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Writing the body

Abstract:

Autobiographical writing embodies a wide range of interdisciplinary actions not only from the perspective of the writing of the narrative but also for those reading it. Drawing on interdisciplinary studies when researching the personal gives a broader base on which to base the creative work and an understanding of its purpose. This article examines aspects of writing the self in memoir, such as memory, truth, embodiment and identity, drawing on work from a range of disciplines and conclude showing the effects that these interdisciplinary studies can have on our creative selves and our research.

Biographical note:

Irene Waters is currently undertaking a research higher degree examining sequel memoir at Central Queensland University, Australia, attending the Noosa campus. She has had work published in an anthology, *Eavesdropping* (2012) and in *Idiom23* literary magazine (2013, 2014 and 2015). She has completed a memoir, *Nightmare in Paradise* (2013), and is currently writing a sequel to this.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Autobiography – Memoir – Identity – Interdisciplinary approach

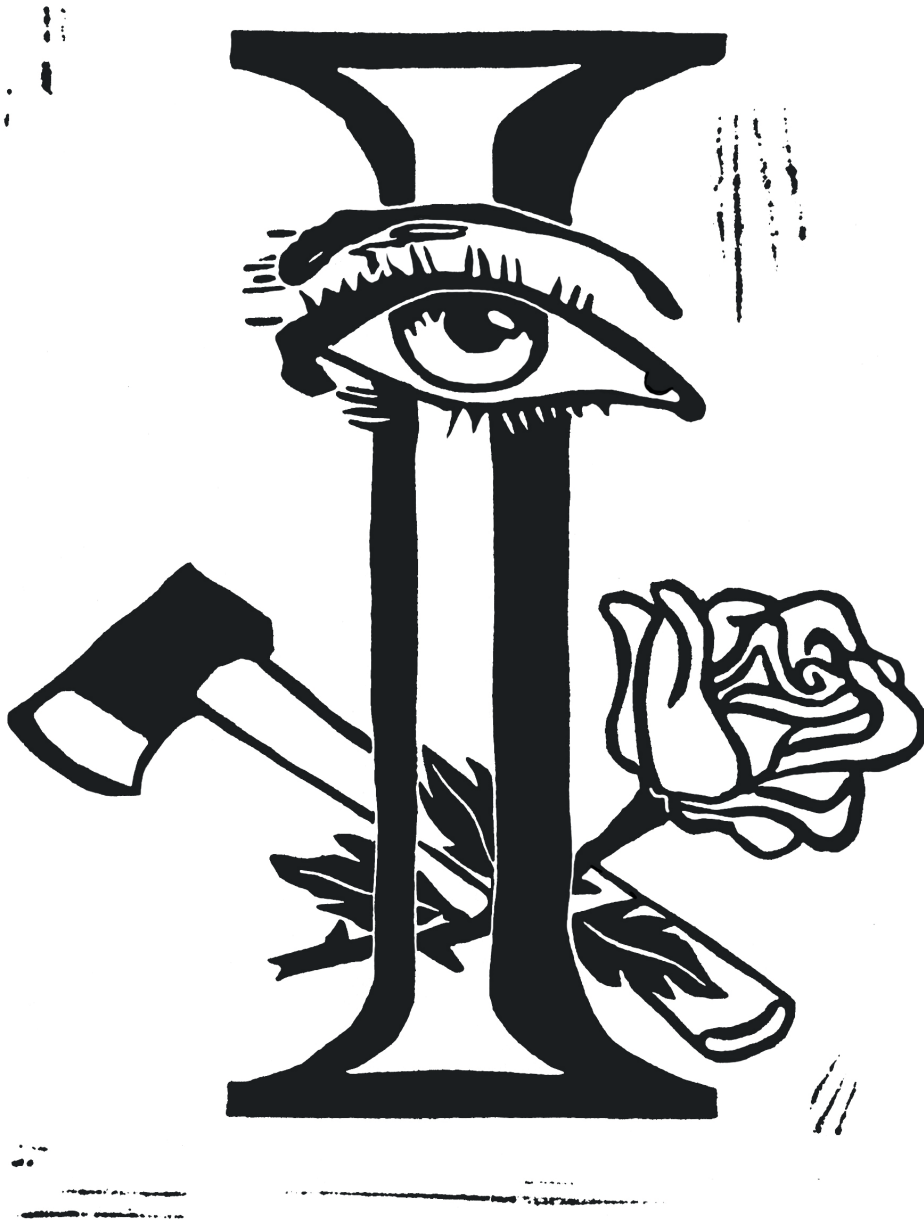


Fig. 1. Ulrike Sturm, *I/eye*, linocut, 2016

Introduction

Autobiographical writing, including in my own case memoir, embodies a wide range of interdisciplinary actions not only from the perspective of the writing of the narrative but also from the perspective of those reading it. This discussion asserts that drawing on interdisciplinary studies when researching the personal gives a broader base on which to base the creative work and an understanding of its purpose.

