organic whole.

Read in this key, Primo Levi's own trauma, i.e. that of an abused Italian patriot, intellectual and Jewish Holocaust survivor, finds its particular kind of explanation and alleviation in so far as he proposes a reinstatement of human dignity through science and intellect; essentially, what Levi attempts and thoroughly achieves, is a rehabilitation of the concept of life, so rich in (auto)biographic literature and the domain of chemistry, and yet so damaged by the event of the Holocaust. From Argon to Carbon, going through Phosphorous, Lead and Cerium (three chemical components most intricately related to Levi's camp/ near-death experience), one actually goes through the circle of life itself, incomplete without the occurrence of death. This organicist view on (and evaluation of) one's life does not erase the individual's responsibility for his/her own decisions—and therefore their dignity and probity—just as it reinforces the truth about the human transient condition. By exposing his biography as governed by the changing circle of chemical elements and historical events, Levi tells us a story about transformation and inertia, truth and lie/fiction, and most of all about life's necessary impurity as opposed to the Fascist fanatic quest for purity. Seen in this essentialist light, his personal biography touches upon everyone's biography in that it proposes a moving and convincing account of how traumatised individual history can reopen the possibility of continuation of a meaningful life.

Private Parts: Victorian and Edwardian Homoerotic (Auto)Biography

Michael Matthew Kaylor
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

The core concern of all autobiographical writing is the elucidation of the following diptych: *Who I am* and *Who I have been*. A plethora of issues arise from this, involving credibility, authentication, available evidence, point of view, authorial intention, gaps in memory, social standing, interpersonal relationships, sexuality, to name but a few. These issues are problematized even further when a writer cannot, for whatever reason, safely admit either *Who I am* or *Who I have been*. Such was the case for the pederastic and homoerotic writers and artists of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, a cluster of divergent voices that have been decently subsumed under the title “Uranian.”

While there were a flurry of available venues for the publication and circulation of their works (whether those were textual or pictorial), waxing overtly autobiographical still held dangers that made it relatively impossible or at least highly unlikely that a daring Uranian would opt to publish, even for private circulation, biographical residues of the sort that became the standardized three-volume “Lives” of this period. At best, these biographical residues appear as “white stains” (to borrow an eroticised phrase from the most contentious Uranian, Edward Alexander “Aleister” Crowley), stains vaguely present on the page, but only recognisable if one knows where to look.

As alternative figures, the Uranians necessarily constructed forms of alternative (auto)biography or alternatives to (auto)biography, and this paper will consider several of the strategies they employed to do so.

The Rogue's Progress: *The In-Between Life of Vikram Lall* by M. G. Vassanji

Evelyne Hanquart-Turner

University of Paris Est-Créteil, and Darwin College, Cambridge, England

M. G. Vassanji's novel *The In-Between Life of Vikram Lall* is presented as an autobiographical narrative recorded by Vikram Lall, a fictional Kenyan Indian, whose life runs parallel with the History of his native country through the second half of the twentieth century. As the eponymous hero confesses in the opening lines of the story: "[he has] the distinction of having been numbered one of Africa's most corrupt men, a cheat of monstrous and reptilian cunning." Using the framework established by Philippe Lejeune in *Le pacte autobiographique* (1975), this roguish life appears as a rogue autobiography as well since it "cheats" with the characteristics of the *genre*. The paper will attempt to show how the novel operates within such a framework and how the usual code is used or misused in the interest of suspense and satire.

(Auto)Biography as Discursive Battleground: Exploring the Use of Life Writing at an American Mission Station in Late Ottoman Syria

Christine B. Lindner

University of Balamand, Lebanon

(Auto)biographies were important tools within the American Protestant missionary movement of the early nineteenth century. The individualism, self-reflexivity and literacy espoused by the missionaries resonated with some living in Ottoman Syria. Reading biographies of converts and important evangelical figures allowed the missionaries to present religious "models" for the Syrian populace, while the collection of autobiographical writings by converts was a way to investigate the sincerity of their new faith. Likewise, publishing (auto)biographies of martyred missionaries and converts was an important channel to raise funds and interest in the specific station, while demonstrating the success of the station's efforts.

The aim of my paper is to examine the history and context for the use of (auto)biographies at the missionary station in Ottoman Syria. My paper will argue that the employment, production and rejection of certain (auto)biographies represents a contestation over the ideologies that plagued both the missionaries as well the relationship between missionaries and converts. I will specifically address the ways that Protestant womanhood was defined and debated through the publication of competing memoirs (edited by men), the selective publishing/silencing of women's writings, and the self-censorship of women to either not produce (auto)biographies or limit what was recorded.

