ALFRED HORNUNG
Editor

# Auto/Biography and Mediation

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ALFRED HORNUNG

# Auto/Biography and Mediation: Introduction

Ever since James Olney's landmark publication *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (1980), auto/biography criticism and scholarship has progressed by leaps and bounds. Innumerable volumes have appeared, new journals have been founded, numerous conferences have been held worldwide, new programs and centers have sprung up inside and outside the academy, and new organizations have been created. These incredibly rich and multifold activities in the research of autobiography, biography, diaries, and all kinds of personal narratives have progressively transformed and reconceptualized the nature and methodologies of a once conventional, conservative, and neglected field. The foundation of the International Auto/Biography Association (IABA) on the occasion of "The First International Conference on Auto/Biography: Approaching the Auto/Biographical Turn," organized by Zhao Baisheng at the University of Peking in 1999, and the subsequent creation of a IABA listserv, operated since then by Craig Howes from his Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, have established an intensely fruitful basis for the cooperation of a dedicated and enlightened community of auto/biography enthusiasts in all parts of the world. The biennial conferences organized after the Chinese founding moment under the auspices of IABA in Vancouver, Melbourne, Hong Kong, Mainz, and Mānoa represent decisive stages in the evolution of the critical engagement with all aspects of auto/biography, renamed summarily as life writing. The shifts in thematic and methodological focus from "Autobiography and Changing Identities" in Canada (2000) via "Life Writing and the Generations" in Australia (2002), "Inhabiting Multiple Worlds: Auto/Biography in an Anti/Global Age" in the special administrative region of China (2004) to "Auto/Biography and Mediation" in Germany (2006) and "Life Writing and Translation" in the U.S. (2008) followed by "Life Writing and Intimate Publics" held at the Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research of the University of Sussex in Brighton, England in June 2010 reflect both specific national and general international concerns and mark the emergence of new territories on the map of life writing.

The articles assembled in this volume are based on presentations given at the Fifth IABA Conference held at Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz in July 2006. They were selected from close to 200 papers, peer reviewed, and revised for publication. The choice of manuscripts is meant to cover the range of areas and methods in response to the conference topic in terms of thematic scope, media of expression, and the different disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Thematically, autobiographical stories may mediate between individual positions and choices taken in life, in the sense of the critical concept of relational selves (see Mason; and Eakin, "Relational Selves, Relational Lives"), or they may mediate between self and place, as in imaginary geographies and eco-biographies. As such, auto/biographies are involved in literary, cultural, psychological, legal, or political processes of mediation in which the autobiographer becomes a mediator in intercultural, interethnic, and interracial affairs. Thus the conception of auto/biography as mediation also refers to the bridging of different cultures, especially between the East and the West. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said specifically addresses this task of mediation between the Arab and the Western worlds, which seems to be symptomatic for all postcolonial autobiographies. This extension of the discourse of auto/biography criticism beyond the predominant Anglo-American scholarship, evident in the different national and biographical backgrounds of scholars, serves as a challenge and corrective to long-held scholarly assumptions.

Technically, auto/biographical narratives display an ever-increasing range of media in which lives or parts of lives are presented: print media, performance, film and video, radio and tapes, or the Internet. Many autobiographers combine different media for intermedial effects, such as the inclusion of photography in texts, voice and music on the radio or tapes, sound and images in filmic auto/biography, or music and dance in self-performances. Autobiographical multi-media installations dissolve the boundaries between genres and technologies of signification (see Smith and Watson, *Interfaces*; and Rak).

The articles collected in this volume also address ways in which autobiographical narratives mediate between different disciplines of the humanities, the social and natural sciences, and medicine. Such an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approach is particularly relevant in regard to the role of memory or recollection as a medium of time and reality (see Olney, *Memory and Narrative*; and Pesch). The interdisciplinary position of this element, which is key to all autobiographical endeavors, between psychology, neuroscience, and medicine is the focus of research by psychologist Hans J. Markowitsch and neuroscientist Antonio Damasio. Applying the ideas of Damasio's study *The Feeling of What Happens* to

auto/biography, Paul John Eakin has argued that the body has stories and is driven to auto/biography. In his reading, the body possesses pre-linguistic stories so that the telling of the story of one's life is part of a biological process. Conceiving of the body as a homeostatic machine, the autobiographical act itself becomes a regulatory activity of the body according to Eakin in "Living Autobiographically." This new dimension of auto/biography criticism could thus serve an important function of mediation between the disciplines, opening the field to the possibilities of a transdisciplinary approach in the academic community.

A comprehensive approach to mediating criticism has been advanced by Roger D. Sell (see *Literature as Communication* and *Mediating Criticism*). For him, mediation is "one of the most valuable services performed by literary critics" (*Literature as Communication* 1). As part of communicative pragmatics, it involves a theory of communication understood as an intersubjective activity with the aim of changing the status quo. It is no surprise that Sell finds mediation most needed in postmodern societies, where it can provide a tool for "a careful negotiation of differences" (*Literature as Communication* 15). Such a conception of mediation as communication, which ideally could work toward the "future peace and prosperity of the human race" (*Literature as Communication* 12), seems to cast a new role for auto/biography and auto/biography scholarship. Beyond the overall goal of finding some kind of resolution between different positions, mediation in auto/biography and its criticism reemphasizes the reality of life studies and links the different media used for the presentation of lives to real situations.

The articles, which address these aspects of mediation, are arranged in thematic cross-sections which trace a trajectory from current auto/-biographical practices via interpretations of historical examples, real and imaginary selves, to personal implications in auto/biography research, religious and biological mediations, and eventually mediations with the dead. The first section, "Writing and Reading Lives," starts out with Craig Howes's stocktaking of the activities of biographical research, involving his own life. Both Manuela Costantino and Emily Hipchen look at the voyeuristic aspects implicit in attempts at mediation between Western perspectives of mastery and endangered subjects on the margin. Mediational failures are the subject of Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith's analysis of the process of reconciliation between victims and perpetrators in South Africa's recent history, of Laurie McNeill's discussion of the differences in memorializing murdered women in Canadian cities, and Susan Tridgell's references to the role of auto/biography scholars in dealing with detention narratives of Australian refugees.

The articles of the second section, "Mediating Histories," address the personal histories captured in oral or transcribed memories of Scottish tenement women (Gabriele Linke) and in the quilts and quilting techniques of women in different regions of the United States and among different communities (Britta Feyerabend). Mirjam Truwant connects her reading of four German biographies of Mme de Staël over decisive periods of German history with different concepts of German nationality, and Marijke Huisman focuses on the marketing of autobiographies as a genre situated between fiction and historiography by Dutch publishers in the nineteenth century.

The articles of the third section on "Media Loops" deal with questions of authenticity, the potential abuses of the genre of auto/biography, and the differences between the writing and reading of lives. Susanna Egan and Carmen Birkle point to the creation of imaginary selves between different cultures for the purpose of dissimulation, while Hannes Schweiger examines the role of Japanese and Turkish immigrant voices in German literature as cultural mediators, stressing the non-transparency of such mediation. Based on Jon Gruden's *Do you Love Football?!*, Julie Rak highlights the role of auto/biography in contemporary mass culture and what the popularity of pulp auto/biographies can tell us about how readers make use of life narratives to interpret their own lives. Xu Dejin contrasts the differences in reading Chinese American autobiographies from the cultural backgrounds of Chinese or American readers. Jeremy D. Popkin uses the professional autobiographies of the economist George Stigler and the cultural critic Shirley Geok-Lin Lim to show the influence of disciplines on the authentic representation of an academic's life.

In the fourth section, "Relational Selves," critics interpret different forms of mediation between different aspects of historical selves. From the perspective of his concept of communication as mediation, Roger Sell reads Winston Churchill's autobiography as the correlation in the author's and the reader's mind of different stages of experience and the writing or reading of a narrative. Micha Gerrit Philipp Edlich bases an ecobiographical reading on the poetry of Gary Snyder and Snyder's intercultural movement between residences in Asia and the American Southwest. Leili Golafshani sees in Doris Lessing's references to matrophobia a means for the author to distance herself from the conventional relational roles of women as mothers, wives, or daughters in order to represent herself as a writer and also as someone whose ideas, opinions, and attitudes change over time. Richard Freadman's discussion of Jewish Australian autobiographies focuses on the double mediation involved in the attempt by children of survivors to act as witnesses to the trauma of the Holocaust.

The fifth section, "Inventing the Self," is concerned with intercultural and intertextual creations of a new self. Eugene Stelzig discusses the construction of the self in Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* as inter- and extratextual composite of the author's mediation between Goethe's romanticism and the modernism of the early twentieth century. The Romanian Revolution is the background for Andrei Codrescu's realization of a new persona which Ioana Luca sees arising from the encounter of the Romanian exile with his native country after twenty-five years of absence. Johan Callens focuses on the analysis of playwright Spalding Gray and his performative construction of a self in his auto/biographical monologues and films, and Michael K. Glenday examines celebrity author Norman Mailer's creation of imaginary biographies of Marilyn Monroe and Pablo Picasso.

The articles of the sixth section, "Crossing Genres," exemplify the fluid genre boundaries of auto/biography. Manfred Mittermayer exposes the intermedial influence on Thomas Bernhard of music and his grandfather's library as sources for Bernhard's series of autobiographies. Regine Strätling analyzes the postmodern mediation in Georges Perec's work between film and literary forms. Applying Bourdieu's theory of objectification, Heidi Isaksen reveals the ways in which the autobiographical writings of Annie Ernaux and Nina Bouraoui make the personal political through critical analysis of the marginalization of working-class women, lesbians, and non-citizen subjects—processes made visible in attempts to transcend cultural and political borders between France and Northern Africa. Shannon Donaldson-McHugh, in turn, sees in Jeannette Winterson's lesbian texts a fictional strategy for testing speech acts and for performing the limits of the genre of auto/biography.