A crucial element of writing memoir is a good sense of recall. Memory is most often seen as the domain of neurology and psychology and yet the telling of life stories constantly mines the body for memories of the past. It is impossible to divorce the writing from the body as memory itself is embedded in it, and the body, the subject of the narrative, is then textually embodied within the work. The text gives an identity and that identity is the writer's 'I'.

Memoirs are about a very particular 'I'; a character who has its own body and identity, so it becomes important to the researcher to examine what constitutes identity and what role narrative plays in this identity. Paul John Eakin, a major theorist on life writing, proposes rules for the writing of these types of narratives and postulates why we write our lives (2005). To examine the role narrative plays in memoir, we need firstly to look at the multiple 'I's of memoir. The identity cannot be separated from the narrative and as the narrative changes, so too, will the identity.

By examining memoir, other fields of research and writing can gain a greater understanding of a wide range of conditions of the human psyche and particular social groups that would otherwise be unavailable to them in their own methodologies. Such disciplines include, but are not limited to, social work, anthropology, medicine and spiritual as well as philosophical arenas. Memoir offers a reader a guide through the human experience – by providing an insight into the author's experience, the reader can gain comprehension of his or her own or an understanding of one which is currently unknown territory. For the less articulate, such reading allows a form of expression that can demonstrate how they themselves feel or offer some comfort that they are not alone with their feelings (Skelton 2003).

Utilising research from life writing researchers, narrative theorists, neurologists, medical ethicists, medical researchers, psychologists, scientists, feminist studies and philosophy, this article will define memoir, then dissect its parts and examine them in closer detail. Several themes become apparent as the layers are peeled back, enhanced by the approaches from other disciplines. These include who the 'I' characters are that the reader meets in memoir, the formation of identity, the rules of writing autobiographically, memory, truth, time, the body and the use of dialogue. Examples will be given to illustrate these aspects of memoir and highlight a number of hybrid forms which cross the boundaries between fiction and autobiographical writing.

Definitions

To begin, I define what is meant by the term 'life writing', and specifically memoir. Life writing is an umbrella term under which many sub-genres of autobiographical

writing fall. These include autobiography, biography and memoir as well as diaries and journals and experimental forms such as biographical poetry and graphic biographies. An emerging form is the literary hybrid biography that combines fiction and biography/memoir (Rendle-Short 2011, Brien 2014). Autobiography and memoir both invoke Philippe Lejeune's (1989) 'autobiographical pact' between the author and the reader. In using the first person 'I', the author undertakes to tell the truth and the reader reciprocates by believing that the narrative is a true account of the events according to the author's memory. This 'I' differs over time and space. Despite this commonality, the two forms differ in several essential aspects. Firstly, autobiography is a chronological record of a life from birth to the present day, whereas the memoir is a portion of life or a theme within one's life, omitting detail not relevant to that narrative. Secondly, autobiography is supposed to be factual and verifiable, unlike memoir which is related from the writer's memory and, as such, issues regarding truth can be raised. Finally, autobiography is not an intentionally reflective process whereas in memoir the narrator of the story will reflect on not only how events and experiences felt at the time, and also speculate about their ongoing effects into the future.

The 'I' characters of autobiographical works

In autobiographical works, the author claims ownership of the narrative identity, the 'I' character. Although a simple word, 'I' gives rise to a complex positioning of the author who has a four-fold relationship with the first person character in the narrative, with the possibility arising that these 'I' characters can be in conflict with each other. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their authoritative book, *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), describe these four 'I' characters as the real or historical 'I', the narrating 'I', the narrated 'I' and the ideological 'I'. The relationships between these 'I' characters can be seen represented below in Figure 1.

