Speaking Volumes about Auto/biography Studies in Canada

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The two volumes, *Autobiography in Canada: Critical Directions*, edited by Julie Rak, and *Tracing the Autobiographical*, edited by Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perreault, and Susanna Egan, demonstrate the vigour of contemporary auto/biography criticism in Canada. Published in Canada by Wilfred Laurier University Press in 2005, each book contains twelve essays by Canadian scholars, with an editorial introduction.[1] Although the only two authors to contribute to both collections are leading Canadian auto/biography scholar Susanna Egan and her respected younger colleague, the late Gabriele Helms, the citations and cross-references convey the sense of a lively and interactive scholarly community.

While reading these essays on contemporary Canadian autobiography I attended a conference on "Art and Authenticity," at which a fascinating discussion followed a paper on the recently discovered "Lake Mungo footprints" (School of Humanities, Australian National University, 2 November 2006). Traces of ancient people, men, women, and children, on

1 Julie Rak (ed.), *Autobiography in Canada: Critical Directions* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier UP, 2005); Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perreault, and Susanna Egan (eds.), *Tracing the Autobiographical* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier UP, 2005).

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the move, going about their daily life, were accidentally preserved as they crossed a muddy area about twenty thousand years ago, in the form of four-hundred-and-fifty fossilized human footprints in the remote Lake Mungo region of Australia. Yet as an art historian pointed out, the footprints are of a quite different order to ancient handprints on the walls of caves in Australia and elsewhere, where the hand was deliberately placed against the rock surface to make an imprint. The handprint constitutes an act of communication with aesthetic implications, whereas the footprints are an incidental, though extraordinary, capturing of passing people with a quite different purpose, travel for hunting, ceremony, or some other reason. The autobiographical act is more like the handprint than the fossilized footprint.

The question, "Footprint or handprint?," was on my mind as I considered these Canadian essays, many which owe a strong debt to the collection edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (1996). Smith and Watson themselves introduce the image of the fingerprint to indicate the vast possibilities of their project, without making a clear distinction between the print as an accidental by-product of an individual going about daily life and the deliberate mark that an individual chooses to make upon a surface: "We could have included discussions of bumper sticker subjects, of identity clothing, of hair. Once we got started on this project, almost everything presented itself as implicated in the choosing, imposing, evading, or negotiating of an identity. Fingerprints were everywhere" (18).

Autobiography in Canada, edited by Julie Rak, examines how the field of auto/biography is developing specifically in Canada, discussing Canadian auto/biography only, whereas the essays in *Tracing the Autobiographical* range well beyond Canada's borders to consider life-writing from Palestine/Israel, works by Australian Aboriginal writers, and gypsy Holocaust texts, as well as emerging forms of life-writing on the internet. The essays in *Tracing the Autobiographical* all represent the work of female academics identifying as feminist scholars. In introducing the essays in *Autobiography in Canada,* Julie Rak also gives prominence to feminist scholarship in autobiography criticism, although the critical perspective is somewhat broader and essayists include both male and female scholars. Rak leans more toward a "footprint" than a "handprint" conception of autobiography in that she sees more potential in cultural than in literary studies for productive development in Canadian autobiography studies. She also advocates continuing work in feminist autobiography criticism, work on trauma and culture, and on non-literary and mass-marketed texts.

Rak sees the study of "non-fiction discourse" in auto/biography criticism as "as an effective way to engage with ideas about truth, representation and power in a broader social sense."

In considering autobiography and globalization from a Canadian perspective, Susanna Egan has argued in an earlier essay, "True North in Transit," that "autobiography may be considered as a genre frequently grounded in the local but having potentially global significance for the world community of readers." Egan also suggests that "despite autobiography's focus on specific place it is likely to contribute to several cultures simultaneously" (23). In approaching these two volumes of Canadian auto/biography scholarship, my expectations as an Australian literary critic have been shaped by Egan's arguments and in my reading I have considered what these essays by a Canadian community of scholars have to offer to a wider community of readers. Given the scope and variety of life-writing in English available for critical study, those of us who edit and contribute to collections of this kind must address the reality that most readers cannot reasonably be expected to be familiar with many of the texts under discussion. It is important therefore for most essays to be self-explanatory so that readers may be stimulated to investigate for themselves a text under discussion or at least to acquire an interesting perspective on an unfamiliar work and to engage with the issues raised.