The articles of the seventh section, "Religion and Mediation," represent innovative discussions of the treatment of religion in texts of auto/-biography. Bärbel Höttges convincingly argues for Louise Erdrich's rewriting of the genre of the Puritan conversion narrative in her North Dakota Series in which the negative influences of the Christian religion on tribal life are foregrounded. Sabine N. Meyer contrasts two commissioned biographies of the Irish Archbishop John Ireland in St. Paul, Minnesota, to point to their ideological presuppositions and ecclesiastical contexts. Kerstin Vogel examines William Apess's interrelation of Native American women's biographical sketches with his own autobiographical reflection. John Barbour relates Graham Greene's, Claude Lévi-Strauss's and Bruce Chatwin's encounter with the religious practices of Indigenous peoples of Brazil, Africa, and Australia as examples of the mediation of spiritual meanings from tribal communities to the modern West.

The contributions in the eighth section, "Mediating Roots and Routes," are concerned with ethnicity, race, and postcolonial conditions in different parts of the world. In a collaborative effort of mother and son, Evelyn Hawthorne and Paul Vanouse combine their research on 1920s eugenics studies performed on "Black, Brown, and White" Jamaicans with Paul Vanouse's multi-media installation using genetic data drawn from his biracial family. Racial aspects also inform the articles of Mary Montemayor, with respect to Filipino American immigrants, and of Yvonne Gutenberger about Anne Moody's maturation within the Civil Rights movement. Sam Raditlhalo's article detects the important influence of African American writers like W.E.B. Du Bois and Richard Wright on South African intellectuals opposed to the apartheid regime, and Alexander J. Beissenhirtz analyzes the influence of African American jazz musicians on the racially unbiased reception of their music by Europeans as reflected in their jazz autobiographies. Sabine Sörgel theorizes the autobiographical play by Trevor Rhone, which he performed at the Mainz conference, to account for his theatrical career between the colonial situation in Jamaica and the motherland in London. Chris Barry presents her own photographic practice as an autoethnographic collaboration with Aboriginals in Alice Springs, interpreting the performance of the self for the camera in the light of intercultural encounters. One of her photographs graces the cover of this volume.

The volume concludes with the contributions of the ninth section, which approach the subject of "Speaking with the Dead" in two ways. First, Zhang Xin-Ke and Jianqiu Sun present examples of the mediation of archives. Zhang's discussion of tombstone inscription traces the evolution of the genre of biography in China. Jianqiu Sun exposes the psychological deep structure of her father's photography of the 1930s, which reveal his critical attitude toward the politics of the time. Second, Deborah Holmes and Bernhard Fetz analyze the contribution of photography and voice, respectively, to the writing of biographies with regard to Eugenie Schwarzwald and Ernst Jandl.

The inclusion of so many different voices in this volume works as a mediation of auto/biography scholarship between Anglo-American critics and scholars in other parts of the world, as realized at the conference in Mainz. The organization of such a conference with 200 participants from five continents requires a team of competent and untiring assistants and colleagues who are dedicated to this project. I would like to thank in particular Prof. Carmen Birkle, Micha Edlich, Dr. Britta Feyerabend, Prof. Nadja Gernalzick, Dr. Claudia Görg, Karina Habermann, Dr. Bärbel Höttges, Mary Montemayor, Aina Quester, Marcus Rieth, Davia Ruge, Silke Schmidt, Natalie Schupp, Prof. Manfred Siebald, and Prof. Nicole

Waller. Dr. Kerstin Vogel proved to be the head of this team in all respects. Along with Silvia Appeltrath, she directed and oversaw all parts of the organization and guaranteed the success of the conference.

This major operation would not have been possible without the generous support of many sponsors and the assistance of the American Studies division at Mainz. I would like to express my gratitude to the German Research Foundation (DFG), the German Association for American Studies (DGfA), the Embassy of the United States of America, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Continuing Education of Rhineland-Palatinate, Johannes Gutenberg University, the Center for Intercultural Studies (CIS), and the Interdisciplinary Research Group for North America Studies (IANAS) at the University of Mainz, Universitätsverlag Winter in Heidelberg, and finally the Office of the Academic Attaché of the French Embassy for German-French Cooperation in Rhineland-Palatinate, Hesse, and Saarland for their generous financial support.

The publication of this volume with 43 contributions could only be realized thanks to many volunteer readers, copy editors, and research assistants. I would like to especially thank Valerie Bopp, Dr. J.R. Duke, Dr. Bärbel Höttges, Sarah Kleymann, and Pan Shan. The greatest credit, however, goes to Sabine Kim for her untiring efforts and scholarly expertise as a shrewd editorial wizard and native speaker, applied over many months to the realization of this publication project, corresponding with the contributors, revising, copy editing and formatting the manuscripts for print. Last but not least, our special thanks go to the contributors and their commitment to this autobiographical research which will hopefully engender new forms of auto/biography and mediation.

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# 1.

# Writing and Reading Lives

CRAIG HOWES

# Doing Biography: Mediating between Life Writing Studies and Lives

Many reviewers and colleagues have been telling us for some time that we live in an age of memoir and biography. I would like to suggest that, more recently, we have also entered into a more modest, but equally undeniable age of life-writing criticism and theory. As co-editor of *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly,* and as the person managing the International Auto/Biography Association listserv, with well over 750 subscribers, I can attest that a great deal of work is going on. Our annual annotated critical bibliography has grown from 500 to 1,400 entries in the past eight years. The number of conference and publishing opportunity announcements on IABA-L has increased by 50 percent in the same period. Centers, research initiatives, courses at universities? All proliferating. Journals are flourishing—*Biography* celebrated its thirtieth birthday in 2008, the American *A/B* continues, and three relatively new publications have appeared—the Australian journal *Life Writing* (2004), the American *Lifewriting Annual* (2006), and the British *Auto/Biography Yearbook* (2007). Several works have recently organized large areas of the field—Margaretta Jolly's landmark *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing* in 2001; Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* in 1998 and *Reading Autobiography* in 2001; and *Teaching Life Writing Texts* (2008), edited by Miriam Fuchs and myself, to mention only a few. This catalogue demonstrates something that is not an issue for those of us who study such texts, but still should be said: There is a field of life writing studies.

I want to propose that we become exporters of our criticism and theory. Or to put this in the form of a question, "How might a familiarity with life writing studies lead to better, more nuanced research or theory in other areas of study?" My title is "doing biography"; I will outline five projects that I have either completed, am still working on, or am just starting. In each case, knowing something about life writing studies has made me more self-aware, more efficient in posing questions, and more confident in reaching conclusions. The specific fields are: literary and institutional history; editing; television production; multi-media revision; and creative wri-

ting. I hope one or more of these accounts might be suggestive for others working in the field.

## 1. Life Writing and Literary and Institutional History

Literary historians often anthropomorphize aesthetic and critical movements, or literary institutions. Sometimes the result is a shorthand statement such as "When modernism was young" or "the *Edinburgh Review* matured into a mainstream Whig publication." A life writing perspective, however, reveals that when movements or institutions get represented as organic entities, these narratives often carry heavily value-laden agendas with them, including the desire to hide or even deny the historical course the subjects actually followed. My example is the British humor magazine *Punch*, which appeared weekly from 1841 until 1992. Very popular within two or three years, it was a legitimate, if self-proclaimed national institution after thirty, and stayed that way, despite decreasing sales, until the end, not so many years ago. *Punch* the magazine was inextricably tied to the hunchbacked, hook-nosed, and violent puppet who was famous before the first issue, who appeared on every cover, and who popped up frequently in the pages. Any "history of *Punch*" has therefore tended to conflate the institution's history with the "biography" of its defining symbol, much in the way that the "biography" of Mickey Mouse is the history of Disney Studios—often referred to as the Mouse Factory.[1]

Institutional histories of *Punch* have not however been stories of the anarchic puppet who beats his wife, authority figures, or even the devil with his bat, but highly conventional stages-of-man moral narratives. In its early, immature years, *Punch* the magazine was supposedly like the puppet—playful and entertaining, but often cruel and intemperate. As the journal tempered its rage and high spirits, however, it left fierce satire behind and embraced comic humor and gentle laughter. Of course, such an archetypical life suggests that it is "natural" for institutions to abandon radical dissent for a conformist, unthreatening "maturity." Retold endlessly from the 1870s on, this "life" labels the progressive politics and savage indignation of *Punch*'s most popular early contributors as naïveté, papers over the fierce debates amongst the *Punch* staff over the magazine's direction, and presents as organic, and therefore inevitable, a history that could have been otherwise. Life writing scholarship can therefore

[1] For a representative sampling of histories of *Punch* that suggest the story of the publication is the biography of its eponymous figure, see, for example, Spielmann, Price, Praeger, and especially given his title, Altick.

alert us to the ideological implications behind a seemingly innocent analogy between the history of a social institution and the course of a "typical" human life.

## 2. Life Writing and Editing

Editors work like biographers. They consult documents to reconstruct the sequence that produced the text. They read the writer's comments about the text and learn about working methods and idiosyncrasies. Although they have a strong sense of the writer, at times they have to guess. And yet, they also know that a text has its own integrity, and that too much research could undermine their work. My own editing project was arguably the ultimate instance of too much information. During his last years, Leon Edel, the Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer of Henry James, was writing his memoirs. Shortly after his death, I was asked to help prepare the manuscript for publication—to edit Leon Edel. Added consideration number one—I had to take into account that a renowned biographer who wrote frequently about the genre had produced the text. Added consideration two—I had conducted twenty-eight hour-long interviews with Leon Edel in the last year of his life. (He had told me he still had some things to say about biography.) In these sessions, he described how he wrote and revised his major books. He also told me stories that turned out to form the bulk of his memoirs. (I did not see the manuscript until after his death.) And yet, my familiarity with Edel's thoughts and methods as a biographer, rather than daunting me, proved to guide me through my work. As I deleted fifty pages forever, or recast a single sentence, I was always drawing on his theory and practice of life writing to direct my actions. Although no editing job could have been more shaped by life writing theory, I was very glad that I had this theory—his theory—at hand.