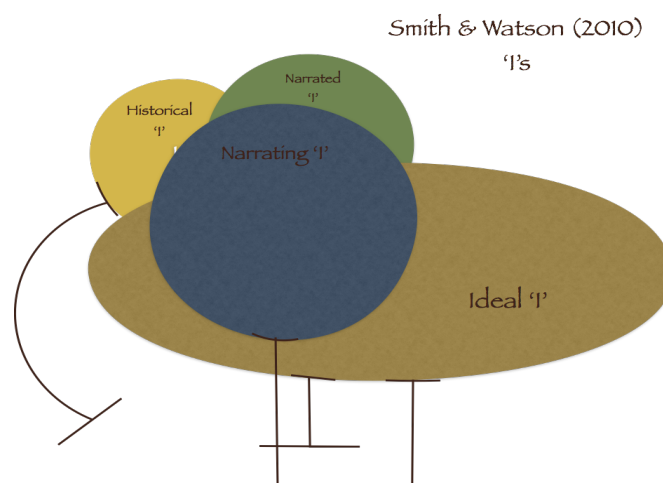


Fig. 1: Interpretation of Smith and Watson (2010) 'I' Characters, created by Irene Waters.

The historical 'I' is a figure from the past, who lived in the world at a definite time and place and who can be verified by documents, photos and historical records.

Although this past 'I' is embodied in the other 'I's and is the subject of the narrative, the past person cannot be reproduced exactly and is, therefore, not the 'I' that is visible to readers in an autobiographical work. This past 'I' may also have taken positions or attitudes that are diametrically opposed to the present day 'I', the narrating 'I', and thus creating a conflict between them. The narrated 'I' is the past person (the protagonist) whom the reader meets on reading. Although the narrated 'I' may be situated in the past, he/she is not living those past experiences but rather the narrative is a construction based on the memory of the narrating 'I' and what they wish to tell the reader. The narrating 'I' is the author, the present day person who does the remembering and offers reflections and interpretations of the past events and can have multiple voices. The reader will hear these voices as speech, as if the narrating 'I' was talking to them, and will draw their impressions of the 'I' characters from them. These voices are unlimited and differentiation can be made as to which 'I' the voice is coming from. James Phelan suggests that these voices are affected by numerous factors that separate the narrated and narrating 'I's, such as the difference in time, emotions, education and intelligence, as well as psychological, physical and ideological distance (in Smith and Watson 2010: 80). *Bildungsroman* memoirs such as *Angela's Ashes* (McCourt 2001) demonstrate this, wherein a child's voice may be utilised, whilst another voice, removed in time, may offer knowledge that the child could not possibly have known, thus alerting the reader to the fact that the voice of the child is unreliable. The child may also act in ways that are ethically or ideologically repugnant to the adult voice offering reflections. Not only does the narrating 'I' have numerous voices for the self, but also has individual voices for others who appear in the memoir.

Although the first person past tense is usually used by memoir narrators, several writers have written autobiographical works in the third person. This creates a disconnect, effectively by putting distance between the narrating 'I' and the narrated 'I.' This is utilised either because the actions of that person in the past no longer make sense to the 'I' of the present or when distance is needed due to the memories being too raw and emotionally difficult to face. Maurice Blanchot and J. M. Coetzee both wrote third person autobiographies – *In the Instant of my Death* (2000) and *Summertime* ([2009]2010, respectively) – that crossed the boundaries between memoir and fiction giving a sense of the author's isolation from himself (Piero 2014). Now, nearing sixty, I have many examples of my own that demonstrate how my rebellious, younger, motorbike-riding self is incomprehensible to my older, rule-abiding persona.

The ideal 'I' is the person who is placed in the world at the time when the narrative is related and knows the cultural and spatial rules of the time. These include concepts such as good and evil, relationships with others, both as an individual and as part of a group, social standing and motivation for action as well as metaphysical concepts. The narrating 'I', therefore, must be aware of what constitutes 'personhood' in both the society in which they are placed and the norms of that society under which 'normal personhood' is formed. As historical times change and cultural norms alter, the ideological 'I' will adjust his/her story to maintain their 'personhood', thus

ensuring a place in the world.

A number of ideological positions are available to the narrating 'I' at any time. The body can be the source of this positioning in terms of such factors as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, disease and disablement, whilst others are culturally obtained such as religion and political stance. This positioning can change over time and with the course of history. Consequently, the ideological 'I' is a changing, mobile entity, making the autobiographical self valuable on an interdisciplinary level as a social construct and, in this way, offering valuable information to those in history and the creative arts as well as psychology, the neurosciences and other disciplinary areas.

