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EDITOR'S NOTE

In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson claim that the act of representing what people know best about themselves, that is their own lives is something that is far from being simple but the very act of self narration puts the teller into two positions: i) the observing subject ii) the object of investigation. In the amazingly complex genre called the life narratives the past is recalled/ understood in the present and the process is not passive but the meaning of the past is actively created in the act of remembering. These memories are history-specific and also situated or contextual as acts of remembering take place at particular sites and in particular circumstances. The very act of remembering is also political. What is remembered and what is forgotten and why, change over time. What is recollected and what is obscured are central to the cultural production of knowledge about the past, and thus to the understanding of an individual's self knowledge.

The period of Enlightenment is the historical moment attributed to the emergence of autobiographical writing as a genre in the West. The Enlightened individual came to be informed by the notions of the self. However, autobiography as a genre that gained traction in the 18th century has been contested by postmodern and postcolonial critics as it excluded many other kinds of life writing- autobiographical writings of the marginalised, coming of age and travel narratives among others. The genre called autobiography in the West, in that sense, failed to capture the various genres and practices of life writing around the world. Later, terms like life writing and life narrative came to encompass the diversity of self-referential expressions. Life writing is

understood as a general term for writing about a person's life or another's as its subject. Life narrative on the other hand, is a term used for various acts of self-representation which can cut across genres and media which can be written, performative, visual, filmic or digital. Therefore, life narrative refers to self-referential acts of any kind.

Life-narrators use multifarious ways of accessing memory in their narratives. Some of these sources are personal (diaries, dreams, family albums, photos, objects, family stories, genealogy). Some are public (documents, historical events, collective rituals). Besides memory, identity plays a crucial role in autobiographical writing and identities are marked in terms of many categories: gender, caste, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, class, generation, disability, religious and political ideologies. Identities can also be intersectional and the fluidity of identities exists across political and geographical spaces.

The burgeoning field of the *Life Narrative* compels us to find new reading strategies and scholarly projects in order to understand the diverse autobiographical texts, subjects, modes and acts. As this profoundly complex genre demands critical academic attention especially in the light of its ever increasing socio-political relevance, the articles in this volume are an attempt towards such deliberations in this area.

Articles in the Volume

The opening article " "I am What I am": Trans Identity, Body and Experience in Jareena's Auto/biography" by Poornima R. and Zainul Abid Kotta examines the different stages of identity formation in Jareena's trans life by studying her autobiography *Oru Malayali Hijadayude Athmakatha.* Punnya Rajendran in her

article "The "Sincere" Rhetoric of Evidence: Rethinking Egodocuments" revisits and redefines terms like "egodocument" and "egohistorical text" while analysing Dr. James E. Esdaile's surgical/medical document. Deepthy Mohan's article attempts to elucidate the concept of postmemory in the context of the Holocaust in Art Spiegelman's graphic memoirs, *The Complete Maus.* Alicia Jacob's paper looks at the concept called minimalism practised by Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus by examining the various forms of life narratives employed by them to popularise minimalism. Rajesh V. Nair through his paper "Memory, Identity and Life Writing: Scope and Debates" studies how life narratives within the paradigm of cultural memory studies breaks fresh grounds in understanding different cultures and the nuances of identity formation. Anu Kuriakose analyses how Vijayarajamallika marks her transgender identity in her autobiography *Mallikavasantham,* and how Mallika sees herself as a trans woman poet in a cisheteronormative society. Anomitra Biswa and Tonisha Guin interpret Anita R. Ratnam's dance performance titled *Ma3ka* as an act of self- representation on stage. The final article by Achu John analyses the recently discovered memoirs of a 19th century French intersex person called Herculine Barbin to explore the questions of choice, identity, belongingness and trauma.