## 3. Life Writing and Documentary Television

Life writing in non-print media has been attracting increasing attention. Since 2000, *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* has published three special issues in this area—two on filmed lives, one on lives online.[2] My research here arose out of serving as an executive producer, a co-producer, and the principal scholar for the television documentary series *Biography Hawai'i*. (We have broadcast five hour-long biographies on

[2] See Man, Zuern, and Rugg.

Hawai'i public television.) I have found three questions especially stimulating. First, how can life writing theory help someone producing a documentary life for a television audience? Second, how does video production change the way we represent a life? And third, how has this experience affected my assumptions about our field?

The production team's goal was to use biography to organize programs about cultural history. We chose our subjects because we wanted to show how the Hawaiian nobility preserved land and culture in the nineteenth century, how Hawaiians sustained their traditional arts after U.S. annexation in 1900, and how lawyers, journalists, and unions together fought for the rights of immigrant workers, and for civil liberties after the Second World War. My background in life writing helped me because I was familiar with the critical debates over biography's status as history. Historians of biography know that the story of an individual has often served as a lens for seeing an era—the life and times approach—but that this lens must itself be examined carefully. In short, life writing scholars have thought about mediation between history and biography.

Mediation is also an issue when considering the creation of meaning in documentary lives. Biography students tend to be most comfortable with scripts—usually a narrator's account of the life, often punctuated by the subjects' words, by the words of those who knew them, or by comments from specialists. But life writing also helped me respond to the ways that juxtaposing words and images, or images in sequence, shapes the audience's understanding of the life. As the documentary developed, I could often recognize how a particular juxtaposition misrepresented the person, or clashed with our understanding of the life and times.

I was especially struck, though, by how this experience shifted my critical assumptions. Here, I'll only give one example. Hagiography has two meanings in life writing studies. It is the term for a kind of biography found in many cultures—what you have written if your subject is a saint. But "hagiography" can be pejorative when describing biographies not about actual saints. In this sense, the term suggests something like a love letter written out of naiveté, or ideological sympathy, or mercenary interests, presenting the subject as impossibly good. Always supposedly preferable is what I now find equally naïve: the warts-and-all approach, which assumes that without shameful actions, personal weaknesses, or cruelties, a biography cannot be about a "real" person and is therefore fiction.[3] But we found that presenting our subjects in a very positive way—highlighting their contributions, or their moments of greatest triumph—actually let us

[3] The phrase "warts and all" is famously attributed to Oliver Cromwell, who used it when discussing arrangements for a portrait.

be more nuanced when handling complex cultural debates. By concisely stating our subjects' actions and then by describing the opposition, we found we could represent the times more accurately. Life writing studies can therefore benefit, and benefit from, lives on film or tape, which is how most people encounter represented lives today.

## 4. Life Writing and Multi-Media Revision

How later events can revise, or even refute, a life narrative is a compelling area for study. Examples here can verge on the banal—passionate dedications to lovers read differently after the break up. But recent discussions about the idea of "definitive" biography have suggested that the changing interplay between writers and audiences will always require recasting lives to make them interesting to other times. And what happens when living subjects respond to negative public representations of themselves by revising their own life narratives?

My subject for this project pushed these considerations to a *reductio ad absurdum*, although the consequences were sad.[4] In 1965, an American serviceman named Robert Garwood was captured by pro-North Vietnamese forces. After roughly six hundred American prisoners of war (POWs) were released in February of 1973, several published narratives by POWs who had met Garwood in captivity described him as a traitor who had served as a guard and an interrogator. When he unexpectedly returned home in 1979, he therefore confronted a public that thought it knew exactly who he was, and what he had done. Since then, Garwood has been constantly revising his life story in response to disciplinary charges, published accounts of his actions, and ongoing controversies over America's handling of POW and MIA issues.

Life writing students will instantly recognize the importance of the two sections of his life that only Garwood can represent. The two years following his capture, when he was alone or held with Americans who died, are crucial, because his account must show that he hadn't turned traitor, despite later POW testimony. But the years after his last encounter with POWs who returned are also important, because his story must show that he had not converted to the North Vietnamese cause—that he was still a POW.

What is fascinating about Garwood is how his life story changes in light of new events. His lawyers offered the first draft at his court martial.

[4] For a far more detailed account of this story and its aftermath, see my essay listed in the Works Cited.

That ended badly: Though not imprisoned, he lost his back pay and benefits. Even before his trial was over, though, Garwood was working with two authorized biographers, Winston Groom and Duncan Spencer. Published in 1983, this book presented Garwood as a victim who had survived by blending in. But a year after its release, at a time when America's obsession with its Vietnam MIAs and POWs was growing, Garwood told an interviewer that he had seen American POWs in Vietnam years after they had all supposedly been returned (see Paul). And Garwood continues to revise the tale, often in response to new twists in the conspiracy narratives that dominate discussions of America's involvement in Vietnam. His revisions have been published, broadcast, cited, and posted in print, on television, and especially in cyberspace, where the most byzantine conspiracy debates now rage. For Garwood, then, the past changes in response to personal and social need. His life is always a story for our times, and when those times change, so does he.

Life writing studies provide excellent tools for assessing this phenomenon because many of our key concerns—relational identity, the purpose of life representations, ethics, truth as a given though complex goal, the impact of the medium—are in play. The mutability and intricacy of his tale as it changes for its audiences make his life an interesting one to follow.

## 5. Life Writing and Creative Writing

At least in North America, creative writing has become increasingly important, as life writing becomes institutionalized in the academy. Twenty years ago, the study of literature was most literature departments' central concern. Writing about something else was either labeled expository writing, often taught as a service course, or as creative writing—which meant fiction or poetry, often taught by writers who felt somewhat removed from the literary critics occupying the department's broad center. Times have changed. The advent of cultural studies, the huge popularity of creative writing courses, and the growth of composition as a field have turned many programs into departments of reading and writing. Life writing crops up everywhere in this process. Whether it is called Autobiographical Writing, Creative Non-Fiction, or simply Non-Fiction Writing, it is being read and produced by students, and many departments are now grappling with the institutional, ethical, pedagogical, and even legal implications of this shift. Life writing theory can help us talk about the fading line between traditional literature—imaginative, not necessarily a representation of fact in any referential sense—and the kinds of writing now being taught and

produced in our classes. Such talk could then help instructors make the transition from teaching students to ward off or mask autobiographical or biographical impulses, to recognizing these as enabling, though prescriptive as well.

My concern here arose during a trip I took in June of 2006 to Bowdoin College, on America's northeast coast. The closest airport is in Portland, Maine, and I stayed the night there before flying back home to Hawai'i the next morning. On the ride from Bowdoin, a nagging memory led me to ask the driver if Portland was in some way connected to the events of 9/11. "Mohamed Atta and another guy started from here that morning. They stayed at your motel," he replied. My memory was actually of a fiction I'd recently read—a Martin Amis story called "The Last Days of Muhammad Atta," which first appeared in the 24 April 2006 issue of *The New Yorker*, and then later in somewhat revised form in the collection *The Second Plane* (2008). The narrative begins in Atta's hotel room, and ends the second after the plane hits the World Trade Center. Because it is told from Atta's point of view, the story is clearly a fiction, and it is labeled as such. But in the *New Yorker* version, four time-coded photographs of Atta and Abdulaziz al-Omari at a Portland gas station on September 10 appear below the title, suggesting that this is the kind of story that sometimes gets called factual fiction.

Though I didn't ask the motel staff anything, I did pay close attention to my surroundings while I was there. Then when I got home I did some very quick net research. I had arrived at the motel at around the same time of day as Atta and Omari had. I had considered, but not eaten at, the restaurant they went to nearby. I *had* used the same ATM machine. Early the next morning, I had flown on the same commuter airline, and waited for my flight in the same security area. (There were photos.) I had *not* stayed in the same room—Atta had been in 232; I was in 310. And when I reread Amis's story, I noted that he had turned the modest three-story Comfort Inn motel into the "ponderous and labyrinthine" Repose Inn hotel, with more than twelve floors (Amis 153).

There are some other discrepancies between the historical record and Amis's account, but I want to offer the Repose Inn hotel as an occasion to comment on current discussions of the differences between creative nonfiction and fiction. I am certain that Amis and others would argue that the change from small motel to huge hotel is irrelevant. Fiction aspires toward a higher truth, unchecked by the piddling details of history. The change does something metaphorically or symbolically that I clearly do not understand. Or even, that my quibbling shows, how the unimaginative, pedantic approaches of biographers, and literary critics as well, kill or maim an art-

ist's work. What I would still suggest, though, is that a life writing perspective provides insight here into some of the contracts that writers implicitly enter into with readers.

We are all familiar with Philippe Lejeune's autobiographical pact. Loosely stated, by calling a text an autobiography, a writer tells readers that the protagonist, the I-voice relating the story, and the name on the book's cover are the same person, and that the cover name is of someone whose existence and history can in certain ways be verified. In the past few years, several texts have famously been accused of violating the autobiographical pact. Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments* is one instance. The attacks on *I, Rigoberta Menchú* have led to some important discussions about testimonio as a genre. And the unmasking of James Fry's *A Million Little Pieces* as a heavily fabricated text resulted in Oprah Winfrey's scolding him before an audience of millions for violating the autobiographical pact.[5]

We can instantly recognize "the deep subject" of these controversies—the ethics of life writing, to quote the title from Paul John Eakin's edited collection. I would suggest that Martin Amis's big hotel arouses a parallel sense of transgression, of a violation of what I will call, for lack of a better term, the fictobiographical pact. The story's epigraph, from the *The 9/11 Commission Report*, implicitly announces Amis's goal:

> No physical, documentary, or analytical evidence provides a convincing explanation of why [Mohamed] Atta and [Abdulaziz al-] Omari drove to Portland, Maine, from Boston on the morning of September 10, only to return to Logan on Flight 5930 on the morning of September 11. (Amis 153; *9/11* 451)

Clearly, the story will imaginatively try to supply an explanation for this, and much more. But by selecting a historical figure for his protagonist, providing photographs of him in the *New Yorker* version, and handling familiar details in ways that suggest he is not changing "the physical, documentary, or analytical evidence," Amis also enters into an understanding with readers.