What is identity? Identity includes the unique features that make up our selfhood, make us recognisable as a particular person and encompasses our ego, personality and any features that distinguish us from others. This identity is embodied in all these versions of the first person 'I' discussed above. Eakin proposes that life narrative is an essential part of maintaining the homeostasis, or equilibrium, of the body and is as important as the maintenance of temperature or pH, stating:

We learn as children what it means to say 'I' in the culture we inhabit, and this training proves to be crucial to the success of our lives as adults, for our recognition by others as normal individuals depends on our ability to perform the work of self-narration (2005: 3).

In this schema, the autobiographical act is essential in maintaining the body's equilibrium in the past, present and future by creating a stable environment in terms of the creation of the human identity. Eakin refers to this as 'temporal mapping' (2005) which keeps us aware of where our bodies are in time and space. It allows us to be continuous, with a past, present and future, knowing where we are when we wake from sleep, and how much time has elapsed between falling asleep and reawakening. It allows us to be embodied in our own body and, when we lose our place on the map, we become disembodied, as happens with the onset of dementia, where those around the afflicted can see the loss of identity as the disease progresses. Clive Baldwin states that, 'if our self is made up of stories, to the degree we forget stories there is an impact on our sense of Self' (2005:101).

Our name is the first thing we own and the last thing we lose when it comes to identity. Curtin asks whether names 'just labels to make the everyday easy, or have they some special power to bestow luck, good or ill, on the head of those they tag?' (2013: loc223). This makes me question, what comes first, memoir or identity? Do you make yourself from the story of your family? Do you readjust unintentionally your memories to fit with the identity memoir has given you? Is this why adopted children have so many torments, as they have not been given a memoir by right of birth? Is this why nations struggle when their history is rewritten and their national identity tampered with?

Shakespeare intimated in his famous passage in *Romeo and Juliet* (Act 11 Scene 11) that names do not affect identity. Juliet says:

What's in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;

So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.

Romeo then answers:

I take thee at thy word:
Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized;
Henceforth I never will be Romeo ([1597]1935: 892).

Perhaps I would feel differently if I was in this situation, however, I struggle to come to terms with the imminent demise of my own family name. I am deeply saddened by this thought, as to me, this signals the loss of the family identity, which is much more than a label that makes everyday living easy.

Not only did my parents give me a name but also my early identity. The townsfolk knew me either as 'the minister's daughter' or in terms of my mother who was widely known as one of the original quiz kids. There were expectations placed on me with this identity I had gained through no effort of my own. It was assumed that I would either be prim, proper and well versed in religious ways or have inherited my mother's brains and excel scholastically. Not fulfilling these expectations created internal conflicts as I set out to create my own identity. My identity alters as I change careers and personal situations and is dependent upon the relationship I have with other people. I can also be multiple, different identities at the same point in time dependent upon these associations. In writing memoir, the narrative reveals the nature of the identity the memoirist wishes to relate.

Rules of autobiography

Eakin states that very early in our lives we learn from our parents the rules of telling life narratives (2001b) and, although every day we relate life stories, few write them. He describes three essentials in telling life narratives: tell the truth; maintain the privacy of others; and 'display a normative model of personhood' (2001b: 1). These rules hold the narrator responsible for adhering to these norms in telling or writing autobiographical stories.

Rule 1: Tell the truth

This is where the waters of memoir become murky, as the genre division between fiction and memoir blurs. There are several aspects to telling the truth with two of the clearest to discuss being the use of techniques from fiction such as dialogue and the description of scenes. G.Thomas Couser has given memoirs which cross over the boundaries into fiction by their use of present tense, dialogue and detailed scene description, the title of 'high definition memoir' (2012: 72) which, he believes, should be a distinct genre and – like many films – should carry the disclaimer 'based on a

true story'. Lee Gutkind labels an entire sub-genre of creative nonfiction titled thus, 'Based on a true story: BOTS' (2009), but his BOTS are those that have moved away from the facts, and contain made up characters and scenes and even, possibly, a fabricated ending. This classification conflicts with Couser's high definition memoir where, despite the inclusion of dialogue, high definition scenes, the conflation and manipulation of time and the omission of some facts that are not important to the narrative, the memoir still has to adhere to the facts of the actual story (2012).