Reference:

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives.* London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

"I AM WHAT I AM": TRANS IDENTITY, BODY AND EXPERIENCE IN JAREENA'S AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

Poornima R.
Zainul Abid Kotta

"I went to say good-bye to myself in the mirror. We would never meet again, and I wanted to give that other self a long last look in the eye, and a wink for luck" (Jan Morris qtd in Jay Prosser 222). For a transgender, the mirror image is a distorted one and transition integrates the projected self and the reflected self, the body image and the image of the body, says Jay Prosser. Akin to the act of looking into the mirror, the textual "I" in trans autobiography is self-reflexive, and entwines transsexuality and autobiography, the narrative and the body. Here, the narrative acts as a transition between the past and the present, thereby imparting a coherence to the gendered split of a trans person. Memory is crucial to any trans life narrative and instead of relegating one's confused and ambiguous gender identity to the darker corners of psyche, it is dug out to declare hir/her/his identity as a (trans)wo/man. The self-writing of a transgender is also a self- righting process, to correct what has been wrong so far and let the world know their true selves. According to the trans activist and writer A. Revathi, writing is a space for a transgender like her to ascertain her identity where she becomes both the narrator and subject. "Writing my own story has also helped me examine my life afresh and that has been both challenging and enjoyable" ("Voice for Visibility").

Among the various genres of life writing, Coming-out narratives emerged as a literary genre after the stone wall rebellion and gay liberation movement giving space for the LGBTIQ community to embrace their sexual and gender identity. Though the term was used earlier to refer to the self-reflexive writing of gay and lesbian communities, it later came to include trans coming-out too. "Like many ethnic autobiographies, coming-out narratives map the individual onto the collective: they tell individual and occasionally idiosyncratic stories that often turn on the realization that the narrator's experience is shared by a broad community of other individuals" (Berovitch 561). With these new genres, the canonicity of autobiography has begun to be challenged giving space to the non-dominant communities to narrate their lives. Coming-out is significant to LGBTQI experience and the autobiographical mode of writing gives them a voice to express themselves. Bridgewater views the coming-out of gays and lesbians as an important process in combating the prejudice and unhealthy attitude towards the sexual minorities. Rasmussen calls it as 'coming out imperative', an imperative which is challenging yet beneficial to the individual and their community.

Coming-out as a gay or lesbian is different from coming out as a transgender since this is related to one's gender identity and is more personal than the other which has to do with sexuality. Lal Zimman talks about two kinds of coming-out: declaration and disclosure. In LGB coming-out, the sexual orientation of the individual is being declared while a trans coming-out is the disclosure of one's gender identity. In the life of a transsexual, the gender identity is declared before transition and disclosed after the process. Unless a transgendered person comes out of the closet, their chosen gender identity will not be accepted. Judith Butler states that gender reality is real only to the extent that it is performed. The expression of a gender core or identity depends upon our acts, gestures and enactments, which may either conform to or contest an expected gender identity. "We never experience or know ourselves as a body pure

and simple, i.e.as our "sex", because we never know our sex outside of its expression of gender" (qtd in Stewart 60). According to her, the fixed framework of gender is subverted only through parody. The identity of an LGB can be concealed but trans identity can never remain hidden since gender is always and has to be performed.

Though transsexual autobiographies were written way back during the early 90s in Western countries, the coming-out of a transgender through narratives happened much later in India since the community was shrouded in the grey area of unspeakability and intrigue. Trans activists like Kalki Subramaniam, Priya Babu, Living Smile Vidya, A.Revathi etc. have represented the transgender community becoming political agents through their literatures and memoirs. Vidya's *I am Vidya* and Revathi's, *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* were the earliest autobiographies written by hijras in Indian society. Later trans life narratives like *The Gift of Goddess Lakshmi* by Manobi Bandhyopadhyay and *Mallikavasantham* by Vijayaraja Mallika were published in 2017 and 2019 respectively. Still, the production of transgender narratives is much lesser when compared to the Western scenario.

The first life narrative about a transgender from Kerala was *Jareena, Oru Malayali Hijadayude Athmakatha*. It is the first autobiography of a trans person in an Indian language. In her autobiography, Jareena narrates her experience of leading the life of a hijra in Bangalore due to the trans repudiation in Kerala, where it is more intense when compared to other states. Though it is an autobiography in genre, it blurs the distinction between an autobiography and biography since it is a life story narrated to B.Hari with an appendix on hijra life and culture by Vijayan Kodanchery. The body of the narrative is auto/ biographical, which necessitates the cautious use of a slash between the two words 'auto' and 'biography'. This split can be correlated with the trans identity of the narrator. Trans visibility was scarce in Kerala due to the gender non-

conformist attitude of the society. The auto/biography was published only because of Hari's genuine interest in understanding the lives of hijras. As a life narrative, the work was the first of its kind in Malayalam literature. It discusses the predicament of a transgender in Kerala before NALSA Judgement and the State Transgender Policy. The work was published in 2006, much before Revathi's, but unlike the latter it was not an intentional act of coming-out through narrative.