I'm not saying that all stories drawing on historical details must sign such a contract. Writers and film makers often throw historical figures into such patently impossible situations that we know such a pact is not in effect. I would argue, however, that much of the power that "The Last Days of Mohammad Atta" has as a story comes from the reader's faith that Amis is exploring the workings of a fascinating and terrifying mind *within* the parameters of what we do know about the man. Or put another way, I

[5] All three of these texts have generated a tremendous number of responses. For the Wilkomirski controversy, see Maechler and Eskin; for Menchú, see Arias. As for Fry, the discussion is ubiquitous, with book-length studies pending.

have no problem at all with Amis imagining the internal life of Atta, but I have a lot of trouble with the hotel, because losing faith in that detail—and remember, I didn't go looking for this anti-epiphany—profoundly changed my sense of the story.

I have found Roland Barthes's essay "L'effet de réel" useful when thinking about this issue. Barthes writes that small details in novels are often neither symbols, nor structural components, but referents placed there only to sustain a sense of reality. "Yes, I can trust this author," the reader thinks, "for he sees the world I see. Such a drawing room would have such a barometer." But Barthes sharply distinguishes between the effect of such details in literature, and in historical narratives, where they *must* also be verifiable—in fact, that is their *only* value. This difference draws one of the lines between history and literature, fact and fiction.

So why did Amis build his non-existent hotel? I do not know, and frankly, I do not want to. Amis could argue symbolism, or proclaim creative license; I suspect, though, that either he never bothered to find out what the Comfort Inn was like, or changed it because he could, and in a way that his vocation encourages him to. Several poets and novelists have told me that when it comes to historical background, they would rather not know too much; for Amis, not caring about the South Portland Comfort Inn lets him erect a hotel that fits nicely with his sense of Atta's mind. (The long elevator ride down on the morning of September 11, for instance, allows Atta to be revolted by some American senior citizens who join him at several floors.) Students of life writing can explain to creative writers who are teaching autobiographical writing and other forms of creative non-fiction why the pacts a life writer, or even sometimes a fiction writer, makes with readers cannot simply be played with, or ignored. An ethics of writing must trump the artist's often non-negotiable demand for freedom from criticism on non-aesthetic grounds, and I think that such pacts govern our reading of stories like "The Last Days of Mohammad Atta." Life writing theory has much to offer at a time when other disciplines are increasingly drawing on life writing's power to further their own academic, economic, and aesthetic ends.

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MANUELA COSTANTINO

# The Sensational Life Story of Latifa: Mediating "Forbidden" Knowledge and Identities

The collapse of the Twin Towers on September 11th marked the beginning of a new wave of intense media scrutiny of the Muslim world. In many North American newscasts, Muslim subjects were demonized and described as uncivilized and the Muslim woman often singled out and presented as a subjugated victim in need of rescue. Pictures of war-torn Middle Eastern cities and veiled or burqa-clad women flooded North American television screens and newspapers. The language that accompanied such pictures often contained disturbing rhetoric justifying Western intervention, not simply as retaliation for the terrorist attacks against the U.S., but as salvation of oppressed women and as a form of democratic development. In "Securing Afghan Women: Neocolonialism, Epistemic Violence, and the Rhetoric of the Veil," Kevin J. Ayotte and Mary E. Husain demonstrate, like several other theorists, that the rhetoric used in North American media helped construct a binary opposition between the Western rational self and the Muslim irrational other. This polarization, they suggest, seriously complicates the representation of Muslim subjects in general and Muslim women in particular. They find especially problematic the ventriloquism of Afghan women by discourses speaking for (both "on behalf of" and "in place of") them. These discourses need to be read critically because they have been edited and prompted by certain lines of questioning, i.e., mediated. This is not to suggest, Ayotte and Husain insist, that the women's stories are false, but rather that even their narratives are inflected by their representation in an inevitably Western discourse (116). This representation of Muslim women in the media creates a specific context in which their life narratives are received. In this context, the veiled and "subjugated" Muslim woman is a "sensational subject" whose hidden stories are difficult to obtain and filled with "forbidden" but highly attractive knowledge.

The flurry of publication of auto/biographies by Muslim women in the last decade certainly attests to the popularity of this "forbidden" knowledge. The production of these autobiographies, however, is far from being

a simple process. Because of their marginal positions in their own cultures, many Middle Eastern women depend on foreign journalists, writers, and presses to get their stories published. In addition, because these narratives address diversified Western audiences, the experiences that they articulate need to be translated across multiple cultural gaps. In order to understand this complicated process of cultural translation, I propose to examine *My Forbidden Face: Growing Up under the Taliban—A Young Woman's Story by Latifa* (2001). This examination will help highlight the complex mediation process and the power dynamics attached to it. Published first as an article in the French magazine *Elle* and then as the book *Visage volé: avoir vingt ans à Kaboul* in November 2001, Latifa's "sensational" story lived through several waves of translation and mediation before it reached the Anglophone market shortly after. The book's many peritexts (the foreword, the map, the preface, the afterword, the acknowledgments, the glossary, and the chronology) illustrate the multiple layers of mediation necessary for this cross-cultural encounter between a young Afghan woman and her intended Western readers.

In May 2001, *Elle* magazine and Chékéba Hachemi, the founder of Afghanistan Libre, an organization that aims at helping the cause of Afghan women, launched an information campaign and made arrangements for Afghan women to come to France and to talk to various political leaders and address the European government. Among these women were Latifa and her mother. Their witnessing campaign was only partially successful since, although they did raise awareness about what was happening in their homeland, the Taliban regime heard of their actions and issued a fatwa against them. As a result, Latifa, her mother, and her father who had accompanied them were stranded in a country whose language they did not speak, unable to contact the rest of their family for fear of endangering their lives. Latifa used this forced time in exile to work on her autobiography. She wrote the book in collaboration with Hachemi and with the help of a translator. This already heavily mediated life story was then translated again, this time into English.

The book opens with Latifa's dedication of the story to her mother and all silenced and hidden women and to the memory of the women executed under Taliban law. A map of Afghanistan follows this dedication, locating the country in relation to its neighbors and identifying major cities, particularly the ones that had been appearing in the news on a regular basis for the few months before the book's publication. The inclusion of this map and the selection of information presented in it clearly connect the reading of the autobiography to the narratives articulated in the media. The

autobiography is introduced as a reading companion to the public stories well known to Western audiences.

Karenna Gore Schiff,[1] who writes the preface to the book, confirms this connection when she explains that "as we digest news reports and public statements, there is a growing hunger for more intimate knowledge of the mind-set and experience of the Afghan people" (ix). Such "growing hunger" for "intimate" knowledge explains the increasing demand for sensational inside stories; many Western readers, after a voyeuristic fashion, avidly desired to penetrate the mysteries of the Muslim world that the American president and his allies vowed to liberate. Although this desire might be seen as a reasonable and commendable effort to learn about the Muslim other, the power dynamics that gave life to Latifa's narrative and the rhetoric used in the U.S. preface betray ulterior motives. Even though Gore Schiff had spoken against the Bush administration on several occasions, her language is infused with words, images, and attitudes very similar to those displayed in media coverage sympathetic to the president's intervention in the Middle East. In her preface, Gore Schiff summarizes Latifa's story before the young woman is given a chance to tell it. Like the news reports that contextualize and interpret the interviews of Afghan women before we hear their voices, this summary shapes a primary understanding of the autobiography for the reader, who will then be able to recognize what has already been highlighted as important knowledge. Gore Schiff, however, is careful not to reveal too much, instead peppering her text with allusions to the sensational and intimate details that readers are about to discover. With the promise of reading about the "terrifying" experiences of women kept "hostage" in their own homes, about "public execution[s]" and "barbaric acts" (Gore Schiff ix, x), we can embark on the thrilling journey of uncovering Latifa's "life and death" story. As readers, we are already conditioned to respond to this narrative in particular ways even before we have accessed the text. We can recognize the same rhetoric and images we have heard on the news and we expect the same story, only better because it will be personal. This autobiography will help confirm what we already know.

Keeping a critical eye open, though, we can read through Gore Schiff's next rhetorical move. At the same time that she validates Latifa's analysis and criticism of the complex U.S. cultural and political influence in Afghanistan, Gore Schiff devalues the young woman's judgment by reducing Latifa's thoughts to mere "beliefs," "feelings," and "teenage impressions" (x, xi). This ambivalent positioning suggests a patronizing stance towards

[1] Gore Schiff is Al Gore's daughter and she was actively involved in her father's presidential campaign against George Bush in 2000.

Afghan women, one that is clearly sympathetic to but more authoritative vis-à-vis the Muslim woman. This stance complicates Gore Schiff's reference to Carolyn Heilbrun, a key figure in white feminist theory, and to Gore Schiff's definition of power as "the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter" (xi). Although Latifa is indeed able to do just that, she could not have done it without the intervention of white women. The very preface that is meant to present Latifa's story as a power-bestowing narrative ironically deprives it of such power by highlighting the lack of agency and control the young Afghan woman had in the production process of her book. Gore Schiff's final claim that "*My Forbidden Face* is about a single young woman seizing power from the Taliban" (xi) only serves to reinforce the creation of a relationship between the events of Latifa's story and the so-called liberating intervention of the Western world. American forces are the ones who literally "seized power from the Taliban" and Latifa's plight and the plight of other Afghan women are advertised as the real incentive behind armed intervention in Afghanistan.

