

Conversation with Patrick Hayes, author of *The Oxford History of Life-Writing, volume VII : Postwar to Contemporary, 1945-2020*

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Traduction : Bruno Tribout

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Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : What were your main objectives in this volume ?

Patrick Hayes : Starting out I was very conscious of the categories that govern the critical discussion of life-writing, which in the period after 1945 tend to derive from identity politics in its various forms. Life-writing has played such a major role in the wider social process that as I began work, I found myself rather dutifully recounting this period's social and moral history, with the major texts positioned as exemplary within it. The book only came to life when I started to find ways of making the more refractory literary qualities of life-writing speak back to those wider cultural situations.

As this might suggest, my understanding of what is at stake in thinking about the literariness of life-writing led me in a different direction to the current emphasis on identifying various kinds of cross-over genres (e.g. "autofiction", "biofiction", etc.). My interest was instead in how powerful writing of any kind is able to reimagine, to some extent, the moral or political framework that seems to govern it. While each of the chapters is focussed on a relatively familiar identity theme (e.g. topics such as sexuality, gender, diaspora, posthumanism, etc.) I departed from the confines of historical chronology, and

organised the material around my sense of the singularity and inventiveness of the texts under discussion. This involved paying rather more attention to qualities of language and form than is often found within contemporary scholarship on life-writing, which often has a social-science feel to it. I knew I didn't need to aim for "adequate coverage" (whatever that might mean), as there are already very good bibliographical surveys on the major life-writing topics. Instead, the approach I adopted moves quite selectively between case studies in a way that pursues the underlying logic of a particular theme.

To put this point in a slightly more philosophical way, what became most important to me is that the book should challenge the widely accepted (though usually implicit) idea that life-writing can ultimately be,understood as collapsed into, or merely a useful supplement for, the,various forms of moral or political discourse about the self which emerged in this period. By contrast my aim was to understand how, in the most compelling cases, these texts have the power to revise and recreate the forms of identity most popularly affirmed in this period. The intellectual life of the book came from my treating each chapter as a different way of exploring the potential for this kind of literary inventiveness within life-writing.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : How is your volume structured (around periods, genres, themes) ?

Patrick Hayes : While the authors of other volumes in this series may have been able to navigate their respective areas by studying changes in the major genres of life-writing (diary, the confession, letters, biography, and so on), or through discussion of key figures (Izaak Walton, John Aubrey, Samuel Pepys, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Samuel Johnson, Thomas Carlyle), I realized quite early on that neither of these approaches could encompass the vast cultural phenomenon that life-writing became in this period. Of course genre remained important in various ways : chapter two describes the impact of psychoanalysis on biography ; chapter ten examines literary biography ; chapter twelve explores concerns about the devolution of diary-writing into public forms of self-presentation on social media websites. And there are naturally certain major figures who stand out. But I needed to bring the social processes through which life-writing became such a vivid and ubiquitous cultural phenomenon (and which in turn it helped to enable) directly into the foreground. So, for the most part the book is organised around a range of themes that relate to the sociology and philosophy of modern identity, and to the changing dynamics of literary publishing. Most chapters cut across the different genres of life-writing, encompassing several literary forms and a range of writers in a comparative way. I foreground questions about the kind of lives that became newly possible (or at least newly visible), alongside even more fundamental questions about what it might be to discover an authentic self (or create a desirable one).

Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : What was your overall approach to the range of texts and genres considered ? Did you concentrate on any particular areas ? What part does biographical or autobiographical fiction play in your volume ?

Patrick Hayes : The majority of texts discussed are autobiographies, autofictions, memoirs, biographies, and diaries. But a diverse range of other literary idioms are featured, including quite an extensive consideration of poetry (lyric and narrative), psychoanalytic case studies, advice books, personal essays, testimonial film, certain kinds of photography, and social media platforms – most of which now routinely form part of the scholarly discussion of life-writing in this period. I also draw upon various theoretical texts that are not normally considered life-writing at all. Several chapters consider the writings of philosophers and cultural theorists, from Judith Shklar's *After Utopia* (1957) to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990)—and typically I do so not only to frame a discussion of works that are more conventionally understood as life-writing, but also to explore the divergences between the theorisation of life and responses to lived experience. It was Nietzsche who most tendentiously expanded the definition of life-writing along these lines, claiming that "every great philosophy" is an implicit "confession on the part of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir". While I had no wish to follow Nietzsche all the way down this line of reasoning (which he offers in a playful or teasing spirit), I do take the view that the various kinds of philosophical writing about the nature of the self which circulated in this period constitute an important form of reflection upon what a life can or should be which a book of this nature should not exclude. Yet my interest most typically lies in using these texts to open an exploration of the resistance to theory within life-writing—a theme which runs throughout the book as a whole.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : For the very recent past/ contemporary period (arguably in the absence of literary-historical perspective), what were your guiding principles for constituting your corpus ?