The life writings or coming-out stories of transgendered people share similar experiences, and based on that many identity models have been put forward by different social theorists. Anne Bolin and Frank Lewins have developed a four stage and six stage development models respectively for transsexual women. It begins with gender confusion and then moves towards transsexual identity, an identity as a woman and finally a rejection of transsexual identity to be a real woman. Gender theorists like Leslie Feinberg, Kate Bornstein and Jamison Green are against this kind of sweeping generalization. According to them, "many transsexual women and men openly acknowledge their transgender histories today and take pride in this identity, rather than considering it shameful or stigmatizing and seeking to become invisible" (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Devor's fourteen stage model reifies this fact - the last stage is that of pride which "implies both a personal sense of pride in oneself and a political stance" (Devor 2004). Even Anne Bolin has revised her later studies since many trans people in recent times choose not to undergo sex reassignment surgery. Nevertheless, finding a coherent model is impossible since individuals differ from each other.

This paper seeks to analyse different stages of identity formation in the life of a gender non-normative person as reflected in Jareena's autobiography. The transgender identity formation model developed by the sociologists/gender theorists in the West will be used for the study for two main reasons: (i) there are no specific models developed to study

the identity formation stages in the life of an Indian transgender and (ii) the MtF trans people of India who belong to the hijra community can be blanketed under the term 'transgender'. Though the different positions taken by trans people over the globe reflect the fact that lived experience cannot be reduced to mere theories, these literary and sociological theories can be used as tools to facilitate better understanding and frame a general idea of the identities of trans people. Aaron Devor discusses two important themes in the process of transsexual identity formation: witnessing and mirroring. "Each of us has a deep need to be witnessed by others for whom we are. Each of us wants to see ourselves mirrored in others' eyes as we see ourselves" (46). When the expected people do not respond the way we wish them to perceive us, it results in psychological distress and mental trauma. In the case of trans people, mirroring "is also about seeing oneself in the eyes of others like oneself" (46). Transgender life writings play a vital role in validating these two processes since it breathes a sense of self into the lives of trans people 'witnessed' by others through the process of reading. Mirroring happens when other trans people could see their own lives reflected in the lives of the subject/narrator. They impart a sense of community feeling to the transgendered people and encourage them to come out of their closets.

The first stage in the life of any Male-to-Female transgender is abiding anxiety over one's gender and the desire to be a female. The individual may not recognize the transgenderism that is latent in her/him but may merely experience confusion in their gender identity. Most of the trans life narratives on Male-to-Female transgender people discuss similar stages of anxiety and confusion in the life of a trans person at a very young age. The very narration of the auto/biography begins with the revelation of Jareena's infatuation for her ninth standard classmate, Prabhakar and her headmaster. The identity confusion could also be witnessed in her desire to do the tasks 'culturally' meant for girls, prefer female playmates over male and wear female clothing of her siblings

when alone. Cross-dressing seems to be an important form of gender expression when the anecdotes of trans people are analysed. Cavallaro and Warwick in their work, *Fashioning the Frame: Boundaries, Dress and Body* discuss clothing "as a figurative supplement of identity" (Elahi 195). According to them, clothing is an important element in determining ethnic identity and this reading can be extended to the study of gender identity as well. It is an expression of the self, one's core gender identity too. Jareena was admonished and even bullied by her brothers for her cross- gendered behaviour. Wearing her siblings' dress, Jareena would often stand in front of the mirror for hours to admire the femininity in her. In Richard Ekins' theory of Male Femaling, there is a stage called fantasying femaling where the femaler tries to manintain a boundary between the male and female self. Cross-dressing is not rampant in this stage, but it is one of the earliest indications of transgenderism among many transsexuals. Though Jareena did not cross-dress in public at this stage, her ontological identity as a woman was explicit in her performative aspects.