Julie Rak's introduction to *Autobiography in Canada* reviews and clarifies critical directions in auto/biography studies in the fifteen years since an earlier unnamed collection of essays on Canadian autobiography was published. Rak places K. P. Stich's introduction to the 1998 collection *Reflections: Autobiography and Canadian Literature* in the context of debates concerning the referentiality of the subject in autobiography. The narrow focus of autobiographical and biographical criticism at that time is noted, together with the limited number of feminist studies of autobiography.

Rak comments on the rapid changes and expansion of this field of study in a mere five years since Stich's volume and specifies the relatively new term of "auto/biography studies," figuring in the title of this collection, as a useful formulation for considering the interrelations of autobiography and biography. She also notes the increase in scholarly activity in Canadian autobiography studies, discussing work by a number of established and emerging Canadian researchers publishing in this field. However, Rak gives a somewhat stronger sense of developments in autobiography studies internationally than of the range and characteristics of distinctively Canadian autobiography and criticism, which is what many non-Canadian

readers are most interested in when they turn to this collection. Many of Rak's observations about the study of Canada as a nation in the 1980s could also be said of the study of Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S., with common interests in the interrogation of nationhood, the life-writing of indigenous peoples and minority groups, feminist approaches, and the recuperation of marginalized stories. In Rak's comprehensive and scholarly introduction to Canadian autobiography criticism, less than a dozen works of Canadian autobiography are named in addition to those featuring in the essays that follow.

The field of biography itself is expanding remarkably, even if criticism has not caught up.

In auto/biography outside Canada, Rak identifies the following trends: feminism and auto/biography by women; auto/biography as genre or discourse; auto/biography and interdisciplinarity; auto/biography and new media. Biography and biography criticism receive only brief comment. Although biography criticism does not compare with the expansion of autobiography and auto/biography criticism internationally, it is nevertheless a growing field. Richard Holmes's *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (1985) and the "sequel" *Side Tracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer* (2000) deserve a mention, as does Susan Tridgell's recently published *Understanding Ourselves: The Dangerous Art of Biography* (2004). The field of biography itself is expanding remarkably, even if criticism has not caught up, and it would be interesting to know how that is reflected in Canada in recent years. Amazon's listing under Canadian biography suggests that it is substantial, despite biography and autobiography being lumped together in this cyber catalogue.

With her strong commitment to feminist criticism, Rak acknowledges the influence of Sidonie Smith, Shari Benstock, and other U.S.-based autobiography critics on Canadian scholarship, but despite her interest in the ethics of self-representation, she does not engage with recent work by Paul John Eakin and others, for example the contributors to *The Ethics of Life Writing* (2004), some of whom find substantial scope for ethical analysis of autobiographical texts of a literary character.[6]

Clearly, autobiography studies are burgeoning in Canada, although Rak's suggestion that, as Canadian writers have been publishing extensively in the field of autobiography, there is simply more to write about is not entirely satisfying. Is there a difference between the popular and influential "culture of confession" in the U.S. and Canadian autobiographical production? To what extent has Canadian culture maintained a cultural distinctiveness from its influential neighbour in this respect? The study of autobiography from writers in Quebec is of particular interest in this context.

Autobiography in Canada opens with an important essay by Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms on Canadian autobiographical narratives about the Holocaust, delineating the distinctively Canadian history of the reception of refugees and survivors from Europe and the extent and characteristics of this community's autobiographical narratives. "Generations of the Holocaust in Canadian Auto/biography" is a lucid, informative, and sensitive study of narratives written in a Canadian context by survivors and the children of survivors. The essay is followed by full and informative notes and a substantial bibliography.