When readers are finally able to access Latifa's text, they find that she does rather more than simply relate "feelings" or "teenage impressions." Latifa articulates her thoughts about American Afghan political connections by reviewing the history of her country, synthesizing the knowledge that she has managed to gather from Afghan, American, and British news outlets, and relating the conversations that she has had with her parents. Latifa's youth and her difficulty in accessing knowledge might limit her understanding of the political intricacies played out on the international scene, but her conclusions are often sophisticated. Her political analyses demonstrate that, contrary to media representations, young Afghan women are educated and able to pursue intellectual interests. In fact, Latifa repeatedly contrasts the violent uneducated talibs and the majority of Afghan men and women who are subjected to their rule. In these contrasts, Latifa presents the Taliban's misunderstanding of the Quran and Afghan culture and rectifies it with her own knowledge. Latifa also rectifies the perceptions of Afghan women as completely helpless creatures that some of her Western readers might have by describing the various acts of resistance the women engage in. She complicates many Western assumptions about the burqa when she explains that the hated garment could also prove ironically useful in concealing cameras, books, and political activists. Equally important are the resourcefulness and courage of Afghan women as illustrated in Latifa's descriptions of her mother's initiative in starting an underground hospital and her own decision to organize an underground school. All of these elements help alter the perception of Afghan women

articulated in many Western media and create an image of these women that Western readers can identify with. These women do not seem after all to be so different from women in the West; they are intelligent and proactive in their attempt to save themselves, but the repressive regime they live under thwarts their efforts.

While on the one hand Latifa's narrative complicates Western perceptions of Afghan women and articulates points of identification between them and Western readers, it also uses well-known media rhetoric and images to pull the readers' emotional strings and make the auto/biography an attractive product. Latifa shapes her story in terms that her audience will recognize and understand. She repeatedly describes Afghan women as "imprisoned," "humiliated," and "oppressed" and discusses the various "atrocities" committed by the Taliban (4, 48, 66, 67, 69, 129, 138, 180, 195). Her rhetoric and imagery crescendo throughout the text until she declares that the Taliban's actions are equivalent to "genocide" (96). Although Latifa's story demonstrates that Afghan women could certainly come up with these descriptions and understandings of their situation, it is important to notice that her rhetoric and images echo the narratives articulated in Western media. In "The Skin of the *Burqa*: Recent Life Narratives from Afghanistan," Gillian Whitlock draws on Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's take on Mary Louise Pratt's work on transculturation to "emphasize that in auto-ethnography, colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms; indigenous or oppressed subjects may both collaborate with and appropriate a dominant culture's discursive models" (56). Such collaboration is particularly evident in Latifa's narrative in the ways in which she incorporates Osama bin Laden in her story. Latifa carefully distances herself and her people from the well-known terrorist by referring to him as "that bin Laden" and emphasizing the fact that Afghan people did not really know who he was. The only thing that they were sure of is that he had a lot of money and was a friend of the Taliban. As such, he automatically becomes the enemy of the Afghan people. This positioning aligns the Afghan people with the Western world, and the U.S. in particular. In his 2004 State of the Union Address, then president Bush summarized the effects of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and explained that "[t]he men and women of Afghanistan [were] building a nation that [was] free, and proud, and fighting terror—and [that] America [was] honored to be their friend" (qtd. in Cloud 298). Latifa's narrative efforts to distance the Afghan people from bin Laden transform Afghans from inferior others into "friends" in need in the minds of Western readers.

Latifa's autobiography ends with the American intervention in Afghanistan. The help she has been pleading for throughout her narrative is finally there, even though she is critical of its reasons and potential consequences. When Western readers reach the conclusion of Latifa's sensational story, they are replete with "intimate knowledge" about the "atrocities" the Taliban committed against women and relieved that they have, in one way or another, participated in the eradication of such tyranny. Latifa's thanks in one of the book's last peritexts to the French women who helped her reinforce the feeling of righteousness that some Western readers might have. The young woman who appeared hidden and trapped in a burqa on the book's front cover has finally been unveiled and liberated, thanks to Western intervention.

My argument here is not meant to undermine the validity or even necessity of Muslim women's autobiographies; quite the contrary. We need to hear the stories that they have to tell, but we also need to be critical of the ways in which such stories are prepared for Western consumption. The fact that Karenna Gore Schiff publicly took a stand against the Bush administration and yet incorporated rhetoric and images used by that administration to help frame Latifa's story clearly speaks to the pervasive power of such rhetoric. Whatever our ideological positioning may be, we need to be aware that our voyeuristic desire to unveil the mysterious Muslim world may be veiling our own disturbing desires and political ends.

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EMILY HIPCHEN

# Mediating Truths in Adoption Search Narratives

In this article, I want to consider some of the ethical difficulties of producing a certain kind of adoption life writing, namely, the adoptee's search narrative—generally speaking, a text written by a closed-records adoptee about her search for her birth parents and her experience with reunion. To do so, I will deploy Tom Couser's *Vulnerable Subjects* (2004). In particular, I single out an element of what Couser refers to as the "so-called Georgetown mantra" (17), from which he develops his understanding of an appropriate ethics for life writing, especially life writing about the unempowered. Though all four principles of the mantra, "respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice" (17), produce interesting questions when we look through these lenses at what happens in search narratives, the first ethic, the requirement that a writer (a doctor, a legislator, a human being) respect the autonomy of others, seems most engaged when we address the issue of naming—that is, the using, telling, hiding, and finding of identities—in these texts.

As Couser describes it, respect for the autonomy of a subject means refusing to use that person as simply an object or a means to an end, irrespective of that person's own goals. "Respect for autonomy" suggests the recognition of each person's unconditional worth and capacity for self-government and self-expression. Couser tells us that the right to autonomy is the "right to decide as far as possible what will happen to one's person—to one's body, to information about one's secrets, and the like"; respect for autonomy gives "the subjects of life writing […] the opportunity to exercise some degree of control over what happens to their stories, including secrets and private information" (19). The implications of an ethics of life writing based on respect for autonomy are profound if, as Paul John Eakin and others argue, all life writing is fundamentally relational—that is, identity and self–life writing necessarily happen socially and therefore must include other people's lives. Such an ethics is particularly fraught in the genre of the search narrative, given that the base premise of such texts is uncovering secret origins and hidden relatives—in particular finding and exposing the identities of the writer and her mother; such iden-

tities have been embodied in names that have been sealed away both informally, by shame or the desire to put the past to rest, and formally, by contracts, laws, and judicial decrees.

I would like to use the element of the Georgetown mantra that requires that we respect the autonomy of others to look at two adoptees' search narratives in particular: Florence Fisher's *The Search for Anna Fisher* (1973) and Debra Levi Holtz's monograph, *Of Unknown Origin* (2001). In both, as in many or most search narratives, the writers had no legal access to their own pre-adoption identities. As was typical when these writers were born (the first half of the twentieth century), their birthmothers were assured of lifelong anonymity at relinquishment; both birthmothers requested or demanded it again, decades later, at reunion with their biological daughters. I have two primary questions about these books specifically and also as examples of the genre: If neither birthmother wanted, *explicitly* did not want, to be exposed and identified, have these narratives respected their autonomy? And is the search narrative as exemplified by this work ethical—*can* it be? Though I do not like to say so, as a writer of a search narrative who uses the naming conventions of the genre, I think the answer to both questions is no.

Richard Freadman, in "Decent and Indecent: Writing My Father's Life," gives us some ways to think about how to respect autonomy; in particular, requests for anonymity or privacy by subjects of life writing. The first approach is to consider the context of each request, on both a personal and a cultural level. Is the person's request to remain anonymous serious, and if so, are we as writers bound to respect the wishes of that person? Is there a good reason to maintain secrecy; or a better one not to? With search narratives, difficulty in perceiving levels of seriousness arises because such judgments usually require intimacy, an intimacy Freadman is privy to because he is writing about his father, the man who raised him and whom he had known all his life; few or no adoptees writing search narratives have that kind of intimacy with their subjects. The problem with parsing out whether or not there are valid reasons to maintain secrecy is the same one faced by those in the gay community who think "outing" closeted gays, while painful for the individual, is good for others—outing becomes a strategy to decrease the social stigma accorded homosexuality. In the context of adoption activism, outing birthmothers, by calling them by name in published documents, can be seen as a way to combat the misguided shame of unwed motherhood and of relinquishment. Is this a good enough reason? Can writers of search narratives, considering the context of requests for anonymity, respect autonomy by refusing to name their mothers? Ought they to?

The second consideration that Freadman points out concerns trust, the principle with which Couser begins *Vulnerable Subjects*. Perhaps the gravest ethical difficulty with exposing people in life writing is that such exposure can, and usually does, constitute betrayal. Since virtually all search narratives involve closed records, by definition identifying birthparents is a violation of the promises of anonymity made to them by adoption agencies, lawyers, social workers, and, by implication, because of its elaborate protection of closed records, the larger legal system. More difficult to gauge is the violation of that particular sort of trust between family members. The birthmother is, after all a birth *mother*, however much she is also a stranger.

But as Fisher points out in her search narrative, adoptees have promised nothing to their birthmothers. For Fisher, this means that, given that Fisher has promised nothing, Fisher violates no trust in her search. "Everyone," she tells assembled group members of the Adoptees' Liberty Movement Association, "has a right to know who they are before they die. […] When I was a baby I didn't sign the agreement for my adoption, and I do not consider myself legally held by it now. In fact, I'm thinking of having mine annulled" (qtd. in Lifton 176). Fisher's position conflates not only legal and ethical concerns ("*legally* held" and "*right* to know") but also does not—indeed, cannot—discriminate between the right to know and the right to tell. Fisher makes this overlap clear when she discusses her birthmother's request that Fisher not use her birth name in public appearances. Fisher's birthmother discovers that Fisher is to appear on a nationally televised talk show. Fisher tells us that her birthmother "saw the listing and called to ask me not to use my real name on the show. No decision was harder for me to make. I told her that to do this would negate everything I had worked for, everything I stood for. […] I wanted to protect my mother, but I had fought for my real name and my heritage and I would not deny them, not even for her" (250). Another search narrative, Betty Jean Lifton's *Twice Born* (1975) explicitly elides knowing and telling. Lifton confesses to an elderly doctor at her adoptive mother's nursing home that she has been searching for her birthparents and writing a book about it:

> "You found your parents?" [the doctor asks].
>
> "Yes." [she responds].
>
> "What … who did you find?"
>
> "I am writing a book about that now. […] But I feel guilty as if I don't have the right."
>
> "Don't feel guilty. Everyone has the right to know everything about themselves," he says with conviction.