The feeling of a wo/man trapped inside the wrong body is the feeling that many trans people claim to have experienced. In the identity formation theories, the realization that one belongs to the opposite gender happens in the life of a transgender after the stages of abiding anxiety, gender confusion and comparison. The constant physical and verbal abuses from both the family and the villagers exalted the feeling of a woman trapped inside the body of a man and Jareena was compelled to leave her home in search of her real identity. Educated trans people of contemporary times have enough exposure to the existence of a trans community through television, social media, popular culture, social networking sites, web pages, chat rooms and even through the text books prescribed in the syllabus of various courses. Unlike these transgendered people, Jareena did not know that there were people similar to her in existence, people who embraced a gender identity beyond the definitions

of the binary. Growing up in a society like Kerala, she had little chances of coming across people similar to her. The realization that such a community exists is a mile stone in the life of any transgender. Jareena lands in Madras to work in a hotel and from there through the short term friendship developed with a man named Muthu, comes to know of the hijra community, "people who were born in a male body with a female self " (Trans. Mine 34).

Referring to trans lives, many gender theorists discuss the need to belong to a group with similar gender identity. In Jareena's life, this sense of 'belonging' found its actualization upon her landing in Alsoor, where hijras lived as a community. Here, she was embraced by the community without any veiled barbs of sarcasm. As a hijra, Jareena could lead a feminine way of life in her group rejecting stereotypical masculinity and get transformed into a woman in both sartorial and performative aspects. In the Indian cultural scenario, the visibility of trans people as a community was found only among the hijras who formed a subcultural group. Transgender, as a community, in its broader sense remained almost invisible and unknown to many. So the only choice for people like Jareena was to join the hijra community. It was in 1976 that Jareena, upon arriving at Hamam (household where the hijras live as a family) in Alsoor, realized for the first time that there were many who lived with a mind and body similar to her. Though there were many from Tamilnadu and Karnataka, hijras from Kerala were considerably less, denoting the fact that transgender identity in Kerala had remained closeted for a long time.

As a result of the transgender movement of the 1990s, many transwo/men have begun to acknowledge their transgender status and take pride in their identity. Though some people seek invisibility post transition, many "recognize that being transsexual does not make them any less of a woman or man" (Beemyn and Rankin 111). The very

existence, identity and life writings of the hijras published later reinforce this fact where they began switching roles from referents to speaking subjects. The need to resist social stigmatization and to empower the community come into the bargain. However, this political stance taken by Revathi, Vidhya, Vijayaraja Mallika or Manobi Bandhyopadhyay seems to be absent in Jareena's auto/biography. Antithetical to the stance taken by these trans people, Jareena hesitated to disclose her identity as is evident from her request to B.Hari, "You can ask anything about me, write anything but do not include my photos. That will destroy my peace of mind" (Trans. Mine 19). Arlene Istar Lev includes disclosure as an important stage in the identity formation of transsexuals since it is a major obstacle that many trans people face, the anxiety over when and how to disclose their true gender identity. The transphobia and stigmatization perpetrated by the mainstream community make many trans people keep their identity closeted.

Transition is an important stage in the transgender identity formation models. According to Devor, there are "two stages of "identity confusion" and two stages of "delay," before transition, reflecting the struggle that many transgender people have faced in understanding themselves, overcoming denial, and establishing an identity that remains socially stigmatized"(114). Though this was the situation in the past many transgender individuals of the present generation find the synthesis much easier, thanks to the information age. Jareena, during her initial days in hamam had wished to return to her village and family but existence outside the community was even more stigmatizing. Despite the fact that there was nothing to hope for in the life of a hijra and when life as a sex worker became unendurable due to the harassment from the customers who were mostly rogues, Jareena decided to continue her life in the dark rooms of hamam only for her self- actualization of becoming a woman. The stages of confusion and delay are almost absent in the lives of hijras since they do not get enough space and time to chew over it. It was by

chance rather than choice that many trans people joined the hijra community.