Ben Yagoda also considers the 'truthiness' of memoir using a rating system. He claims this is 'partly facetious' but it nevertheless has a certain utility, in terms perhaps not of his points system but for the categories he uses (2011). Starting at 100, he subtracts points for factual errors, negative reflections on people, demonstrating a moral or political agenda, too much dialogue and poor writing technique. Points are added back if there are clear author statements or clarifications on the veracity of memory and fact-finding and the use of self-criticism. If a book obtains a score over 65, Yagoda considers it to be memoir. However, he concedes that this positioning is personal and others may have a cut-off point that is higher or lower.

Regarding the single element of dialogue, according to Gutkind, the reader knows that dialogue in a memoir is recreated and, what is important, he contends, 'is to replicate the conversation vividly and to mirror memory and speculation with trust and good judgment' (2012: 37). Despite being fictive, it is commonly accepted that dialogue and description of scene do not constitute truth violations and are recognised as a component of the memoir genre.

Another element of memoir that is largely acceptable to manipulate, is time. Here, the memoirist can conflate time by writing several events as one in order to have a smooth flow in the narrative. Additionally, vivid memories do not follow a chronological time frame and these may be presented as recalled by the writer with movement between past, present and future (Birkerts 2008). The memoirist can also choose where he/she starts his/her account; some begin in the future, some at the beginning, whilst others start at any place in between and flash backwards and forwards. Virginia Woolf in her memoir, *Sketch of the Past* ([1939-1940]1976), uses a stream of consciousness writing technique. She is deemed a lyrical writer, which Birkerts classifies as those attempting to reconnect with the feelings and emotions that they experienced in the distant past (2008). Joanna Russ described this lyric mode as 'without chronology or causation, its principle of connection being associative' (1995:87). Woolf wrote:

2nd May ... It would be interesting to make the two people, I now, I then, come out in contrast. And further, this past is much affected by the present moment. What I write today I should not write in a year's time ([1939-1940]1976: 75).

In doing so, Woolf recognised the presence of different first person narrators – 'I' characters – and that, over time, the story told would, undoubtedly, be different to that which she was writing on that 2nd of May. Woolf thus reveals her understanding of memory as a constructed entity, with the past being affected by the present. However, there is more to 'truthiness' than the simple manipulation of time, use of

dialogue and description of high definition scenes. Memoir is derived from memory and memory is a construct of the mind (Schacter 1996, Bruner 2004, Żarowski 2012). Herein lies the difficulty when examining truth in memoir.

Deliberate falsehoods are not tolerated in autobiographical works. A high profile spate of these cases have occurred, including around books such as Leon Carmen's *My Own Sweet Time* (Koolmatrie [1995] 2006) where, as a white man, he wrote a memoir passing himself off as an indigenous woman, and even winning a Dobbie Award for the best first novel by a female author (Lofgren 1997). James Frey, with his *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) that was sold as a memoir, claimed, amongst other deliberate fictional events and actions, that he had been in gaol for several days rather than the few hours he was actually held. He was well aware that he had made these incidents up and deliberately intended to deceive, as he had initially attempted, unsuccessfully, to have his book published as fiction. Both of these examples were conscious frauds and violate Lejeune's (1989) 'autobiographical pact.' When the story is revealed as fake or phony, readers are angered by both the author's deception and at themselves for having been taken in by the lie.

The question then needs to be asked: is this different to false memories that are believed as truth by the person remembering? This was described by Oliver Sacks, a neurobiologist who, believing some of his most vivid memories were reliable and true, discovered that he had, in fact, not been present on a certain occasion, despite being able to describe the occurrence in minute detail (2013). Although knowing the truth of this, Sacks continued to feel that it was his experience and that it was embedded in his personal psyche as deeply as if he had experienced the event himself. I have had a similar experience. For years I believed that I had chopped my brother's toe off when I took to him with an axe in a fit of seven-year-old rage. I have vivid memories of the axe, the gushing blood and the punishment meted out to me by my mother. Recently, when my older brother heard what I believed, he contradicted me. He had suffered a minor cut but had created a scene so that I would get into trouble. Despite his assurances to the contrary, I cannot overcome my belief that managing my anger was an issue for me as a child.