> "I worry that my mother may not understand. That she'll see it simply as a defection."
>
> "Don't worry, it is a good thing you're doing. And it is important that someone like you should write about things that most of us don't know." (281)

The *it* in the doctor's response reveals that he, too, sees no difference between knowing (finding out) and publicizing the information; that neither is a "defection," and that Lifton's guilt is unnecessary—in fact, that, for the doctor as for Fisher, telling serves a useful social purpose. But telling may also answer an important personal necessity for the adoptee. Debra Levi Holtz makes clear why knowing and telling may be inextricable for adoptees who search: "Sometimes," she writes, "we don't realize the truth of our words until we say them out loud" (288).

If we can accept that for closed-records adoptees knowing may require telling, then the ethical issue becomes balancing the right to autonomy in the form of the protection of secrecy or anonymity for the birthmother, with the right to information about oneself and to the dissemination of that information as a form of autonomy for the adoptee. Typically, search narratives balance these two rights by using aliases for birth families and anyone else who requests privacy. But the disclaimers the books use to describe this practice simply raise more questions, both about genre and about how to maintain anonymity effectively—Holtz tells us that "[s]ome names and locations have been changed in this autobiographical narrative in order to protect the privacy of individuals" (verso title page). Lifton's is a political statement that is embedded in her text rather than published with the front matter: "Some, not all, of the names in this book are fictitious. They have to be because that is what adoption is all about: secrets" (4). Fisher insists that "[e]verything in this book is true and happened exactly as written. However, to insure [sic] privacy, most of the names have been changed and any resemblance to any living person is coincidental" (verso title page). Ironic, yes; but the real irony in Fisher's disclaimer is that resemblance in search narratives is never coincidental; indeed it is crucial because in search narratives, as in the searches themselves, resemblance constitutes identity.

Inscribing anonymity is one thing, but being anonymous—in a text about genetic kinship—is something more troubling. The problem is bodies. Bodies in search narratives work like driver's licenses in that they get used by virtually everyone as identification. Like most or all search narratives, both Fisher's and Holtz's texts talk about bodies as passports to a relationship with birth families—but particularly with birthmothers—and thus are road maps to origins and information about the self. Holtz's aunt by marriage and biological uncle accept her because, as they tell her, they

"can see a lot of Helen [the birthmother] in you. […] I think you look like her […], very much so. […] Good God, your nose, chin, cheeks—they're all Dunne [Holtz's birth family]. But it's that bump on your nose, that's the distinctive Dunne characteristic. Helen has it, so does Michael [Holtz's uncle]" (134). Holtz looks so much like her birthmother that she is recognized by someone passing by on the street, an elderly relative who has not seen Helen in more than a decade. The aunt tries to pass off Holtz as her own daughter (and thus not a blood Dunne), but the old woman looks Holtz over quickly, then insists that "[s]he's not your niece, she's Mike's niece"; that is, Helen's child (169).

Fisher's experience is even more interesting. Like most adoptees in search narratives, she is instantly recognized by her biological family through her body (and her son's body). Fisher recognizes her biological family by the same means. On seeing her birthmother for the first time, for example, Fisher comments:

> [A]s I looked at her, I thought, *That's what I'm going to look like in seventeen years*. […] In an instant I took in every feature of her face: her eyes, her high cheekbones, a certain curve of her ears, the precise shape of her nose, her expression. Only her mouth was different, and she was heavier. Otherwise we might have been sisters. Even her hair was dark, my natural color; the shape of her face and the animation in her eyes were the same as mine. (201)

But perhaps more tellingly, early in her twenty-year search for her birthmother, Fisher locates the doctor who had delivered Fisher and had served as the liaison in her adoption. When Fisher goes to his office to find out when she can see him in order to obtain information about her adoption, she runs into him unexpectedly: "The door to the doctor's private office opened," she writes, "and […] [a] medium-sized man in a white smock […] turned to us. When he saw me, his head jerked and he gave a slight gasp"—a gasp which came from seeing her, Fisher realizes after speaking with her birthmother, *as* her birthmother, a teenager who had rejected this doctor's sexual advances two decades earlier (77). "I was in my early twenties," Fisher writes, "and at that time looked very much like my mother had at eighteen. He had blanched when he saw me; suddenly I *was* my mother" (220).

The particular problem of negotiating anonymity in a search narrative, then, is that even if the authors avoid naming names, bodies tell secrets and become that which names. Knowing may necessitate telling, but in negotiating the ethics of telling, not-telling gets redirected into showing, another kind of naming. This showing is further problematized by the way in which editors, book designers, or book marketers display non-text images of the authors' bodies (and possibly those of their birthmothers) as part of the apparatus of the book—for instance, as cover illustrations or

jacket photos. If not precisely publishing the pictures of authors' birthmothers, as Holtz may be doing, by writing long and detailed descriptions of them, these texts expose the birthmothers' bodies and thus their identities in the present of the book. But because the authors emphasize their comparative youth (which underlines their similarity to their relinquishing mothers rather than to the aging bodies of the birthmothers they find), and show and describe themselves as physically resembling—indeed standing in for—their birthmothers, the search narratives *also* expose the early, relinquishing mother. Under these circumstances even the standard author photograph may be seen to violate anonymity. In such a book, where bodies are recognizable and are used by those who figure in the book as a shorthand for names, it is difficult to imagine that it is at all possible to negotiate anonymity for the birthmother and to respect the wishes of those who do not want to be exposed.

In auto/biography theory, names are crucial: According to Philippe Lejeune, the name of the main character in any putative autobiography is crucial in understanding whether the text is really autobiographical. Names are perhaps even more critical in adoption. In order to pursue a search, one needs names: first, one's birth name (this is the holy grail of searching) and then one's birthmother's name (like the holy salver of the search). With these, one has a certain power—and power is the central concern of any ethical questioning. Part of Couser's understanding of how to apply the Georgetown mantra, and implicit in the mantra itself, is an understanding that there are *vulnerable subjects*: that is, unbalanced power relationships between those who write lives, and those who live the lives described by the writers. Life writing theory, common sense, and Couser's principles of respect—virtually everything tells us that the writer is unambiguously empowered and the written-about is not, given that the writer has control over the presentation of the story and the selfhood of her subject. The writer can make such a selfhood public, and shame and humiliate her subject, without giving her an opportunity to object. This is particularly important when considering past or utterly uncommunicative subjects, such as variously discussed by Couser, Freadman, and Nancy K. Miller in Paul John Eakin's *The Ethics of Life Writing*. When we start applying this understanding of power relationships to the genre of the search narrative, however, things become tricky.

It is hard to tell exactly who is empowered in search narratives. Part of the difficulty in figuring this out lies in the way we see, and think about, adoptees: Though a writer of these texts may, like myself, be in her thirties or forties, we are called adopted *children*. Lifton tells us that the culture of adoption entails talking of the adopted as if they had never attained adult-

hood: "The adopted child can never grow up," she says; "Who has ever heard of an adopted *adult*?" (4). Both text and imagery in the search narratives themselves emphasize these semantic and cultural stereotypes. In Fisher's text, she describes being denied the information she wants about her adoption, leaving her feeling as if the system treats her like a child; she is accused several times, as Lifton is, of wanting merely to indulge her curiosity and of not having grown-up desires because she searches. Moreover, each edition of Lifton's memoir pictures Lifton on the cover as a child, for instance, as do many search narratives that venture to use photographs of the author, including Holtz's. Yet as searchers and writers none of them are of course children. In fact, most are mothers themselves by the time they become writers. If, culturally speaking, adoptees are perceived as childlike, childish, or as children, they are by definition the unempowered or the vulnerable, in both life and in narrative. We might think about Carolyn Steedman's assertion in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, that "[c]hildren are always episodes in someone else's narrative, not their own people, but rather brought into being for particular purposes" (122). It is also worth noting that a search narrative has as its subject a searcher in a position of ignorance about herself. Trying to find information and to locate the lost, even if she is not a child, either truly or metaphorically, she is victimized by other people's secrets and vulnerable in her ignorance.

But then equally vulnerable is the adoptee's birthmother. Though she has the advantage of knowing the pre-adoption information that the search and the search narrative exist to pursue, she is all the same the object of search, speculation, and examination and is the subject of a text she does not write herself. Her "shame" is the center of the search narrative and is merely reported (not interrogated) by it. The birthmother has no control over her own story, even over its existence, since in many search narratives, as in both Holtz's and Fisher's, the writing and making public proceed without her input, despite her repeated and sometimes desperate pleas for silence. Fisher's birthmother asks her not to reveal her life in public: "'I can't'—her [biological mother's] voice began to crack—'I can't bear the thought […] of anyone knowing'" (251). Fisher's birthmother ends contact with her after Fisher refuses to honor her birthmother's wishes. Lifton pleads with her birthmother, telling her: "'We are writing a new page of the adoption story even while we talk.' 'This should not be written at all,' [her birthmother] said tersely. […] 'This is private. Not something for the public to know" (244). Lifton reports that towards the end of her writing project, when her book was close to completion: "My natural mother has begun calling me—apologetic but frantic. She has started worrying what I might be writing […]. What she wanted to say

was, *Do Not Write This Book*" (280). Holtz's birthmother actually threatens her: "You apparently feel you have a right to intrude into my privacy […]. When there is an invasion of privacy, that is a precursor to violence" (214), though the rest of her conversation with Holtz confuses our—and Holtz's—understanding of whether Holtz's birthmother threatens or feels threatened by her daughter's insistence that she is the "Helen" whom Holtz has been looking for.