Patrick Hayes : I think I've partly covered this in my response to your first question. I wanted to move away from the more familiar kind of bibliographical survey towards an approach that could credit the singularity and inventiveness of particular texts. More broadly, my aim was not to be in some sense adequately representative (as you suggest, what counts as canonical in this period is very much open to debate), but instead to explore how the major questions governing each theme play out. I wished to provide readers with a basis to think about how other texts might advance or contradict the underlying problematic I describe, rather than to define a canon.

For example : chapter 3, which is titled "Self-Knowledge as a Question", opens with a discussion of the philosophical discourse on authenticity that derives from Heidegger ; I

then test out the heuristic value of this concept through close examination of some of the more intellectually venturesome autobiographical texts, including (among others) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mots*; Jeannette Winterson, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* and *Why Be Happy When You Can Be Normal?*; Christine Brooke-Rose, *Remake*; and J.M. Coetzee, *Summertime*. Each example is there because it forces reconsideration, to some extent, of the philosophical model. The purpose of the chapter is not to settle the necessarily vexed question as to what counts as an authentic identity, but to provide readers with a rich enough exploration of this concept so that in later chapters I can examine how it has been further extended and revised under the pressure of particular social or moral problems.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : What effects does this approach have on reframing the canon of texts that matter for life-writing ? What authors are you putting forward or researching the most ?

Patrick Hayes : There were dozens of authors I could have discussed in each chapter, but I tended in each case to concentrate on the dialogue between certain key figures, though naturally I place their writings in a larger frame of reference. For example, in the chapter on feminist autobiographical poetry the authors I mainly discuss are Adrienne Rich, Lyn Hejinian (one of the leading figures in the "Language" school of poets in the 1980s and 1990s), Denise Riley (an English poet and philosopher) and Eileen Myles (American poet and writer, loosely connected with the so-called "New York School"). This chapter explores the movement from second-generation feminist exemplary writing into the more self-ironising forms that emerged later. Partly what interested me was the fact that Adrienne Rich became such a recognized and representative writer, and what the idiom she develops both enables and restricts. Riley's work is fascinating and very underrated, but there are reasons why her poetry could not command Rich's wide audience. Eileen Myles has in recent years become a much better-known poet, not least through her charismatic way of presenting herself; her writing—which traverses lyric, autofiction, and essay—reimagines the exemplary mode developed by Rich and others. There were dozens of writers I could have discussed, but I felt that the dialogue (both implicit and at times explicit) between these figures clarifies ongoing debates about the relationship between life-writing, lyric, and the reshaping of gender identity.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : Is your work challenging any current generic terminology (e.g. autofiction) or offering new terminology ?

Patrick Hayes : The enterprise of defining genres and providing classificatory terminology is quite a preoccupation in the academic study of life-writing. It might even be called a founding preoccupation, going back to seminal essays such as Philippe Lejeune's "The Autobiographical Pact", which attempts to carve out the genres of autobiography

and biography from literature broadly conceived, and pull them apart from the novel and the lyric. While I would not wish to collapse the pursuit of autobiographical truth into fiction, I think the drive to distinguish genres is liable to generate unnecessary confusion, as well as certain kinds of critical blindness, if it is pursued in too literalistic a spirit. I use genre terms in a way that recognizes family resemblances where it seems helpful to do so, but I'm not really interested in generating new terminology or carving out new definitions. Some of the attempts to categorise sub-genres of life-writing have beenuseful and enabling (such as Francoise Lionnet's term "autoethnography", which I engage with in some detail in the book), but my feeling is that if such terms are pursued too dogmatically they start to smooth away what is happening in more thoughtful kinds of writing into a set of unilluminating norms and preconceptions.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : Are the genres you mentioned above, "autofiction" and "biofiction", widely used in life-writing studies in Britain ? Is "autofiction" a category that you are using yourself ?