The body, rather than the brain, is another source of memory according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a major phenomenological philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century. Merleau-Ponty argued that it was the body which remembered the world, a departure from memory being a sole function of the brain ([1962]1989). Anecdotally, this has been verified by tales such as those told by Nigel Krauth who describes how a junk food addicted, lesbian heart transplant recipient became, post-transplant, a man-loving vegetarian who later discovered that these were the characteristics of her donor (2010). As the body is universal to all of us, writing it should assist both writers to find their own truth, as well as helping readers to believe the veracity of the narrative.

Daniel Schacter, a psychologist, discusses how modern brain imaging has overturned the belief that memories are stored in drawer-like compartments in the brain (1996). Autobiographical memory is, instead, stored in the same area as visual memory. This means that, should we have a strong image of an event, even if it has never happened,

that vision can be retrieved at a later date as autobiographical memory. During functional brain imaging, these false memories activate the same areas of the brain as true memories. As an individual, it may, therefore, be impossible to verify from memory what is historically true and what has been gained from other sources. The process of imprinting, storing and retrieving memory is subjective.

Autobiographical writers can aid the reader by accounting from where we obtain the facts we are providing and owning any shortfalls, both known or unknown, which we may have with our memories. Couser refers to this as ‘methodological transparency’ (2012: 84). Mary Karr in her three memoirs, *The Liars’ Club* (1995), *Cherry* (2001) and *Lit* (2009), is frequently alluding to gaps in her memory. In *The Liars’ Club*, for example, she writes:

Because it took so long for me to paste together what happened, I will leave that part of the story missing for awhile. It went long unformed for me, and I want to keep it that way here. I don’t mean to be coy. When the truth would be unbearable the mind often blanks it out. But some ghost of an event may stay in your head. Then, like a smudge of a bad word quickly wiped off a school blackboard, this ghost can call undue attention to itself by its very vagueness. You keep studying the dim shape of it, as if the original form will magically emerge. This blank spot in my past, then, spoke most loudly to me by being blank. It was a hole in my life that I both feared and kept coming back to because I couldn’t quite fill in (1995: 9).

All memories are constructed (Schacter 1996, Eakin 2001b, Bruner 2004, Schwalm 2014), and narratives, including those about the self, are also constructed. Jerome Bruner, a psychologist, contends that narrative is the only means by which a life can be described (2004: 692). He believes that narrative and life are inseparable from each other and we become the story that we tell. This is a view similar to that held by Eakin (2001a) who postulates that rather than memory being experiential, it is a malleable construct and will differ on each episode of remembering. It will correspond with the future that we wish to construct for ourselves and the identity we wish to be.

Clive Baldwin makes a convincing argument that our incomplete memories are in fact a blessing, for if we had a full memory, it would make the recounting of our lives predominantly dull and boring. According to narrative theory, the gaps in memory are filled in so the story is told in a way that creates sense both for the narrative and historically (2005). The ease with which our memories can take on board other information and suffer gaps in the remembering generates blurry edges due to unknown errors of memory and the difficulty in bringing a memory into vivid relief. Unlike the frauds described above, however, these ‘honest’ memory mistakes, I contest, are permissible in writing memoir as these factors, written as narrative truth, are all any of us can claim are our memories and these stories give us our identity.

To some extent, all memoirists thus write a hybrid form, mixing fact with fiction, as they use dialogue and high definition scenes. These, I have concluded, belong in the genre of memoir. Some writers – such as, Sheila Heti author of *How Should a Person Be?: A Novel from Life* (2013), Francesca Rendle-Short author of *Bite Your Tongue*

(2011) and David Markson with *Reader's Block* (1996) – all cross the boundary of memoir/fiction intentionally. Rendle-Short, for example, has straddled this genre divide with the writing of a narrative that is intentionally fictional in one section and memoir in another (2011). This *bildungsroman* is her own, but she writes with three voices: the narrator who is on her way to see her dying mother; a fictional child, Glory; and, a third voice who adds the facts that Glory (both the fictional character and her real-life counterpart, Rendle-Short) could not have known at the time. From the opening pages, the body is in evidence. An x-ray of her mother's hands, for instance, leaps out from the first page. Her mother, an active anti-smut campaigner, undertook a campaign to save Queensland's children from literature she considered morally corrupt such as J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* ([1951]1991), Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* ([1957]2012) and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* ([1960]1982) to name but a few. She was, indeed, a book-burning, morals crusader. Rendle-Short's story of growing up in this household is still extremely raw and so it was written as fiction, allowing the story to take her to places that otherwise she would not have been able to travel. Rendle-Short describes this fiction in these terms:

Incrementally, memories and connections and threads began to appear on the page that made sense, I could hold my mother up, the subject of my research – nudge, cajole, tease. This story became a body for the page – what I call a linguistic body – a body I could recognize, with skin and bones and hair and teeth [...]. By writing a body on the page, a discovered body, an improper body, you reclaim your own (2010: 5).