This paper will thus show how (auto)biographies were, historically, both channels for discursive exchange as well as sites of tension.

Writing the Self beyond the Nation: Transnational Identities in Olaudah Equiano's Progressive Autobiography

Silvia Schultermandl

University of Graz, Austria

While Benjamin Franklin was recording his life in colonial America and thereby depicting the struggles of a young nation, Olaudah Equiano was recording his multiple crossings of the Atlantic as first as a slave, and later as an explorer of the North Pole. Both men depict their lives as testimonies of animated circum-Atlantic cultural conversations, but conclude with different emphases as far as the status of the American nation-state. Franklin's *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1791) offers a detailed depiction of the political and socio-cultural underpinnings of postcolonial American identity. Meanwhile Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789) articulates a sense of self that is not tied to a nation-state but to the passages in-between.

One way of accounting for these differences is to take into consideration the racial formation of the United States, where Franklin, as member of a white, male ruling class inevitably experienced life in the young American nation differently than Equiano, a slave imported from Nigeria. I argue in this paper, however, that the different racial formations are only the starting point for a critical reading of depictions of nationhood in the two autobiographies. Perhaps it is out of the necessity to write himself into existence that Equiano employs a more experimental form than Franklin, one that transgresses established generic boundaries of autobiographical writing, much in the fashion of postmodern authors. Equiano's embracing of an experimental form animates questions about the convergence of literary form and national identity, and lends itself to speculations about the role of autobiographical writing as a reflection of American politics and an allegory of nationhood.

Autobiographical Controversy as a Challenge of a Dual Identity

Sorina Ailiesei
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași, Romania

The topic of this investigation focuses on the complex and elusive process of self-definition and narrative self-making, pointing out particular features encountered in one of the most famous ethnic literary texts of contemporary times, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. The Asian American writer revises the memoir form as a tool for rewriting reality, asserting female-gendered selfhoods historically contextualized. This work also focuses on the author's quest to redefine genres combining techniques of fiction with fact, to negotiate boundaries between past and present, history and myth, using fantasy, speculation and anecdote, to create an exotic China in conjunction with the feminist message she interjects into a wondrous landscape. She seeks to articulate forces and disjunctions in order to claim hyphenation as a form of bicultural identity that evolves inside a third, hybrid, Chinese-American space. This duality is generated by her double cultural heritage she wants to reconcile with, mediating between Chinese and American values. Through her contentious discourse, she proves that searching for an identity goes beyond mere individual efforts, but it derives from, as well as contributes to larger cultural ethos, certifying that memoirs are not only of a person, but of an era, that is, a class identity.

The Kindertransport and Karen Gershon's Autobiographical Writings

Christoph Houswitschka
University of Bamberg, Germany

Karen Gershon (1923-1993) was born in Bielefeld, Germany. In 1939 she came to England without her family on a kindertransport. She was one of the first exiles of the kindertransport who wrote poems and prose about her loss, her alienation, and her inner feelings as a German refugee. In the series of her writings her autobiography were written last. In the subtitle, Gershon calls her edition of biographical records, *We Came As Children* (1966), a "collective autobiography." She tries to grasp her own individual fate as one of thousands more. She imagines her individual identity always as representation of a collective or social memory as a Jew and a woman, as a refugee and an author.

Gershon's allegorical tale of a woman who survived the bombing of Coventry as a child and faces death a second time in her life when she develops a chronic poliomyelitis, *Burn Helen* (1980), tries to compare Gershon's unique suffering as a Holocaust refugee with that of another group of people trying to fathom the "normality" of her experiences. In *The Bread of Exile* (1985), Karen Gershon tells the story of the kindertransport from December 1938 until February 1942 by narrating the fictional biographies of several children at various stages of their exiles. Her last book, *A Lesser Child* (1993), is her autobiography the second part of which, *A Tempered Wind*, was edited in this year.

Karen Gershon's writings are reminiscent of other autobiographical writings about the kindertransport, not all of them published but available at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York.