In both Bolin and Lewin's models, the last stage of an MTF is sex reassignment surgery and thereafter, the transsexual becomes a 'natural' woman and renounces the transgender identity. Unlike the transsexuals in Lewin's model who try to erase their identity of a transsexual after gender affirmative surgery, an MtF joining the hijra community embraces this identity with the initiation into the hijra clan by becoming a *chela* to a hijra guru. 'Nirvan' can be equated with the surgical alterations of the body that a transsexual undergoes and it is a part of hijra cult when the person becomes a member of the community. The hijra identity becomes an 'imprinted' one with the ritual of emasculation. Traditionally, the hijras believed that the ritual of castration transformed them from an impotent male to a potent hijra, one who will be accorded the power of an ascetic with the ability to bless or curse; but as understood from Jareena's life narrative, it is a part of self-actualization as a woman for many hijras.

Transition involves both hormonal therapy and sex reassignment surgery, a psychological integration of the mind and the body. It also "means the leaving behind a way of life" (Devor 61). Jareena's physical transition was made possible to some extent with hormone therapy though a complete transformation was unattainable through gender affirmative surgery. In hijra culture, it was 'Dai ma' (mid wife) who performed the ritual of emasculation upon the consent from the Guru and their Goddess, Bahucharamata or Yellamma but the complications involved in the crude practice compelled Jareena's Guru to send her to a surgeon for sex reassignment surgery (SRS). Since she suffered from occasional attacks of fits, the doctor refused to conduct the surgery. Jareena would often compare herself to other hijras who were fortunate enough to undergo 'nirvana' and become a 'natural' (as defined in the autobiography) woman.

However, for some transsexuals, as Devor mentions, transition is complete when they are witnessed and mirrored as the gender and sex they identify with. Taken in that sense, Jareena's transformation is complete when she has begun to be witnessed and mirrored as a woman. Her marital relationship with Surendran is a testimony to the fact that she was perceived as the gender she identified herself with.

The cultural context of hijras may be rooted in the mythological past but, in contemporary times, their identity is evolving in a number of different directions. Contrary to the view put forward by Serena Nanda, most of the hijras of the present do not perceive themselves as either man nor woman but as women, and their identity formation resembles the transsexual trajectory of the MTF transsexual. The only difference is in the collective identity of hijras as against the fragmentary nature of the individual which is found among the Western trans people. Here, Jareena seems to challenge the dichotomy between sex and gender without the SRS, though it is not an overtly political act. Nowadays, many trans people, especially, Female-to-Male transgender people refuse to undergo SRS due to the medical complications and depend on mere hormonal therapy for physical transformation. Some people, due to their political stance also refuse surgical alterations of the body. Transition is not mandatory for a transgender to accept oneself in the gender role they identify with. Cromwell draws attention to the reversal of ontological premises in trans-situated discourses. For him, trans-situated discourses, by narrating experiences, body, sexuality and identity, reorder the order of things and bring into focus the alternative experience of a community condemned hitherto.

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THE "SINCERE" RHETORIC OF EVIDENCE: RETHINKING EGODOCUMENTS

Punnya Rajendran

Abstract

This paper argues that the medical documents maintained by Dr. James E. Esdaile in Hooghly, 1845-47, exhibit certain narrative qualities which allow us to revisit and define afresh the terms "egodocument" and "egohistorical text" from some of the earlier theorisations about life-writing by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser and the French theorist Jean-Louis Jeannelle respectively. An overwhelming pressure to prove marks Esdaile's document as a unique text in the history of life-writing recognisable in terms of its evidentiary, demonstrative, and petitionary nature. The terms "egodocument" and "egohistorical text" allow us to reclaim the self-effacing yet emphatic traces of an ego that we find in such narratives in which there is a narrating "I" but what is being narrated is not a life-story but a set of observations about something other than the narrator's life.

Keywords: Egodocument, Life-writing, Medical Records, Esdaile

In 1902, the Psychic Research Company, an establishment based out of Chicago with a commitment to exploring psychic phenomena such as hypnotism, published a book titled *Mesmerism in India and its Practical Application in Surgery and Medecine.* It contained the surgical records kept by Dr. James Esdaile, a Scottish civil surgeon, during the period of his posting in Hooghly, India, in the mid-1840s. According to

his records, Esdaile conducted or supervised surgeries at the Imambarah Hospital (a charity institution run by the State which often treated convicts from the Hooghly Jails) and later at the experimental state-sponsored Mesmeric Hospital. These surgeries were allegedly painless and conducted while the patients were put under the influence of a controversial para-psychic process called mesmerism.