The second essay, "A Modern Hiawatha," is an intriguingly titled study of the identity claims and environmental writing of Grey Owl, a Canadian writer of the 1930s. The next two essays discuss complex mediating and collaborative processes involved in the production of life stories, in Sally Chivers's study of *Mothertalk,* by an immigrant to Canada from Japan in the early twentieth century, Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka, and in Deena Rymhs's study of Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*. Subsequent essays address issues of life-writing, agency, and disability; self-publishing and empowerment in a social work context; celebrity memoir as performance; and Canadian death notices as auto/biography. Two essays discuss autobiographical writing by Quebec women, one focusing on France Théoret and Nelly Arcan, the other on Quebec immigrant writer Régine Robin. In the final essay, "The Ensign of the Mop and the Dustbin," the heraldically countercultural title introduces a discussion of poverty and class division in writings by female authors Laura Salverson and Nellie McClung.

A number of essays in this collection are characterized by an authorial stance either as advocate or critic of the writer whose work is under discussion. Albert Braz defends the writer Grey Owl from trenchant criticism on the grounds of imposture, for implying in his life as well as his writings that he was a Native North American rather than an Englishman born in Hastings. Sally Chivers adopts a position of advocacy for the agency of elderly women who choose to record their memories in a collaborative venture with younger associates. In a discussion of two performers' autobiographies, Andrew Lesk commends Carole Pope for "coming out" as a lesbian rock performer and upbraids Toller Cranston for being less than frank about his sexual orientation. Ann Fudge Schormans's essay conveys a lack of confidence in contemporary professional and community understandings of the capacity for non-speaking persons with intellectual impairments to communicate. Like Chivers's concern for the agency of people of advanced age, Fudge Schormans's advocacy, despite

the personal experience to which she refers, seems not to take account of the complexity, difficulty, and indeed mystery of communicating with, and interpreting communication from, people with many different kinds and degrees of intellectual impairment.

While the role of the scholar as advocate can be valid and useful, some essays at times appear to glide over the commitments and insights of communities of care, health workers, carers, families, and volunteers. It may be a fair comment that medical case histories often read like depersonalized biographies, but health workers who fail to keep case notes will be taken to task by patient advocates, and best practice is for holistic approaches to care, enabling individual agency to the greatest degree achievable. While Foucaultian theory has exposed institutional capacity for oppressive practices of surveillance and regimentation, competent institutions may also promote high standards of care and expertise and respect for individuals. Although readers of auto/biography criticism anticipate and appreciate a strongly argued point of view, the prevalence of the critic as advocate for a minority writer raises major theoretical questions. When a scholar concerned about issues of agency in the life narrative of a marginalized writer implies that others associated with the writer are interfering, power seeking, and undermining individual agency, there is a danger that the apparently detached critic is positioning her/ himself inappropriately as having more developed and sensitive moral insight.

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In an effort to avoid just this kind of moralizing, Albert Braz makes a case for a scholarly focus on text rather than writer. Toward the beginning of his absorbing study of issues of authenticity and identity in the writings of Grey Owl, Braz makes the forthright statement that "Even in these postmodern times, in which the writer is supposed to be dead, or at most a discursive construct, we often do not read texts but authors" (54). He argues that Grey Owl's "posthumous transformation from a renowned conservationist and nature writer into … a racial imposter" after his death in 1938 indicates a continuing "discomfort about the idea of a white man pretending to be a Native North American." Braz explores the complexity of Grey Owl's, or English-born Archibald Stansfeld Belaney's, self-construction in his writings and the critical condemnation of his perceived imposture. The essay concludes with an ironic directive for readers to focus on Grey Owl's books rather than his identity. Yet Braz's essay too is a form of advocacy for the right of Grey Owl/Belaney to experiment with alternative identities in both life and writing.