Patrick Hayes : I'd say those terms have become more familiar over the last fifteen to twenty years, though of course writers such as Coetzee have long since been coining neologisms such as "*autre*biography". In *Self Impression* (2010), Max Saunders points out that the term "autobiografiction" was invented by Stephen Reynolds as long ago as 1906. But as I mentioned previously, I have little interest in using genre theory as a determinative way of reading. Ideas about genre can be useful as a starting point, as a way of orienting the reader in certain family resemblances around a topic that is generally understood as useful to discuss. But they can't open a reading.

Bruno Tribout : Would you go as far as to say that genre classifications have become ineffective, that perhaps this is the end of genres as far as life-writing is concerned ?

Patrick Hayes : No, I wouldn't say that. For example, as I just mentioned, I would not wish to collapse the pursuit of autobiographical truth into fiction. In the book I follow Paul Ricœur in arguing that any authentic or authoritative account of the self must find ways of acknowledging the fact that we do not completely control the meaning of our lives, whereas an author creating a fictional character is obviously not under the same obligation. The character David Copperfield (for example) is simply the sum of everything Dickens wishes to say about him, but my own life-story has an enigmatic—or at least completely unchosen—beginning, and an unknowable end ; any account of myself that fails to recognise and come to terms with these human conditions of knowledge risks spinning off into fantasy. Yet while this seems to me a significant difference between the possibilities open to authors of fiction and the constraints that more authoritative forms of life-writing tend to acknowledge, the distinction I'm making here is evaluative rather than categorical, and I wouldn't wish to go much further in deriving

generic specifications from this point. Doing so would create various kinds of confusion. It would, for example, tend to obscure or downplay the very significant ways in which writers explore self-knowledge through fictional imagining and lyric ; or conversely the fact that authors of fictional texts (think of Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, or Samuel Beckett's *Molloy*) impose an array of internal constraints on what can be known about their characters.

To answer your question in a slightly more generalised way I would go to Derrida's essay on the "law of genre". I think Derrida's point is that genre should be understood as one of the conditions of possibility for writing rather than a needless constraint on creativity ; that it sustains a certain kind of readability which is nonetheless inadequate.

Bruno Tribout : Looking at the wide-ranging types of primary materials you are covering in your study (including, for instance, advice books or social media), do they all relate to literariness in the same way ?

Patrick Hayes : One example of the "advice book" that comes to mind is Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (1951). This is not just an example of conduct literature but a deliberately painful negation of its procedures, a version of advice-giving which demonstrates that (as Adorno would have it) the bourgeois life it helped sustain has become irretrievably damaged. It is one of various texts I explore in the opening chapter as forms of testimony about the larger significance of the Second World War. For context here, many writers and intellectuals of the immediate postwar period felt called upon to ask how the war might have reconfigured or even debunked longstanding conceptions of human nature and human possibility, and they did this in a range of ways, from works of theory (such as Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*) to very direct forms of testimony (Primo Levi's *If This is a Man*). *Minima Moralia* is a more indirect kind of testimony which achieves its power through its disorienting way of inhabiting a generic expectation ; I think you could also say this—and Adorno did say it explicitly—about a lot of lyric poetry written in response to events of the war as well. Randall Jarrell's poems about airmen derive much of their testimonial power from a disorientation of what a lyric poem could be or what you might expect it to be. Alongside Adorno I also consider the rise of the "Robinsoniad" novel (e.g. fiction that looks back to *Robinson Crusoe*), which I read as a purposeful disfigurement of the *Bildungsroman* tradition.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : Considering these average generic expectations, for instance in the case of the memoir boom where we find a lot of texts with no literary quality at all, do you use these as a sort of reference point for the texts you are interested in ?