According to its strident supporters, mesmerism is believed to induce an insensate state in the subject which was conducive for curative purposes. While it was a particularly controversial practice within the medical community at the time, Esdaile was one among the many medical men of the 19th century who practiced it repeatedly and in public, often with the twin aims of curing patients and proving at the same time that a mesmeric cure is backed by evidence and deserving the support of a suspicious medical community. This paper argues that Esdaile's document (including its various editions over time) exhibits certain narrative qualities which allow us to revisit and define afresh the terms "egodocument" and "egohistorical text" from some of the earlier theorisations about life-writing by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser[1] and the French theorist Jean-Louis Jeannelle respectively.[2]

I. All surgeries involving mesmerism as an anaesthetic and curative means were subjected to an overwhelming pressure to prove, especially at the experimental state-sponsored Mesmeric Hospital. The State had mandated that all surgeries must be performed by Esdaile in public at this hospital, thus giving any citizen the right to scrutinise the

1. For a comprehensive overview of Presser's coinage of the neologism "egodocument" see Dekker's "Egodocuments and history: autobiographical writing in its social context since the Middle Ages" (2002).

2. Eakin writes about Jean-Louis Jeannelle's distinction between autobiographical and ego historical texts in "Living in History: Autobiography, Memoir(s), and *Mémoires*" in *Writing Life Writing: Narrative, History, Autobiography* (2020) by Paul John Eakin.

process for fraud. This pressure to prove informs the choice of words, tone, mood, and social configuration of Esdaile's narrative and can be identified as its driving rhetorical force. "If this production should be unfortunate enough to attract attention at home," writes Esdaile, "I hope that criticism will be chiefly expended upon a careful examination of the alleged facts" (*Mesmerism in India* 9). Further he adds, "What I now offer to the public is the result of only eight months mesmeric practice in a country charity hospital; but it has been sufficient to demonstrate the singular and most beneficial influence that Mesmerism exerts over the constitution of the people of Bengal" (*Mesmerism* 9).

One of the distinguishing features of the text, therefore, can be found in the fact that it is designed to be an appeal or a petition and that it is directed towards a skeptical addressee who is framed as the general public. It is an "offer to the public" and notably, an offer to demonstrate the truth. The daily logging of surgeries and cures at his clinic were thus maintained by Esdaile out of professional necessity and legal mandate rather than an autonomous and individualistic desire to record his own lived experience as a surgeon. This overwhelming *pressure to prove* itself marks Esdaile's document as a unique text in the history of life-writing recognisable in terms of its evidentiary, demonstrative, and petitionary nature. It is a mode of address rather than a site of self-representation. It is self-conscious about its expulsion from mainstream medical practice and self-conscious of History in an antagonistic manner.

"Such is the force of habit, and aversion to a new train of thought," writes Esdaile, "that this proposed extension of man's power […] has been subjected to an irrational incredulity which nothing can satisfy" (*Mesmerism* 21). The text is caught in a rhetorical struggle to validate itself. Further, it is interesting to note that Esdaile has the full attention of his readers but not their goodwill. As Clarke would write in 1874 in *Autobiographical Recollections of the Medical Profession*, "There is no

chapter in the history of Medicine more astounding and bewildering than the episode of 1837—38, when for a time animal magnetism or mesmerism engrossed the attention of the Profession and the public. (Clarke 155).

Let us first consider whether the term "egodocument" or "egohistorical text" can apply to a document such as that of Esdaile. While distinguishing between autobiographical and egohistorical texts within the broad category of life-writing, Jean-Louis Jeannelle includes testimonies (along with memoirs, chronicles, and diaries) in the latter category.[3] Esdaile's text is certainly more testimonial than diaristic in nature because he does not write in pursuit of self-knowledge or self-representation. Rather, his statements are all assertions of what he believes to be demonstrably true in the scientific sense of the term. Harking back to Presser's very early description in the 1950s of an "egodocument," we can identify Esdaile's text as one in which "an ego deliberately or accidentally discloses itself or hides itself" (Dekker 14) rather than one in which the describing subject is a continuous autobiographical presence. In other words, we might argue that egodocuments can include those texts in which the narrating "I" appears in a purely instrumental sense for the communication of a general truth.[4]

3. This essay appeared in French as "Vivre dans l'histoire: autobiographie, *memoir(s)*, et mémoires,"*Le sens du passé: pour une nouvelle approche des Mémoires*, ed. Marc Hersant, Jean-Louis Jeannelle, and Damien Zanone (2013), 351–61. It has not been translated but it is referred to in Eakin's book (Eakin 90-91). What is particularly interesting for the scope of this paper is the manner in which Jeannelle demarcates life-writing into these categories based on the intentions and scope of the narratorial voice.