Braz's discussion has resonances with other literary controversies. Australian literary history is conspicuous for literary hoaxes and authorial

impostures, such as that of Helen Demidenko, who as author of *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1994), a prize-winning novel set in the Ukraine and based on her supposed family history, falsely claimed to be of Ukrainian descent. When Leon Carmen, a white Australian male, was revealed as the author of the supposed autobiography of an Aboriginal woman Wanda Koolmatrie, *My Own Sweet Time*, also published in 1994, he was fiercely castigated by indigenous and non-indigenous critics for the appropriation of many aspects of indigenous women's life stories. More recently, Norma Khouri's *Forbidden Love*, published in Sydney in 2003, claimed to be an autobiographical account of the so-called honour killing of a young Jordanian female friend of the writer. The account proved to be a hoax when it was revealed that Khouri had left Jordan at the age of three, with many other discrepancies in her narrative of her own life.[7]

North America's most recent literary hoax, James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, a fraudulent account of the protagonist's history as a drug-addicted young man, was painstakingly dissected by critic Susanna Egan in a keynote address at the Fifth International Autobiography and Biography Association Conference in Mainz, Germany, in July 2006. Although each of these cases is distinctly different from that of Grey Owl, each aroused a level of public indignation that indicates the strength of reader expectations of authorial authenticity where indigenous or immigrant identity are concerned. Braz's citing of autobiography critic John Eakin's earlier work, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985), suggests that this critical issue in autobiography studies is far from passé.[9]

The third essay in *Autobiography in Canada*, Sally Chivers's study, "'This is my memory, a fact': The Many Mediations of *Mothertalk: Life Stories of Mary Kiyoshi Kiyooka*," examines the collaborative processes involved in the publication of this Japanese Canadian memoir by an author who is described as a "very old woman." This is a topic of significant interest not only in relation to Kiyooka's important text but also for relatives, friends, and carers of elderly people who wish to support them in recording their memories. This process does not necessarily mean that "older bodies of women and men are considered primarily in terms of stories to be transcribed," as Chivers states. Possibilities also exist for such collaborations to be a sensitively negotiated source of agency for an elderly person, a meaningful mutual activity and a valuing and preserving of an individual's account of a lived life.

As well as a complex text for critical debate about collaboration and agency, *Mothertalk* is also a valuable documenting of an individual response to the family and personal disruptions caused by war and dis-

criminatory government policy to Japanese Canadians, in the context of the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement and its aftermath. This commemorative aspect of Chivers's discussion is what I found most convincing.

Chivers argues that *Mothertalk* "relies simultaneously on Mary Kiyooka's advanced age authorizing her as storyteller, and on Mary Kiyooka's elderly body because her age undermines her authority as a voice in the text." Despite frequent references to Mary Kiyooka's "advanced age," Chivers is curiously reticent about how old Kiyooka actually was during the recording of her "life stories." Without access to Kiyooka's text, Chivers's essay raises many unanswered questions, such as her age when her son Roy Kiyooka started to work with her on her memories, the duration of this work—first by Roy and, after his death, by Daphne Marlatt—the presence or absence of any diagnosed or obvious memory loss, and, if present, if it increased during the period of recording and if any of Kiyooka's later stories contradicted ones related earlier.

Not everything in Chivers's essay is self-explanatory. I felt disadvantaged in not having read the essay by Egan and Helms that Chivers draws on so substantially. More significantly, Kiyooka's birth and death dates are not specified and I had to comb through the essay to find out that she reached the age of 100. Chivers draws on theoretical writing by Gullette in resisting what she describes as "standard assumptions of old age as a time of deterioration, and especially, senility," assumptions she detects in the introduction to *Mothertalk*. However the term "senility" is no longer regarded by gerontologists as a helpful or precise descriptor for various kinds of dementia and memory loss in old age, and it does not imply disrespect to acknowledge the fact of memory loss or impairment in an individual in their nineties as Kiyooka was, although it makes questions of agency and memory far more complicated.