It is also very clear in this narrative that writing the body mingles the reader's body with the body in the text ensuring the reader becomes irrevocably embodied in the life of the Soldier family, empathising with their pain.

Those five words sprayed across the room, across the lunchtime spread of cold meat. Elsie sat frozen, dead straight in her chair, jaw locked unblinking. Those five words — *I am ashamed of you* – grafted together the bodies of the six daughters and entered their mouths and throats to circulate with their blood, settled in a skin around their lungs, a crust on their hearts; to congeal in all their hidden and not so hidden places, inside and out (2011: 33).

Open this book at any page and the body jumps out at you. For me, as a memoirist, it becomes clear that the use of metaphor and writing the body can create a strong emotional response in the reader.

Rule 2: Maintain the privacy of others

Eakin's second rule protects the others who feature in the narrative. This becomes a philosophical question which Veruska Cantelli has coined the 'ethical pact' (2012). As the life writer does not live in a world alone, isolated from others, in writing autobiographically, the story of other person/s and the author's relationship with them will also be told. This creates a further interdisciplinary action as social and family histories are told and the narrative takes on the roles of supporting, teaching,

guidance, advising and reprimanding.

Additionally, this relational aspect of autobiographical writing displays that the identity created by the narrative is dependent upon the relationship of the 'I' character to the others displayed in it. The 'I' character may have a new identity when combined with another person or group that is quite different to their individual selfhood. In my own life, this was clearly displayed when I was working as a clinical educator in an Intensive Care Unit. In this role, my knowledge of care and treatments were recognised by doctors and nurses alike and I was held in high esteem within that group, however, when I returned home I became a different person. My husband at the time had a mental disorder and at home, unlike work, I was at a loss and, instead of being the controlling agent, I was the one who was controlled. These two identities bore no relationship to each other and I kept my two worlds and identities apart. Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero ([1997]2000) takes this further and postulates that the 'other' is an essential element in identity formation, for without these relationships with the other, it is impossible to determine 'who' the self is. Cavarero argues that philosophy can only see the universality of the person by looking at specific characteristics, whereas the uniqueness of the individual, and who they are, can only be seen in the interaction of the self with others.

Not only is there an ethical position to be taken in regard to the other people embodied in a memoir, but also in regard to the writer as author. Bearing this in mind, the memoirist must ensure that the narrative that they are sharing is *personal* information, not *private*. Some facets of life are not for public scrutiny and, if written, belong in a private journal. Throughout the writing, the memoirist should ask: 'would I tell this to a friend?' Apart from maintaining their own privacy, the memoirist can be classified as a vulnerable subject if they view a narrated 'I' who is experiencing difficulties, as for example, in terms of the death of a spouse, the experience of abuse or historical events such as the holocaust. Psychologists and cognitive therapists use narrative therapy as a means of kick-starting the healing process. If this occurs unintentionally through writing a memoir, the writer may have problems dealing with the pain of the emotions elicited from the narrative and should, thus, be aware of the various techniques, such as writing in the third person and the hybrid fiction/memoir form, which can distance themselves from the events being recounted.

As for the other people in the memoir how can a memoirist ensure their privacy? The main players are generally well known to the memoirist and, as such, the writer will be privy to knowledge of an intimate and private nature that occurred prior to making the decision to record the events for others to read, creating the potential for a betrayal of trust. There are several ways to deal with this. The memoirist can show individuals the section of book in which they appear and question how they feel about it. If, however, they do not like what has been written, a dilemma is thus created for the writer about what to do, as the writer also has an ethical responsibility to the reader to tell the truth. Events will also always be seen differently as each participant brings their own beliefs and world views to the task of remembering, and so the author cannot relate anyone else's truth other than her own. David Carlin, when considering the ethical issues surrounding writing about others in memoir, states that treating them

objectively is not possible but that they must not be misrepresented; that is, they must be truthfully represented (2005). Couser points out that there are degrees of ethical responsibility in memoir, with that between spouses being the least risky as the relationship is entered into on an equal footing (2005); with either partner equally capable of writing their own version of events. This is not the case when it comes to the disabled and the parent/child relationship as here there is inequality in the relationship and others are not in a position to give informed consent or respond.