4. However, it must be noted here that this is a potential reading of the term which was coined by Presser himself to argue against his fellow historians in favour of little histories over grand ones several decades before Hayden White. He went on to pioneer the introduction of personal texts such as Anne Frank's diary into a valid object of historical analysis. Despite the potentially expansive understanding of the term "egodocument" which included non-personal texts (written by the Self but not about one's own life) hinted at the above early definition, Presser himself used that description only to carve out a space for memoirs, diaries, letters and notebooks as valid components of a historical archive. Since Presser's use of the term in the 1950s, therefore, the capacities of the term has shrunk considerably over time.

At one point, Winfried Schulze does offer such a similarly inclusive interpretation of Presser's theorising of the egodocument, arguing that it can include judicial hearings, curriculum vitae, and various official records but such an interpretation, as many of his critics pointed out, does run the risk of the concept being too open-ended and losing all meaning (Dekker 12). However, I would like to propose an alternative interpretation of the term "egodocument" based on my analysis of Esdaile's document as a case study for this uncertain genre. In this light, an egodocument is one of those texts of life-writing in which the narrating "I" assumes a consciously public mode of addressing a collective or a community and identifies itself as a historical entity in terms of the success or failure of such an address. In this case, the narration is modelled to complement the imaginary figure of the addressee and the text becomes a conversation with history rather than the Self conversing with itself and through history.

The narrating "I" seeks to efface itself by recording external and objective facts as evidence to the public but at the same time, by positing itself as the recorder of facts (and therefore of Truth, as it was believed in the Lockean era), the narrating "I" also goes through a process of self-aggrandisement. At one point in the text, Esdaile likens himself to being a recorder of facts rather than a narrator, a transcriber of what happens in front of his eyes—quite within the traditions of a Defoe-like 18th century narrator who embraces external and observable facts as the most 'sincere' or truthful type of narrative. "In making these experiments, I was in the situation of a chemist who […] sets his apparatus to work in the way prescribed, and is rewarded by obtaining the same results as the first discoverer" ("Third Experiment" 59). The sense of appeal or petition to his peers is also overwhelming in the text. "I hope the time has at last come for the public, and the medical profession, *to listen patiently* to a medical man, while he relates facts that have fallen under his observation" and he also later adds that "a writer has a right to expect that his statements shall be believed till they are disproved" (*Mesmerism* 20).

II. This sense of an appeal to historical validity and the emphasis on the figure of the addressee (note the phrase " to listen patiently") involves an important element of performance and dialogism in the text. The addressee is clearly a phantom figuration which, in Esdaile's case, flickers between a specialised audience, the state, and the general public. The title page of *The Introduction of Mesmerism (With the Sanction of the Government) into the Public Hospitals of India* (1856), second edition, notes that it is "Dedicated to the Medical Profession" and Esdaile cites from the pages of several different medical journals of the time (some of them surviving to this day such as *The Lancet*), all of which pronounce mesmerism as a charade or a trick (*Introduction of Mesmerism* 8-9). The medical practitioners are, thus, a negatively constituted audience and also form the dialogic social screen within which Esdaile is able to write. The fellow doctors denounce the document itself (and are, thereby, not at all its real readers) and the premises of Esdaile's belief in mesmerism. Esdaile himself portrays these non-readers in the following unflattering terms: "Those who live by the wisdom of their ancestors […] howl against and persecute the discoverer of any new truth which disturbs their successful routine, wounds the self-love, and endangers their easy gains" (*Introduction* 9). However, he aspires for their attention even as he denounces their denunciation of his surgeries. The ideal reader of Esdaile's documents is yet to be constituted. It is not a historical reality but a narrative category of hope.