It is also well documented that the early stages of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia are characterized by short-term memory loss together with a vivid and generally accurate recall of memories from early life. But as the condition advances, independently verifiable early memories may be eroded or altered. Some individuals show no evidence of memory loss in their eighties, and although statistics are against them some are free of any problems in their nineties, but Chivers does not specify whether or not this was true for Mary Kiyooka.

It seems unfair to state, as Chivers does, that "the collection fits … within a contemporary literary tradition wherein older bodies of women and men are considered primarily in terms of stories to be transcribed, and,

accordingly, become potentially controllable markers of difference." This statement contains an implied post-Foucauldian nihilism, where no collaborative human project is ultimately worth undertaking because power will operate to the detriment of one or more of the participants. Here Chivers seems to have been captured by her theoretical framework. The possibility that the interactive recording of a very old person's memories in co-operation with a trusted family member might be empowering for the former and a positive activity generating emotional warmth needs also to be considered. The essay is more interesting when she affirms Mary Kiyooka's agency as "a noteworthy commentator … about a shameful period of Canadian history." Although Chivers relates *Mothertalk* to the term "biotext," originating with critics George Bowering and Fred Wah, its application did not seem entirely clear.

Chivers reveals her positioning as advocate when she speculates that as Roy Kiyooka predeceased his mother Mary, "perhaps Mary should have sought to record Roy's experiences rather than the other way round," despite there being no indication that Mary in old age would have had the capacity or interest in organizing a life-writing project. Chivers also notes Mary's resistance to the North American practice of placing elderly relatives in nursing homes, despite the practice seeming more humane than the Japanese folk tradition to which she alludes, of taking elderly people up a barren mountain to die. Chivers apparently approves Kiyooka's resistance but does not state whether or not Mary Kiyooka was herself in residential care at the time of writing. Kiyooka's perspective in her memoir is not invalidated by the fact that, given her age, her own children would have been no longer young and may not have had the physical capacity to act as carers: notably, her son predeceased her. But here again Chivers appears to be too close to her subject.

In contrast to Chivers's doubts about the collaborative interventions in *Mothertalk*, Deena Rymhs, in her essay on Yvonne Johnson's *Stolen Life: The Journey of a Cree Woman*, considers the collaborative venture with Rudi Wiebe to be a productive strategy for making Johnson's story available to a wide readership. A prominent criminologist first drew this text to my attention, recommending *Stolen Life* as a valuable narrative documenting a First Nations woman's experience of the Canadian justice system and long-term incarceration. For this scholar, the collaborative aspects of the text's production were not a prime focus, despite the central role of writer Rudi Wiebe in working with Yvonne Johnson. Given the difficulty facing an imprisoned First Nations woman in making her story known, and the

extensive and diverse readership of *Stolen Life*, the kind of critical work being done by Deena Rymhs seems particularly important.

Rymhs emphasizes Johnson's inititiative in inviting Wiebe to collaborate with her on her life narrative, noting how his role extended from collaborator to advocate as the project progressed. She also suggests that as Johnson did not testify at her trial for murder, "*Stolen Life* … fills in for the testimony not given in the courtroom." She concludes that Johnson and Wiebe together "structure an 'alternative hearing,'" by "managing the narrative in a way that allows [Johnson] to circumvent the constraints that the law places on self-representation." For Rymhs, the collaboration between Johnson and Wiebe is effective, despite aspects of the text that make it open to criticism on the basis of appropriation of Johnson's story by Wiebe (and here Rymhs also engages with critical work by Egan). In Rymhs's view, it is difficult to "prescribe alternative ways of presenting Johnson's narrative," given her disempowerment as a woman in prison (90, 105, 106).