Patrick Hayes : The way I organised several of the chapters is by moving from widely-recognized forms of writing towards examples that offer some kind of imaginative re-orientation. In the chapter on the memoir boom I start with very high-

profile, best-selling books-—-Mary Karr, Frank McCourt, James Frey−—which sold millions of copies. These texts have actually been quite widely studied, mainly by academics with a sociological interest in the emergence of neoliberal confessional and sentimental cultures, who explore the ambivalent ways in which memoir sustains an "intimate public sphere", as it has been called. I reframe this conversation by reflecting in a more specific way on what it means to have intimacy in writing. It struck me as curious that this word ("intimacy") has migrated from its ordinary use in the context of personal relationships, and that it now names something about published writings and even about a certain kind of public sphere. How meaningful is it to speak of intimacy in a public literary context, and how might it be established or undermined ? Interestingly, I found that by asking this more "literary" question I could deepen the sociological focus on the cultures of neoliberalism, not least by thinking about the impact of what is being taught on MFA programs in creative writing schools. As the chapter develops, I show how certain writers are working in resistance to popular memoir and are developing a more refined or exacting sense of what intimate disclosure involves. Important figures here include Maggie Nelson, author of *The Red Parts* (2007) and *The Argonauts* (2015), or Edward St Aubyn, author of the *Patrick Melrose* series (which are classed as novels but openly discussed by St Aubyn as involving a description of his life).

Bruno Tribout : One of the recurring questions your volume seems to investigate is the way in which life-writing might resist or test theory. Would you correlate in any way literariness and this resistance to theory ?

Patrick Hayes : This is a complex point, and one way I address it comes in the chapter on literary biography. For context, my sense is that literary biography is far more a British and American obsession than it is a French one. With the rise of literature as a university subject, and the proliferation of different kinds of literary theory, a number of literary biographers (especially in Britain) started to claim that their form is somehow a more humane way of encountering literature—that it helps us escape from the narrowness and dogmatism of theory. While I'm quite sympathetic to this aspiration, in practice many literary biographers have been held captive by a particular theory of literature (romantic expressivism), and have not been very reflective about that theory's limitations. I wanted to challenge the oversimple idea that just by writing biography you somehow escape theory, when it comes to literature. But my wider interest was in attuning readers to the ways in which certain biographers have productively complicated,their relationship with governing theories about literature. Particularly helpful to me here was the philosopher Ray Monk's reflections on biography (though he doesn't discuss literary biography), which derive from Wittgenstein's contrast between theorising and "making connections". Many literary biographers create thickets of misunderstanding around literary texts by the way they dogmatically pursue a theory that writing

is the emanation of personality and circumstance ; yet the more authoritative examples (here I'm thinking of figures such as Richard Ellmann, Hermione Lee, Lyndall Gordon, Richard Holmes) demonstrate that it is possible to work with expressivist ideas in a way that is not narrowly governed by them, and which can become very illuminating.

Bruno Tribout : Conversely, would you say that some literary works have engendered new theories ?

Patrick Hayes : Very much so, even if that is not always what their authors intended. Theorizing is but one way of responding to writing, and maybe not always the best one. It is certainly the case that texts which don't present as theoretical can have large ramifications, but often they illuminate us in what can seem quite a troubling or disorienting way. Some of the most significant texts are those that ask whether our inherited ways of describing ourselves (including some of our most cherished narratives about personality and identity) really do what we think they do.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : In your opinion, what are the most effective theoretical references (critics, essays, methodological perspectives, etc.) for approaching the issues of life-writing (biography/ autobiography) today ? What were your principal methodological and theoretical approaches in this volume ?

Patrick Hayes : The book brings together, and tries to place in dialogue, ways of thinking about selfhood and life-writing that have emerged from within the various fields of psychoanalysis, sociology, philosophy, and literary studies.

In the second chapter I provide an account of the impact of Freudian thinking on biographical writing in this period and introduce some of the core psychoanalytic concepts and problems that later chapters in the book continue to explore. From that point onwards Freud's legacy is treated not only as a historical phenomenon but also as an ongoing intellectual resource, and indeed as one of the more insightful idioms for describing selfhood. Psychoanalytic ideas particularly inform the chapter on memory culture (including discussion of trauma) ; other chapters engage with Freud's discussion of transference and supervalence.