The rituals around naming, both in these texts and in the adoptions they describe, reveal most potently the difficulty in deciding which party is the vulnerable subject and which the empowered—and thus clearly show the complexities of thinking about the appropriate ethics for search narratives. Names in closed-records adoptions generally work as follows: The baby is born and is given a name either by her birthparents, the agency that has custody of her, or the courts. This will be the name referred to in her adoption papers—mine was Mary Beth Govern, though my original name, Mary Beth Cook, which is recorded nowhere but on some psychological tests from my first week of life, reflects yet another naming convention at the time of my adoption. Many birthmothers assumed aliases when they entered homes for unwed mothers; mine took "Eleanor Cook." When I was formally adopted after nine months, the courts made official what my adoptive parents had named me, as a token both of their parenthood (all "real" parents name their children) and of my belonging to the family (symbolized in my surname, but also in my middle name, which I share with my adoptive mother's sister). A more modern, open, adoption is described by Dan Savage and his boyfriend in *The Kid*, a 1999 memoir about adoption by an adoptive father. Here, the two parents decide on a name but then change it in order to keep the maiden name of their son's mother as part of the child's identity. For her part, Debra Levi Holtz was named Shirley Jane Dunne by her birthmother, who took Jones as an alias for the birth certificate but gave her daughter the real (maiden) surname of Dunne. Florence Fisher's search for "Anna Fisher" uncovers the fact that Anna was not a name chosen by either her birthmother or her adoptive mother, though it was the catalyst for her search because it appeared on a document Florence discovered, at age seven, in her mother's hanky drawer. Fisher tells us that "Somewhere between the birth certificate, which listed me as 'Baby Fisher,' and the Order of Adoption, naming me 'Florence,' 'Anna' had come and gone. Perhaps some nurse in the hospital, feeling 'Baby Fisher' too anonymous, had named me Anna out of kindness" (219). Fisher renames herself after reunion, abandoning—annulling—her adoption by rejecting her adoptive parents' surname.

Search narratives by adoptees ask "What is my true name? What is my birthmother's true name?"—and then change those names. It seems to me to be impossible to rename oneself and write a truthful, ethical search narrative; almost as impossible, perhaps, as to change one's mother's name. In the successful search for their own identities, their "true" names and "real" origins, the searchers both uncover these and perpetuate the deception. They become both ineffective tellers of the truth and unsuccessful liars—very like, uncomfortably like, the inept clerks who forget to seal Fisher's records; and the woman who, the Dunne-bump on her nose inches from the Dunne-bump on her daughter's, refuses to acknowledge the documents that prove that the two women are related. These authors make their refusal in order to protect something—themselves, their birthmothers, and their adoptive families—for precisely the same reasons that their requests for information are refused by judges, lawyers, social workers, and doctors. How does the ethics of naming play out in search narratives written by adoptees? The central irony is that, in balancing the need to respect the autonomy of the birth parents and the need for adoptees to write their own experience—in writing aliases made transparent in part by their own bodies—these search narratives participate in the very falsification that they are writing to make obsolete.

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# Writing and Reading Lives
## *Mediational Failures*

KAY SCHAFFER AND SIDONIE SMITH

# Intimacies of Power: Mediating Victim, Perpetrator, and Beneficiary Positions after the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Perhaps more than any other human rights inquiry or truth commission of the late twentieth century, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) modeled the importance of personal witnessing in campaigns for social justice and reconciliation.[1] The TRC captured worldwide attention, as it marked the end of the apartheid system that had oppressively ruled the lives of racially marked South Africans and had rendered South Africa an outsider nation in the eyes of the world. Aimed at restorative rather than retributive justice, the TRC process modeled an ethics of recognition for victims, perpetrators, and the nation as a whole.

Initiating the possibility of dialogue, it called for contrition on the part of perpetrators and acts of forgiveness on the part of victims. For 244 days during 1996, the commission heard reports of 46,696 gross violations of human rights from 28,750 victims, many of whom were women testifying on behalf of their husbands, brothers, and sons.[2] Victims were given the opportunity to confront the perpetrators, tell their stories, and have those narratives validated. Enjoined to tell the truth about the past, express remorse, and seek forgiveness, perpetrators were promised amnesty from criminal prosecution in exchange for a full and open disclosure of their crimes.[3] To promote healing, reconciliation facilitators encouraged dia-

[1] The first volume of the official *Report* makes clear that the commission's work depended not only upon the testimony of victims and perpetrators, but also upon the reception of that testimony by listeners engaged in an intersubjective dialogue. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the chairperson of the commission, repeatedly called for and enacted an ethics of listening and recognition. See Tutu.

[2] Eighty-four percent of the victims who testified were women, a majority of whom gave witness of abuse suffered by the men in their families, i.e., husbands, brothers, and sons. See Ross, *Bearing Witness: Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa*.

[3] See Volumes 1 and 6 of the TRC final *Report*. Carnita Ernest, working for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), has analyzed the amnesty process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She reports that some 7,112

logue among those named as victims, perpetrators, and witnesses to their suffering.[4] This circuit of identification, performative action, and ethical response was the circuit established to promote "reconciliation"; but that circuit was, and continues to be, subject to interruption, blockage, and incompletion.

Thus, despite its remarkable achievements, the TRC brought its own constraints, with potentially negative effects on survivor/witnesses. For some but not all participants, the victim hearings validated their lives and legitimated them as new subjects of history, enabling them to take an active role in constructing the larger narrative of nation. Even as the TRC pursued its reconciliatory mission, however, the project began to unravel, revealing the incommensurability between the stances of victim and perpetrator allocated by human rights instruments, the moral ambiguities of witness stances that the process obscured, and structural inequalities that complicated the goals of national unity.

Arguing at the time and subsequent to the TRC hearings, Mahmood Mamdani critiqued two problematic dimensions of the process: the reification of victim and perpetrator stances and the absence of the beneficiary position.[5] For one, he maintains that to the degree that human rights instrumentalities fix and individualize victim and perpetrator stances, they obscure communal histories of violence, limit the extent to which they can account for the social and psychic densities of injury and harm, and ignore the pervasiveness of structural violence.

perpetrators sought amnesty, only twenty-six of whom were women, a majority of whom were black. Only about 10 percent of victims expressed forgiveness during the hearings and only about 17 percent of (mainly black) perpetrators expressed more than superficial remorse for their actions in their amnesty applications. The commission refused amnesty for 72 percent of applicants.

[4] The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) deals with the dissatisfactions of TRC participants and facilitates focus-group meetings to help unravel some of the complexities of assigned victim and perpetrator positions.

[5] Mamdani explores the moral compromise at the heart of the TRC process. The TRC produced a truth of the past that was far too narrow, according to Mamdani: "[T]he TRC's version of truth was established through narrow lenses, crafted to reflect the experience of a tiny minority. This tiny minority included two groups, on the one hand, perpetrators, being state agents, and on the other, victims, being political activists. The TRC defined over 20,000 South Africans as the 'victims' of apartheid, leaving the vast majority in the proverbial cold" (178). This constrained agreement on the terms of reference and the identities of victims and perpetrators meant that the violence of apartheid—which was a violence directed at communities rather than individuals, a violence of "racialized power and racialized privilege" (179)—and the TRC's theater of truth-telling and -seeking obscured the "history of conquest and dispossession" (180).

Mamdani's invocation of the term "beneficiary" draws attention to individuals and groups who benefited from the legally based distribution of power and privilege under apartheid: from the privileges afforded them on the basis of skin color, including employment and educational opportunities, standards of living and economic advantage, to the power that their status assured them in relation to people of color. Mamdani's critique implicitly questions whether a truth and reconciliation project can deliver on its promise of addressing injustice when those who benefitted from apartheid are not asked to "bear moral responsibility to redress" the consequences and after-effects of injury and harm (183).

If the TRC had the effect of reifying victim and perpetrator stances, obscuring structural inequalities, and ignoring the stance of the beneficiary, what other venues of witnessing might offer alternative venues to reflect on the possibilities of reconciliation beyond what the TRC was able to achieve? We argue that significant work directed to the project of national reconciliation takes place in genres of life writing that have been so critical to human rights campaigns everywhere and about which we wrote in *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*. Indeed, personal narratives have become a privileged site for dislodging the binary schema of victim-perpetrator stances and exploring the complex ambiguities of the beneficiary position.

This article examines two such narratives: Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night* (2003) and Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull* (1998). Gobodo-Madikizela heeded the TRC's model of healing through forgiveness by directly confronting the in/humanity of an arch-perpetrator, Eugene de Kock. Krog's multilayered psychological investigation restages a dialogue between herself as victim-survivor and de Kock as perpetrator, resituating the reconciliatory act outside the institutional setting of the TRC and un-staging the differentiated identities of victim and perpetrator. Krog heeded the call for witnesses of other people's suffering to rethink their own positions as beneficiaries of South African apartheid. Through her compelling and haunting memoir, she becomes a witness in the second person, staging acts of complicity, guilt, loss, suffering, and apology. Both works take up moral and ethical ambiguities in the present that carry the unfinished aspects and messiness of the past, even as they prepare for a future-becoming that reaches beyond the violence, the personal and communal injury, and the racially constituted social divisions that marked South Africa prior to the TRC. Both works also take up the significant and consequential act of forgiveness, exploring new ethical processes through which individuals might begin to transcend hatred and accept moral responsibility by acknowledging their complicity with the

other.[6] And both expose the limits of interpersonal, cross-cultural dialogue within the Enlightenment model of "reconciliation through forgiveness" espoused by the TRC.

### *A Human Being Died that Night*

In *A Human Being Died that Night*, Harvard-trained psychologist and facilitator for victims at the TRC, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela produces "an almost unimaginable dialogue" (book jacket), tracing her investigative journey into the mind and soul of Eugene de Kock, a reviled figure of apartheid whose orders and actions had led to the killing and torture of countless innocent victims. De Kock had been the commander of Vlakplaas, a death farm and scene of covert police operations on the outskirts of Pretoria. At the TRC he testified to the activities of the group, presented graphic details of police torture methods, and named perpetrators above him who had ordered the actions but had not come forward to testify or apply for amnesty. He was granted amnesty for all but two crimes, for which he received a double life sentence.

De Kock had been labeled "Prime Evil" in Jacques Pauw's SABC (South African Broadcasting Commission) documentary of the same name, aired at the time of the TRC hearings in October 1996. Presenting a chilling indictment, replete with photographic material of prisoner abuse, *Prime Evil* established de Kock's villainy before a public that watched in rapt attention. In the documentary and in its communities of reception, de Kock came to represent the archetypal "perpetrator" as imagined in the post-apartheid state.