One approach many writers take to protect others in memoir is to change names and other identifying markers. I find it difficult to write if the significant others' names have been changed, as it seems to make these people anonymous, disembodied and devalued – it removes their identity. Moreover, some identities in the story cannot be made anonymous even if I do change the name. As my author name is the same as the protagonist in the narrative, thus invoking the autobiographical pact, it follows that my husband is identifiable as my husband no matter what I call him. Josie Arnold reports about a character she renamed in her memoir *Mother Superior, Woman Inferior* (2009), noting 'I continue to regret [changing the name] as it seems to me to dishonour the truth and the woman concerned' (2009: 81). I feel likewise.

Mary Karr relates how she informs those being featured in her memoirs early in the creative stage. This gives them time to protest and also to acclimatise to the idea. She keeps the narrative to herself until the final draft has been completed when she gives the relevant sections to those that appear in that section, to read (2005). Gutkind also completes this step but he does not leave his narrative with the person in question but rather reads it out loud to them, gauges their reaction, records this on tape and then takes his text away with him (2012). This way he does not lose control of the narrative by it being passed on to third parties such as attorneys, spouses and others. Karr describes her points for writing about others as: she keeps herself focused on her own thoughts and feelings and does not presuppose another's; she shows the scenes rather than using jargon to describe them, leaving it to the reader to form their own opinion; she points out her limitations and if she knows others have different opinions or memories of an event; and, in respect to her subjects, ensures that the reader is aware that this is her own subjective viewpoint (2015). Both she and Gutkind advise that the writing should be carried out from a position of love, not hate. Gutkind states:

More than in any other literary genre, the creative nonfiction writer [which includes memoir] must rely on his or her own conscience and sensitivity to others and display a higher morality and a healthy respect for fairness and justice. We may harbour resentments, hatreds, and prejudices: but being writers doesn't give us a special dispensation to behave in a way unbecoming to ourselves and hurtful to others. ... Write both for art's sake and humanity's sake (2012: 42).

Ethically, I believe memoirists must act responsibly and tell the truth. We should not write with the aim of hurting another person or group, especially if they are innocent of any wrongdoing. At the same time, the truth should be told to the best of the writer's ability and if another person is displayed in poor light then their actions will speak for themselves. At all times, we must take care of those that are in a more vulnerable position. Again, an interdisciplinary team is needed ranging from

philosophers to lawyers to ensure that an ethical resolution of the situation is met.

Rule 3: Display a normative model of personhood

The rule ‘to display a normative model of personhood’ refers to the loss of the ability to narrate one’s own life story as a result of a loss of normalcy, such as that which occurs with brain injury, dementia and other neurological conditions. Oliver Sacks wrote of a Mr Thompson suffering from memory loss due to Korsakoff’s Syndrome. In this narrative, Sacks reveals that societal controls affect how identity is formed. Such ailments which affect memory leads to the sufferer losing the ability to tell their life stories and, as a subsequence, their identity diminishes and eventually is lost. When this happens the only narrative that can be told is by those ‘others’ that know their story. In Sacks’ case, an interdisciplinary approach adds much to the ability to relate such a person’s story.

Conclusion

When undertaking research in the field of memoir, the disciplines of history, philosophy, neurology, psychology, creative arts, literary studies and others will all broaden the type of knowledge available. The use of interdisciplinary resources aids the application of the craft of writing, as the depth research allows writers to offer a well-rounded and critically sound analysis of a particular text, phenomenon, trend or event at a particular moment in time. Such interdisciplinary research also allows the memoirist to discover techniques, such as manipulation of time, dialogue and high definition scenes, to make a compelling narrative. It also gives the writer an understanding of the genre and their responsibilities to both the readers and those who appear within the narrative. As memory is embodied and the body is something to which we all relate, writing the body can enmesh the reader in the text, making the narrative compelling due to the connection of both the author and the reader with the narrated ‘I’.

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