Foucault's writings on sexuality remain essential to understanding the transformations of identity in this period. As with Freud he is initially discussed as a historical figure, not least for his influence on queer theory and the inspiration he provided for certain kinds of memoir-writing. But the very salutary suspicion he directs towards determining moral categories, and the wider Nietzschean spirit of his approach to the self, also guides my discussion in a more general way. As a contrasting voice to Foucault I was at times drawn back to Anthony Giddens's *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) and *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992), though I tended to find his work more useful as

a spur to some form of creative disagreement. I found another sociologist, Eva Illouz, whose work builds on Giddens, more important as a source of inspiration, particularly when it came to getting a critical foothold on the development of popular memoir in this period. Her book *Cold Intimacies : the Making of Emotional Capitalism* (2007) deals with forms of life-writing that I don't really consider in the book (e.g. dating websites and personality questionnaires). But her broader argument, which extends Max Weber's thesis on rationalisation into a discussion of the changing emotional life in this period, is extremely insightful, and helped me find ways of defining what is at stake in the slick and unilluminating quality of so much of the confessional writing that emerged in the memoir boom. Nikolas Rose's *The Politics of Life Itself* (2007) also seems to me a landmark in the sociology of modern identity. As well as being strikingly informative about the possibilities and limits of current work in life-sciences, the balanced way Rose writes about identity in relation to modern medical technology helped me find critical distance from the rather overheated theoretical discourse on posthumanism, with which I engage quite closely.

One of the central questions that runs through the book is about how to understand what makes for a more or less authentic or authoritative attestation of self. Various chapters explore the historical dimensions of this question, for example in relation to postcolonial and diasporic identities, but one of the early chapters examines it in a specifically philosophical way. The central figure here is Martin Heidegger, though I address his account of authenticity mainly through the ways in which it has been developed by later twentieth and twenty-first century philosophers. Important works here include the first volume of Charles Taylor's *Human Agency and Language* (1985), Paul Ricœur's *Oneself as Another* (1990), and Stephen Mulhall's *The Self and its Shadows* (2013). However, I should emphasise that here as elsewhere in the book I am at least as interested in using life-writing to test the limits of this important line of thinking about selfhood as I am in using it to elucidate the concerns of individual writers.

From within literary studies, this book is written in gratitude for, and indeed reliance upon, the excellent bibliographical and synoptic resources provided by Margaretta Jolly's *Encyclopedia of Life-Writing* (2001), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography : A Guide for Interpreting Life-Narratives* (2001), and Ricia Chansky and Emily Hipchen's *Routledge Autobiography Studies Reader* (2016). These texts, among a wide range of others in this growing scholarly field, enabled me to approach this book in a way that would not otherwise have been possible (as I've discussed above). Derek Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (2004) elaborates some of the central aspects of what I take to be at stake in thinking about inventiveness and originality ; Attridge's account looks back in no small part to Derrida's discussion of the logic of supplementarity in *Of Grammatology* (1967), among several other interlocutors.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : Did you discuss your approach with other volume authors ? How far are your theoretical choices aligning with what you know of the early twentieth century volume and of earlier volumes ?

Patrick Hayes : The series editor, Zachary Leader, emphasised from the outset that this would be a series of individually-authored volumes, with no collective editorial steer. Without that reassurance I don't think the project would have interested me. All seven authors met for the first time a couple of years ago at a launch event for the first two volumes, and it became apparent that we had quite naturally taken very different approaches. This seems to me justifiable for two reasons. The first is pragmatic : each volume is probably best understood as an intervention into a particular intellectual field with its own preoccupations, and in practice very few readers will read through all seven volumes in a sequence. The second is that the situation of life-writing within the wider culture diverges radically in different periods, so the approach that worked for Karen Winstead (medieval, volume 1) and Alan Stewart (early-modern, volume 2) would not have worked for the period after 1945.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : Has there been a collective reflection with other volume authors about generic boundaries for the series as a whole ? For the 20thcentury in particular ?

Patrick Hayes : No. I anticipate that each author will use the introduction to each volume to reflect upon which kinds of writing can most usefully be considered as life-writing for their period. All that's necessary here is shared understanding, not grounding definitions.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle / Bruno Tribout : Were there overlaps (in relation to specific authors or titles) between your volume and volume 6 ? If so, how did you approach these overlaps ?