Schorman's essay, on "auto/biography and non-speaking persons labeled intellectually disabled" concerns, is grounded in her expressed commitment and experience in caring for her non-speaking foster daughter and again conveys a position of advocacy. I found it puzzling that her discussion did not seem to take account of the quality of community and medical care available for many people with intellectual disabilities in western countries, where family relationships are supported and physiotherapy and occupational therapy services are made available, as are, where appropriate, sporting opportunities and employment agencies.[3] Schorman focuses on a devaluation of intellectually disabled people as knowers, and while it is inarguable that discrimination toward people with disabilities persists, considerable respect, sensitivity, and awareness of ability and communication strategies can be found among family and community carers, and individuals' need for and capacity for self-expression are encouraged. Here again, I detected evidence of an implied Foucauldian nihilism, where the possibility is not entertained that people who represent those with intellectual disabilities are not necessarily appropriating their agency but attempting to negotiate a position balancing agency with offering the help or representation that their condition requires. The logical consequence of this negative critical position is that there is no point in

3 My reference to care for people with intellectual disabilities in Western countries reflects Schorman's emphasis in this essay. Schorman does not explore the diverse approaches to care in non-Western countries.

trying to help disadvantaged others, as any attempt will simply result in the helper abusing their power over the helped.

By contrast, the essay by Vuletic and Ferrari discussing autism and self narration, "A Transfer Boy," is positive and straightforward, offering an informed perspective on autism and providing the "transfer boy," a young boy with autism, with a voice for his autobiographical writing. In their analysis of the boy T's self-portrait, the authors discuss two criteria for self-representation, "One is what one likes" (in T's case, various kinds of public transportation) and "One is what one remembers" (things about public transport systems).

Social worker Si Transken also assumes a position of advocacy in the essay "Creativity, Cultural Studies, and Potentially Fun Ways to Design and Produce Autobiographical Material from Subalterns' Locations." Speaking as a facilitator of writing circles and life-writing projects, Transken discusses technological developments in desktop publishing that have made it possible "for small, marginalized voices to design and distribute books" and argues that these projects also contribute to building community. These community writing projects have a longer history than Transken's essay suggests. I am aware of projects of this kind being undertaken back in the late 1970s and 1980s, influenced by Paolo Freire and the non-formal education movement. Australian projects that I encountered included collaborative ventures between teachers in adult migrant English programs and their students to produce jointly produced anthologies of immigrant and refugee autobiographical writing and productions of low-cost collections of stories by various women's groups on themes of childbirth, breastfeeding, and other aspects of female parenting. Technology has improved the design and presentation of these collections.

Transken draws on a therapeutic discourse of "healing," "wisdom," "play," empowerment, and knowledge of the heart, together with cultural studies concepts of "subaltern voices." Although the theoretical discussion does not always sit easily with the discussion of group writing practices and outcomes, and the vocabulary is sometimes tired or woolly, the essay foregrounds practical applications and the value of autobiographical writing for people experiencing social disadvantage and alienation.

Laurie McNeill's essay on Canadian death notices is a sound, data-based, cultural studies project that maps the genre with clarity and thoroughness. However, I question the inclusion of the term "auto/biography" in the title of her essay. Where obituaries are concerned, the term biography seems most appropriate, even though form and content convey much about the living.

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Essays by Barbara Havercroft and Yuko Yamade both discuss Québécois women's autobiographical writing. Yamade introduces immigrant writer from France to Quebec, Régine Robin, in fairly conventional theoretical terms, as constructing innovative hybrid identities in two autobiographical texts. Havercroft compares France Théoret's *Journal Pour Mémoire* and Nelly Arcan's *Putain*, focusing on "the quest for subjectivity and agency" in each writer's work and drawing on Foucaultian and feminist theory. Havercroft offers a convincing feminist interpretation of the symbolism of Théoret's metaphor of "le noeud" (the knot), associated with the oppressiveness of "les generations," given that "especially in the 1980s, textile metaphors—weaving, knotting, quilt-piecing, and the like —have been linked repeatedly to women's writing." In Australian literature, the quilt metaphor in Barbara Hanrahan's *The Scent of Eucalyptus* and the ball of thread in Drusilla Modjeska's *Poppy* come to mind.However, in view of this writer's French cultural heritage, the powerful metaphor of Nobel-Prize-winning novelist François Mauriac's *Le Noeud de Vipères* (*Vipers' Knot*) may also underlie Théoret's image. I did feel that Théoret's adoption of the *journal littéraire* needed some discussion in the context of French texts such as the *Journal* of André Gide and the diaries of Anaïs Nin.