In Spite of Herself: A Reading of Janice Williamson's *Crybaby!*

Zuzanna Szatanik
University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland

The general aim of my paper is to discuss Janice Williamson's memoir *Crybaby!* as an example of transgressive autobiography. As a text narrating the painful (though therapeutic) process of coming to terms with childhood memories of incest, *Crybaby!* is not only an intimate story of the past trauma, but—more interestingly—is also a dramatic confession of the *incredibility* of such a story. On the one hand, therefore, the author struggles with her early memories which—due to their dream-like, impalpable quality—are always elusive; on the other, she feels that what these memories point to is too palpable to verbalize. This ambivalence permeates the narration and lends it its shape: the text is fractured, or fragmented, and combines quotations, dictionary entries, scientific discourse, poems, other people's memories, photographs (and photographs of these photographs' backs). The majority of these elements seem to create an illusion of objectivity—photographs, for instance, have traditionally been perceived as

faithful representations of reality and as evidence of what *really happened*. Importantly, however, Williamson discusses what is in the photos on pages with no pictures on them, forcing the reader to go back and forth and making him/her realize that what s/he sees in the photo is not necessarily what the narrator sees in it. Another visible marker of the story's fragmentariness is the use of various fonts and different font sizes. Even though such experiments with the form of the text—as well as the questioning of such concepts as “truth” and “objectivity”—can easily be inscribed in the convention of postmodern literature, they are also important as features of feminist (auto)biography. What interests me in particular, therefore, is how Williamson “writes the body” into her memoir and how she uses the form of confession (which, in Michel Foucault's terms, necessarily disempowers the Other) to speak the unspeakable and to transgress the trauma of her past.

Autobiography: The Party of One?

Vera Eliasova
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

The focus of my presentation will be the boundary between the personal and the collective in autobiographical writing. I will address such diverse authors as Virginia Woolf, Mary Antin, or Daphne Marlatt. While acknowledging differences between these authors in terms of their nationality, historical period, and literary and cultural tradition, I will point to a shared feature of their autobiographical writing, the moments that represent a transgression from the individual to the collective experience. I will focus on subtle yet effective textual strategies that work as turning points in which the autobiography makes a case on behalf of a larger social group. Antin's memoir *The Promised Land* (1912) can thus be interpreted as claiming immigration rights, and Woolf's autobiographical essay *A Sketch of the Past* (1939) as making an argument about women's writing. Finally, Daphne's Marlatt's *Ghost Works* (1993), her autobiographical writing that has been critically termed as a "biotext," engages the writers of autobiography in a common project to interrogate the assumption of singularity of the writing "I." My analysis leads me to speculate that this "turn to the collective" as an indispensable, even defining, feature of the genre of autobiography that is conventionally understood as a genre of one.

Chiaroscuro Biography: Paul Carter's "Light Reading"

Stephen Paul Hardy
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

Paul Carter is a cultural historian whose work seeks to question and critically examine the presumptions of modern approaches to spatial organization and perception through an environmentally based poetics of place. His earlier publications, notably *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987) and *The Lie of the Land* (1996), focus on these problems, primarily in the context of the European colonization of Australia. A more recent publication, *Repressed Spaces: The Poetics of Agoraphobia* (2002) has considered the implications of the same poetics for offering a different outlook on the pathologies of rapidly developing urban life in *fin de siècle* Vienna, particularly the pathologies of modern psychoanalytic readings of human subjectivity. The paper offered here focuses on one of the essays included in *The Lie of the Land*, "Light Reading," which includes a counter-biographical study of William Light, "founder of Adelaide." This study seeks to free Light's life from what Carter considers to be the enclosures of a colonially inspired politics and poetics and includes reference to the virtues of what he calls "chiaroscuro biography," a term which takes its cue from notions of perspective inspired by Giorgione and other painters of sixteenth century Venice. The aim of the paper will be to provide a brief introduction to the essay and its poetics as well as to ask what insights they might make available to current biographical practice.

Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill*: Towards a Biotext

Krystyna Martynska
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland

One of the notions that is connected to the contemporary studies in the field of (auto)biography is biotext. The term was coined in 1988 by George Bowering, who in his *Errata* states that "autobiography replaces the writer," whilst "biotext is an extension of him." What biotext is trying to do is to capture the tension between the BIO and the TEXT—to combine the living element (including people and relationships between them) with the textual sphere (how these living elements are represented in writing). In order to do so it employs a range of formal strategies that challenge our ways of looking at (auto)biographies. Joanne Saul suggests that we should think of biotext as "a potentially new and provocative generic 'event'" where the boundaries of such concepts as memory and reality, past and present or here and there are pushed to their limits.

In my paper I would like to examine the extent to which Fred Wah's *Diamond Grill* (1996) can be classified as a biotext and what strategies the author uses in order to avoid being "hijacked by ready-made generic expectations, the cachet exuded [...] by those two other terms, autobiography and life-writing." I will focus on the narrative threads that Wah takes up and that contribute to the cumulative process inherent to biotext and I will discuss the significance of poetic language that, drawing on the tradition of the Canadian long poem, enables *Diamond Grill* to be an extension rather than a replacement of the writer.

Saturday, 17:00-18:00—Session 10

Workshop with Sharon Butala, Amanda Hale, and Theresa Kishkan