Patrick Hayes : The main potential for overlap is the discussion of psychoanalysis and Holocaust testimony. With the former, my focus is very firmly on the impact of psychoanalysis on the development of biographical writing after 1945, rather than the emergence and reception of Freudian ideas in the earlier period. When it comes to writing about the Holocaust, my opening chapter explores memoir as one element of the wider postwar discourse on the "crisis of man", as Mark Greif has called it, and positions texts of witnessing (by such figures as Primo Levi, Charlotte Delbo, Robert Antelme, and Arthur Koestler) alongside other forms of writing (including, as I mentioned earlier, conduct literature, autobiographical fiction, and some lyric poetry) in a comparative way. A later chapter considers second- and third-generation Holocaust testimony alongside the forms of meta-witnessing developed by figures such as Claude Lanzmann and W. G. Sebald, with the focus being on how such texts are situated in that later period's wider

engagement with memory in relation to historiography.

Bruno Tribout : How big a part did the history of life-writing forms or concepts play in your approach ? Did you refer to earlier periods or earlier volumes of the series, if available ?

Patrick Hayes : The volume before mine is at a quite early stage, so I can't discuss it in any detail, but 1945 to the present does feel to,me a meaningful period of time to consider in a single volume. The shock of what happened in the war, the process of decolonisation that followed, and the ongoing revising of what a life can be that has come through identity politics—these are such distinctive and overlapping themes that I think it is meaningful to speak of "the postwar" as a period, though it may be that the rise of social media is so transformative that it will soon seem equally meaningful to speak of a new one. That said, I could equally have imagined wanting to write a history from the Romantic period to the present. That would have enabled a longer perspective on the rise and development of celebrity, the emergence of literary biography, the development of sentiment and empathy as a way of generating political understanding, and so on. So many of the themes in my book can be traced back into the late eighteenth- or early-nineteenth century.

But to return to your question, naturally I didn't have space to keep retelling the whole story of all the themes I was dealing with. In the chapter on sexuality, for instance, I contextualise the ways in which sexual identity was studied in this period by pointing to how it is part of a much longer story involving the rise of psychoanalysis and other disciplines. When it comes to the discussion of literary celebrity, I do of course acknowledge that authors have long since been celebrity figures—think of Byron or Dickens or Wilde. But I move quickly into discussion of the decisive changes in this period, which include conglomeration in the publishing industry, the enormous rise in marketing budgets, and the prevalence of new media, which together resulted in a much greater invasiveness of the ephemeral forms of life-writing through which celebrity is manufactured. In this case I address the present moment quite quickly, exploring how writers have tried to contend with their changing situation in a world of publicity, interviews, and TV appearances.

Bruno Tribout : What role did literature in translation, in particular European literature, play in your volume ?

Patrick Hayes : The focus of the series is on 'life-writing in English'. In general, I have included French or German or Italian writers in translation when their influence has been decisive within Anglophone literary culture. I've already mentioned some of them, including Sartre and Primo Levi ; I also refer to Roland Barthes' autobiographical writings, *Camera Lucida* (*La Chambre claire*, 1980) as well as *Roland Barthes par Roland*

Barthes (1975) – albeit mainly to set up a discussion of Christine Brooke-Rose, a Francophile English writer whose work is in dialogue with Barthes. Other major works in translation that I discuss in detail include W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1992), and Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985) which is of course multilingual across French, English, German, Polish and Hebrew.

The broader question of translation in life-writing is a very interesting one, and I address it explicitly in the book. One chapter is about multilingualism in postcolonial life-writing, where the authors have typically been raised in a culture that features a European language alongside one or more local languages. For example, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, an Indian poet based in Allahabad and educated in Bombay, speaks about writing as a "prismatic interlingual space"; Kamau Brathwaite is interested in the variations of English that emerged in the Caribbean through hybridizing with languages of the African diaspora. On one level, and most obviously, these writers complicate an idea that derives from Lejeune, namely that life-writing is an ideally transparent window onto reality. (In fact, I think Lejeune is wrong about that even when it comes to monolingual writers, simply because of the internal differentiations within any language.) But more significant is how ideas about what counts as authentic self-expression becamerevised in this period by the ways in which writers such as Mehrotra and Brathwaite draw attention to the relationship between identity, language, and power.

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