Arcan's *Putain*, a disquieting contemporary narrative of a woman studying literature at university and also working as a prostitute, may or may not be autobiographical. Havercroft conveys the linguistic complexity of the text, mirroring the protagonist's predicament, but in this, as in a number of essays, I did not gain a sense of the aesthetics of the work, an aspect of autobiographical writing with which the cultural studies orientation of the majority of these essays are not concerned.

The final essay, by Wendy Roy, "The Ensign of the Mop and Dustbin," continues the feminist theme with a comparison of working-class writer Laura Goodman Salverson's *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (1939) and the better-off though politically aware Nellie McClung's *Clearing in the West* (1935) and *The Stream Runs Fast* (1945).

In the light of my own critical work on shame in Australian autobiographies, I was interested in Roy's discussion of shame in Salverson's response to oppression. Drawing on Pamela Fox's critical work on shame and resistance in the British working-class novel, Roy highlights examples in Salverson's work of shame based on poverty and class-based difference.

This engrossing essay also makes for a "good read" at the end of the volume. The self-characterization of Salverson in particular emerges strongly,

rather eclipsing that of McClung. Roy's case for the inclusion of Salverson's autobiography in the Canadian literary canon is convincing.

* * *

Tracing the Autobiographical is more experimental in focus than *Autobiography in Canada*, with a number of essays seeking to expand the generic boundaries of autobiography, some more successfully than others. In introducing the collection, editors Perreault and Kadar explain that the writers of these twelve essays "all self-identify as feminists (without requiring definition of that capacious term); and all are academics." Although the title would suggest that these essays would be closer to a "footprints" conception of autobiography than those of *Autobiography in Canada*, in fact at least a third fall clearly into the "handprint" camp in that they discuss forms of memoir.

The first two essays consider examples of autobiography as mediated by the internet, and the third discusses autobiography and reality television. Helen Buss examines a young woman's autobiographical response to encounter with a sexual predator on the internet. "*Katie.com: My Story*: Memoir Writing, the Internet, and Embodied Discursive Agency" makes for compelling reading as Buss traces the strategy of internet stalking by which a North American teenage girl, Katherine Tarbox, was pursued and her autobiographical response a few years after this episode (while still in her teens). Her memoir, *Katie.com*, published as a book in 2000, was later linked with a website designed as a resource for the safe use of the internet by young people. I found it helpful to follow up Buss's internet references as I read her essay.

Similarly, in reading Warley's essay, I referred to the websites indicated. This study of the personal home page as a performative genre, with case studies of pages where professional status and achievement is foregrounded, is a valuable contribution to a comparatively new "everyday use" of autobiography as cyber narrative. Warley's attentive scrutiny of individual home pages, through a feminist theoretical lens, also illustrates the riskiness of such self-exposure. An internet audience, like the reader of a published book, may read the narrative of self against the grain and uncover agendas not intended by the author. Warley's comment on the essentially conservative qualities of autobiographical home pages, where it is mainly the internet location that is innovative, illustrates the strength of autobiographical conventions and is interesting to consider in the light

of similar findings by Laurie McNeill, contributor to *Autobiography in Canada,* in her analysis of Canadian death notices.

Gabriele Helms's essay extends the discussion of self to the expanding field of reality television. Although the performance of self in this visual genre has much in common with features of autobiography as conventional printed text—including exhibitionism and confession—I nevertheless stumble over the concept of the written word, the "graphy." In this as in a number of other essays in this collection (such as Grace's essay on performing autobiography on stage), the term "auto/biography," with or without the slash, seems insufficiently comprehensive: a subset of a much broader sphere of self-representation that may nevertheless be shaped by textual precursors.

These essays taken together express a commitment to social justice and often a sense of outrage at the damage done to those in whose stories they take an interest.