It is this figure, vilified by the media, whom Gobodo-Madikizela sought to interview. Over a six-month period in 1997 and 1998, she visited de Kock in prison, spending some forty-six hours interviewing him and then compiling a memoir that reflects upon their meetings and the possibilities for forgiveness. The complex, hybrid memoir is at once a moral inquiry into the nature of evil, a psychological portrait of a perpetrator, a philosophical meditation on forgiveness, and an interpersonal journey of self-discovery. And it is in the end a project of mediation between victim and perpetrator stances embedded within the physical, psychological, and cultural residues of apartheid violence.

[6] The narrative blurring of the boundaries between victim and witness gives way to an understanding of what Mark Sanders calls *com-plic-ity* from the Latin, meaning folded-togetherness, a condition of vulnerability that necessitates questioning the conditions for becoming other (*Complicities* 208).

By framing the initial meeting in this way, Gobodo-Madikizela reproduces the juridical identities set up by the TRC, presenting herself as "victim/survivor" and de Kock as "perpetrator." In confronting this designated figure of "Prime Evil," however, she comes face to face with a man who confuses her expectations and unsettles the juridical abstraction of perpetrator as identified within the TRC's human rights framework. Reflecting on her responses to de Kock, she acknowledges the multiple aspects of *both* her own *and* his implicated histories under apartheid that confound her moral position of victim-survivor and his objectified status as perpetrator.

As he attempts to justify his actions and evade the identity of perpetrator, de Kock presents himself to her in various guises: as a defender of the state, a protector of children, a decent private man, a Christian, and a victim himself insofar as he is made into a public assassin by the higher authorities whose orders he carried out. Unexpectedly, in his presence, she succumbs unwillingly to what she calls a "slave" victimology. That is, she participates in a historicized and psychological relationship in which she is positioned as "slave" and de Kock as "master." This troubling set of imaginary projections and contradictory layerings of self-and-other perceptions demand that Gobodo-Madikizela confront the "victim within"—that is, the psychic, cultural and interpersonal residues of her own experiential history as a black South African confronting a named Afrikaans perpetrator as a survivor of a brutal and dehumanizing apartheid regime.

Gobodo-Madikizela eexplains these imagined residues of victimology in a passage that details how, in an early visit, she instinctively reaches out and touches de Kock's shaking hand in a gesture of sympathy and compassion that transgresses the boundaries between them. This impulsive hand movement constitutes a move toward the vulnerability of the other, a gesture which Alphonso Lingus describes in *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* as a sensing through which one can "feel the feeling of the other" (31). Gobodo-Madikizela describes how, almost immediately, she recoils in horror at her own gesture, horror exacerbated during the next visit when he tells her "that was my trigger hand you touched" (39). The touch, and the visceral impact of his words, return to haunt her, reverberating throughout her subsequent visits and her struggle to find a narrative appropriate to and adequate for the confusions of her lived experience.

In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler elaborates how "we are not only constituted by our relations [to others] but also dispossessed by them as well" (24). Butler is particularly interested in the relationality of bodies to one another. "[E]ach of us," she writes,

> is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure. (20)

Gobodo-Madikizela's memoir of her encounter with de Kock tracks each unsettling perception of this embodied act of vulnerability and connection, perceptions that prompt new feelings, attachments, and understandings.

Boring through the surface of things, sensing the "tensions, drives, compulsions" moving between them (Lingus 23), she peels back layers of difference, exposing the fragility of the relationship. Projecting her own fears onto de Kock in a series of imaginary scenarios, she plays out the dynamics of the encounter, adopting an exchange logic of commensurability: *Is he persecuting me? Am I getting to him? Is he contrite? Am I sincere? Why are the embodied gestures between us so compelling?*

These imagined inter- and intra-subjective questions are confounded not only by the proximity and physical contact, but also by her projections onto him, the gulf between their personal and professional histories, their different TRC experiences, and the asymmetries of power through which they confront each other. The concrete, embodied experience of the touch dispossesses her of the security of relating to de Kock as "Prime Evil," the perpetrator of her desire and her imagination. The after-effects of the touch reverberate through the narrative as Gobodo-Madikizela probes the "intimate complicity" (46) of those positioned as victims and perpetrators and the complex relations between them.[7]

[7] It is interesting to read Gobodo-Madikizela's *A Human Being Died That Night* next to Eugene de Kock's own published memoir, *Long Night's Damage: Working for the Apartheid State*, as told to Jeremy Gordin. A journalist, Gordin visited de Kock in prison because, he says, "I was interested in his character and motivation" after watching the SABC documentary "Prime Evil" (25). Like Gobodo-Madikizela, Gordin finds a complex man who defends his actions, purports not to be as villainous as others from whom he took command, expresses pride in his service record and his expertise at torture, recalls a difficult relationship to a violent father, displays a somewhat gentle manner and diffidence towards women, and expresses remorse even as he maintains that the government sanctioned all the activities of his unit in the belief that "the end justified the means" (de Kock 102–03). In a gesture of reconciliation, Gordin and de Kock agree that royalties from sales of the book should go to victims, especially the youth. Gordin supplies a forward and an afterword, both of which open with a juxtaposition of epigraphs, the first from de Kock himself that concludes: "Previously we had been the dependables; now we were the expendables" (286). This epigraph is followed by a string of citations that contextualize de Kock's motivations and come close to absolving him by making him into a puppet. "De Kock was living in the heart of that 'ignorant parochial philistinism,'" concludes Gordin, "and knew no other life" (de Kock 299).

The fundamental question posed in *A Human Being Died That Night* is how to "transcend hate," a project necessary to the goal of "transform[ing] human relationships in a society with a past marked by violent conflict between groups" (15). What, in other words, does one do about the "perpetrator" next door? How does one escape the commanding power of a master of violence? Will forgiveness be possible? In her attempt to answer such pressing and seemingly intractable questions, Gobodo-Madikizela measures every word, gesture, and action of her interviewee, looking for signs of his remorse in order to calibrate her own measured responses in answer to the question: "Can I forgive?" She invokes a psychological model of exchange that accounts for the interdependency of power relations between victim and perpetrator, keeping the reified positions in play even as she attempts to transcend them. Pondering the unexpected psychological nuances of the encounter, she both recognizes and recoils from the possibility that her act of forgiveness (as a victim-survivor) may in fact convey power back to him—the perpetrator. In the narrative she reasons that:

> Because the victim is still struggling with asserting herself or himself and her or his rights, (the perpetrator) has the advantage as a person used to being in control and so is able to define the agenda even while asking forgiveness. The forgiveness then reawakens the victim's feelings of powerlessness instead of becoming a vehicle for shifting the power dynamic. (100)

At the same time she recognizes that the act of forgiveness can also empower the survivor who holds the key to the perpetrator's release from guilt, the power to return the perpetrator to "moral humanity" (15). Although perpetrators, as historical agents, act from positions of power when they commit crimes against humanity, they cannot find release from shame and guilt without the victim's actual power to forgive. Gobodo-Madikizela, who herself is not a direct victim of de Kock's actions but claims victim status through her personal history and role as facilitator at the TRC hearings, thus comes to recognize her own ambivalent and conditional agency as the bestower of forgiveness—"the gatekeeper to what the outcast desires—readmission into the human community" (117).

In her final chapter, Gobodo-Madikizela weighs up the encounter and her ability to forgive—to transcend hate. Adopting the Christian humanist model advocated by Archbishop Tutu at the TRC hearings, she tentatively affords de Kock a sufficiency of signs of remorse and transformation to make him worthy of her forgiveness. To this end she attests to a belief in de Kock's remorse and supports his petition for pardon, a conclusion that drew considerable anger from many readers. She ends *A Human Being Died That Night* on a note of hopefulness, deriving from her concrete and

embodied experience a recognition that both perpetrator and victim need the act of forgiveness because it is "part of the process of becoming rehumanized" (128). She recognizes as well that she is not only required to forgive the man but also the concept of perpetration which is both essential for letting go of the past and impossible to achieve in any ultimate sense.

Yet there are a number of irreconcilable dimensions to this personalized act of forgiveness, necessary as it is, that trouble the text, dimensions that Derrida examines in his essay "On Forgiveness." There Derrida examines two poles of forgiveness, one of which might encompass Gobodo-Madikizela's project. He refers to it as the pragmatic, conditional forgiveness that resides within the order of law, politics, and social ecologies. This kind of conditional forgiveness is an economic transaction, a weighing of signs through which a judgment is rendered. The other pole he defines as pure, unconditional forgiveness that demands nothing, that "in order to have its own meaning, must have "no" meaning, no finality, even no intelligibility" (45). Arguing for the imperative of and impossibility of unconditional forgiveness, Derrida would "contest th[e] *conditional* logic of *exchange*." For him, unconditional "forgiveness has precisely nothing to do with judgment. Or even with the public or political sphere" (43). It is a kind of madness, both necessary—because it sets up the conditions for new becomings, and impossible—because it requires a relinquishment of sovereign selfhood and a transcendence of historical contingency (45).

Derrida's essay exposes an aporia, an impossible contradiction in Gobodo-Madikizela's exceptional struggle and that of others intent on nation-building through forgiveness. Her project is necessary for herself and for other victim/survivors if they are to break the residual chains of victimhood and reclaim agency as citizen subjects in a new democratic order. At the same time, her gestures of reconciliation remain inflected by rhetorics of judgment, adequation, economies of exchange, and asymmetrical relations of power. Revenge, confession, atonement, remorse, worthiness: These complex motivations, acts, judgments and exchanges translate into weighted equations between antagonists, qualifying the process and forestalling its ultimate success.

There are moments when the limits of conditional forgiveness surface in the text. For example, as Gobodo-Madikizela assumes the power to assert her agency in an act of forgiveness, she redefines forgiveness as the victim's "revenge enacted at a rarefied level" (117), confounding the distinction between forgiveness and revenge, and calling into question the very possibility of a reconciliation between equals. There can be no end to