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WALLSTEIN VERLAG

der aufklärerischen Verhandlungen des Verhältnisses von Antike und Christentum verorten lassen.

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WAGNER-EGELHAAF, MARTINA (Ed.), *Handbook of Autobiography / Autofiction*. 3 vols. Berlin / Boston: De Gruyter (2019). 2180 S.

This comprehensive *Handbook* in three volumes constitutes an ambitious and intriguing editorial project. It sets out to discuss and represent autobiographical writing from an open and inclusive »global and hence transcultural perspective,« at the same time paying tribute to the classical notion of autobiography as a genuine »Western product« (vol. 1, xv). The editor's preface and introduction outline the transdisciplinary approach and address key terms and concepts, such as the idea of truth underlying the various genres and patterns of autobiographical writing in relation to aspects of perspective and perception. Roland Barthes famously asked how to distinguish between texts that suggest to be read as autobiographical and others as merely fictional. This led, in the 1970s, to Philippe Lejeune's notion of the »autobiographical pact,« with the basic idea of an identity of author and protagonist, to which then the counterpart of a »novellistic pact« was proposed by Frank Zipfel 2009 (3). Meanwhile, other approaches dismissed such a distinction, such as Liz Stanley's critical feminist study *The Auto/Biographical I* (1992). To escape the traditional stereotypical view of only male authorial subjects as being worthy of autobiography, Stanley suggests reading autobiographical texts as a special form of biography, in which the biographer (or author) and the depicted (or protagonist) happen to be the same individual.

While the term »autobiography« is rooted in a Eurocentric tradition, from a modern transcultural and postcolonial perspective, the term »life writing« has gained more significance in recent years, marking an effort to de-colonize and de-canonize traditional takes. The French writer Serge Doubrovsky (*Le Fils*, 1977) first introduced the term »autofiction,« arguing similarly, that a proper distinction of the biographical truthfulness of a life account, determining what is fact and what is fiction, misses the point. As Wagner-Egelhaaf points out, it is both »the linguistic nature of every autobiographical report,« and »the insufficiency of human memory« that cause »autofiction« (vol. 1, 2). This also explains why the *Handbook's* title lists both terms, which are not easily distinguished: Goethe's canonical »autobiography« *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit* illustrates this, as it can just as easily be read as »autofiction.«

Mindful that Goethe was reading from a work in progress in front of a live audience in the »Römisches Haus« in Weimar around 1810, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* can be conceived as a dialogue with his readership, making it much more a comprehensive cultural history than a truly personal account of his lived experience up until his twenty-sixth year. Seen through the lens of the author's lifespan of sixty years, Goethe's remembrance of events during his childhood, such as the famous Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, is much more the product of his continuous linguistic and cultural knowledge acquisition than the real-life account of a six-year-old – despite writing it as if he had been there when it happened. *Dichtung und Wahrheit* can be regarded as a history of Goethe's lifetime of studying, reading, writing, encountering,

and conversing with others. This is evident in his interpretation of Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* as a direct commentary on the Seven Years' War, and his recounting of the journey from Leipzig to Dresden to test his own perception in the »Gemäldegalerie,« the result of his study of *Laokoon*.¹ Considering this gain in our cultural knowledge, how important is it that things actually happened as portrayed?

The three volumes of the *Handbook* are subtitled »Theory and Concepts« (vol. 1), »History« (vol. 2), and »Exemplary Texts« (vol. 3). For the purpose of this review, I will focus on entries and articles referring to the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries. Volume 1 showcases »Autobiography / Autofiction Across Disciplines.« The first section presents entries on »Theoretical Approaches« to autobiographical writing, as they are used and applied in fields as diverse as anthropology, philosophy, history, psychology, brain research, and neuroscience. The entries are listed in alphabetical order, explaining why 1.4 »Deconstruction« (Linda Anderson), 1.5 »Discourse Analysis« (Manfred Schneider), and 1.6 »Gender Studies« (Anne Fleig) precede 1.7 »Hermeneutics« (Ulrich Breuer), and why 1.14 »Postcolonialism« (Mita Banerjee) is listed even further down. This rubric juxtaposes the poststructuralist questioning of concepts of authorship from viewpoints of logocentrism (Jacques Derrida), discourse history (Michel Foucault), and feminist criticism (Domna C. Stanton) against the traditional hermeneutic approach in which the notion of autobiography originates. The articles are structured individually, which includes the diverse practices regarding gender-aware language use. The important aspect of »writing-back« from a colonized perspective vis-à-vis »the power of colonial or hegemonic discourse« comes to the fore in Banerjee's article (132-133), which also raises questions of the intersection of gender and colonialism.