More than half the essays in *Tracing the Autobiographical* discuss representations of traumatic life experience, mainly inflicted by gross abuses of human rights, including the institutional murder of European Jewish men, women, and children in the Holocaust and also of European gypsy or Roma people, whose term for this catastrophe is "The Devouring." Also discussed are the memoirs of three generations of Israeli women in the state of Israel and the impact of colonialism and racism on the indigenous peoples of Canada and Australia and descendants of African slaves in the Caribbean.

These essays taken together express a commitment to social justice and often a sense of outrage at the damage done to those in whose stories they take an interest. Unfortunately, the attempt to trace the autobiographical in "non-standard" textual material at times fails to convince, although the essays may be of considerable interest for all that. For example, Perreault's essay on poet Muriel Rukeyser, "Egodocuments and the Ethics of Propaganda," is a heavily laboured analysis of manuscripts never intended to be autobiographical. Although Perreault introduces the term "egodocument" (borrowed from Dutch theorist Jacques Presser), it is insufficient to justify the use of documents produced by Rukeyser when developing propaganda for the American government in the Office of War Information in the 1940s. Suzack's "Law Stories as Life Stories" argues for the "discourse of law as a complement to the discourse of Aboriginal women's life stories" in Canada, making for an interesting discussion of resonances between court records and the autobiographical narratives of First Nations women, although the title of the essay misleadingly smudges the distinction between the two.

Susanna Egan's essay on Marlatt's poetry is rather different. In this nuanced study of Marlatt's poem cycle *Steveston*, and the way in which

"Steveston the place [a British Columbian fishing village] provides the immediate siting for Marlatt's own imaginative recognition of migrant identities" Egan examines the relationship between Daphne Marlatt as poet and as historian. She designates autobiographical narrative as "implicit" in this poem, rather than "explicit, as is more commonly the case." While not entirely convinced by the argument for *Steveston* as constituting autobiography, I was enchanted by the delicate and probing analysis of the poems that argues for a distinctive representation of migrant identities not simply as the product of marginalizing socio-economic forces but as "subjectivities sharing the rhythms of the natural world, rhythms of movement and change that locate the migrant in continuous process." For Egan, the implications of her study for autobiography are that "'relational identity' (Eakin) … can also be configured, and read, in terms of eco-relationships" (113). The essay is a rich and suggestive contribution to literary understandings of place, memory, and belonging, from which aesthetic considerations are not absent.

In considering the essays as a whole in *Tracing the Autobiographical,* I found it difficult to accept a number of textual objects of this study as "auto/biographical." Confronted by the inescapable allusion to actual text in the terms "autobiography" and "life-writing," would it not be more appropriate to broaden the scope of self-representation to include terms such as self-portraiture and self-performance? Many contemporary opportunities exist for self-representation—the internet, the theatre, gallery exhibition space. Theatre and television complicate matters further. What is the dynamic between self and performance when an actor writes an autobiographical play and, then, casts him or herself, acts the part, as Sherrill Grace's essay explores? Here, at least a text exists. But what is happening in reality television when individuals without a script act the part of themselves, as Gabriele Helms discusses? Boundaries between text and image have long been fluid in that the inclusion of photographs in autobiographies is unquestioned and often expected. Is it time to accept that the meaning of the word autobiography is changing, ignoring etymology? Or should we still look to the novel? John Banville's *The Untouchable* (1997), bare of illustrations or photographs, is the subtlest and most probing study of the performative self that I have read in the last year or so.

In an autobiographical essay, "Conversing with Victor Ivanovich," visual artist Ann Brennan writes powerfully of the "seductive possibilities of the trace," as discovered by her young daughter when looking at a small stone "sitting neatly next to the imprint it had made when she lifted it carefully out of the soft soil." Brennan writes that the little girl "loved

the completeness of its imprint, its mirroring of the stone, but she also acknowledged its emptiness" (198–99). The more successful of the essays in this collection capture the power of this mirroring, while others are caught up in emptiness.

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