The second section of vol. 1 presents entries on »Categories,« again in alphabetical order. To name just a few: »Apologia,« »Authenticity,« »Autobiographical Pact,« »Autobiography and the Nation,« »Autoethnography,« »Autofiction,« »Ego-document,« »Facts and Fiction,« »Gender,« »Life Writing,« »Minorities,« and »Truth.« In the context of eighteenth-century studies, I found the articles 3.10 »Confessions« (Ulrich Breuer), 3.14 »Diary« (Schamma Shahadat), and 3.16 »Epistolary Autobiography« (Karl Enenkel) particularly insightful as these epistolary forms become so predominant in the Age of Reason.

Volume 2 begins by describing the de-colonizing effort of this project with the editor's »Introduction: Autobiography across the World, or, How not to be Eurocentric.« The volume is subdivided into the following sections: 1. »The European Tradition,« 2. »The Arab World,« 3. »Africa,« 4. »Asia,« 5. »Australia and New Zealand,« and 6. »The Americas.« I took a closer look at sections 1 and 6, particularly 1.3.2 »Autobiographies in the Vernacular« (Karin Westerwelle) on early modern literature from the Renaissance to the seventeenth century; 1.4 »Modernity« (Michaela Holdenried) spanning from seventeenth century confessional and picaresque forms of autobiography/autofiction to the present time; and 6.2 »North America« (Alfred Hornung) focusing on autobiographical writings in relation to the process of independence, nation-building, democratic and anti-abolitionist movements. Regarding the European early modern period, it is helpful that this chapter is subdivided. This

1 Cf. part 2, book 8, in: Hamburger Ausgabe, ed. by Erich Trunz, vol. 9, 1981, pp. 280-281 and 320-322.

also would have been beneficial to chapter 1.4, with its long span from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century.

Volume 3 opens with the editor's »Introduction: Exemplary Autobiographical / Autofictional Texts, or, How not to set up a Canon.« This very impressive selection of texts ranges from Isokrates (353 BCE) to Jane Alison (2009), including nine articles on seventeenth- to mid nineteenth-century authors: 15. John Bunyan (Martin Löschnigg), 16. Anne Halkett (Helga Schwalm), 17. Glikl bas Judah Leib (Richard Block), 18. Lady Mary Wortley Montague (Clare Brant), 19. Benjamin Franklin (Volker Depkat), 20. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Christian Moser), 21. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Jane K. Brown), 22. William Wordsworth (Helga Schwalm), and 23. Harriet Jacobs (Martin Klepper). All articles follow the same rubrics: A brief introduction, »Historical Origins of Text,« »Content Summary,« and »Analysis«; some include additional sub-categories. Other than volumes 1 and 2, in which canonical authors (St. Augustin, Benjamin Franklin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) are most prominently discussed from multiple angles, this selection puts a clear emphasis on the interrelation of gender, race, and colonial histories. While proceeding in chronological order, vol. 3 manages to break with the traditional canonical line of authors and texts.

In conclusion, this is a fascinating new *Handbook*, insightful for scholars as a reference work offering a plethora of facets, angles of investigation, and examples. It is also a work I consider to be a valuable resource for anyone who is generally interested in reading and reflecting on all sorts and aspects of ›writing one's self.‹ It enables those striving to ›unlearn‹ as much as they can of traditional views of literary developments throughout history and around the globe. I like the fact that the articles breathe their individual style, and I noticed only very minor flaws, such as, in the bibliographical record of the article on *Deconstruction*, Derrida's name is misspelled on five occasions with a triple-r (vol. 1, 43) – I imagine he would have smiled.

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WILLIAMS, SEÁN M, *Pretexts for Writing: German Romantic Prefaces, Literature, and Philosophy*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press (2019). 261 pp.

This book is perceptive, timely, and ambitious: perceptive in that it zeroes in on serious gaps in research, the exploration of which may alter our views of eighteenth-century German literature. Indeed, *Pretexts for Writing* redirects our view on canon-formation and established literary tradition vis-à-vis »the great unread« (Margaret Cohen). The book is timely for pulling away the curtain from these neglected aspects of literary culture without hiding in the machinations of digital humanities for legitimacy: prefaces and other so-called para-texts, along with other minor or marginal genres, prove to be *constitutive* to (rather than distracting in) the historiography of literature. This is a bold claim. As the book tackles its subject by juggling (too) many aspects of inquiry, its ambitious goals court the risks of failure. But Seán Williams steers clear of the latter: *Pretexts for Writing* largely succeeds. That the book found its home at Bucknell UP, in the series sponsored by the North American Goethe Society, is no coincidence either. Rather than promoting an ever-narrower group