This unfulfilled figure of the addressee (a fluid image consisting of readers, spectators, and witnesses, as well as skeptics and detractors) in Esdaile's document can be found in Lord Dalhousie's response to the request put forward for certain citizens to declare to the public his support of mesmerism as medical practice. Dalhousie's response is incorporated into the para-text of the 1856 book (2nd edition) by Esdaile as if in ironic acknowledgement of the document's public status: "Having thus replied to your question and testified (as I shall always be ready to testify) to

what Dr. Esdaile actually effected in India by what he termed mesmerism, I wish to be permitted to add that I must not be considered as a discipline of the doctrines of mesmerism generally" (*Introduction* 4). The general ambiguity of the figure of the addressee is echoed in Dalhousie's position here. He believes in the results of mesmerism and that it is beneficial for the public but he will not endorse it in an official capacity or declare himself its believer.

Thus, Esdaile's text has the capacity to "fail" on its own accord in a way a memoir or autobiography cannot; the latter is a genre of writing that believes in itself while the former has no existence outside of the existential tryst it forms with its own disciplinary constraints. Its relationship to its own historical time and space is tenuous and contestable. It exists under the threat of an invalidation that is to come. We may thus qualify Esdaile's document as an outward-facing text. This becomes the key feature of an egodocument in general as well. Eagleton's description of the social function of rhetoric throughout late Antiquity and the Middle Ages can very easily provide for us the minimum criteria for recognising egodocuments of the above variety. "Rhetoric for the ancient world was language as public event and social relationship. If it was performative, it was also dialogical, as a form of speech which constantly overheard itself in the ears of others" (Eagleton 11).

Similarly, "sincerity" is identified by Peter Burke as a Renaissance concept which later becomes closely associated with autobiographical writing (Burke 19-20). The sentiment of 'being true to oneself' recurs in literary history as a fashionable practice of self-articulation that emerges at a certain historical juncture when people become more aware of the difference between an inner and outer self. Esdaile's case, we may argue, harks back to a more classical notion of "impression" rather than representation, i.e. giving a good impression of oneself to others rather

than self-representation. This means that the egohistorical is a quality of communicative language rather than a text or a textual object. It denotes a conscious dialogue with history rather than an introspective account which is open to a historical reading. The egodocument is, thus, also a product of the Cartesian imagination and the narrative toll taken on the subject by demands of empiricism and rationality. In this effort to keep the personal at bay and to address the public rather than the private imaginary reader of the memoir or the diary, the trace of the autobiographical one finds in an egodocument is unique.

III. Apart from distinguishing the autobiographical from the egohistorical, Jeannelle also creates another differentiation of life-writing into that of "major lives" and "ordinary lives." While the former involves the lives of those who have towering historical presences (for example, the heads of state and freedom fighters), the latter category reflects "the humble existence of anonymous people" (Eakin 67). The latter category of micro-histories which enter into contestation with grand historical narratives is today a familiar category for scholars. The former category can be understood in a straightforward pre-critical manner as the recorded lives of famous personalities. It is also more easily identified in the recent past as a memoir, that is, texts which retain a fundamental orientation towards history even when the subject matter is the life of an unimportant individual. In a memoir, an ordinary person's "humble existence" is narrated in tandem with the larger events of national history. Such texts too are outward-facing to a certain extent because they tend to "focus on the times in which the life was lived and the significant others of the memoirist's world" rather than on the private life of one individual (Eakin 67). This is also what Andre Malraux calls "the repudiation of the private" (Malraux in Eakin 194) in memoirs.

Esdaile's text escapes both these categories. Esdaile is not a "major" historical figure to the extent that his life does not reflect the

trajectory of an individual who rises to a position of national or international significance (and thus, rendering, in retrospect, his early years worth recounting). His life is not "major" in the same way as that of Gandhi or Abraham Lincoln. Nor is he narrating his life with any monistic sense of a single Life (from infancy to adulthood, shaped by sociopolitical circumstances) belonging to an introspective organic individual. Esdaile, however, does not imagine his own life as "humble" or ordinary either. In the text, instead, we find a particularly aggrandised version of the Self.

This is best exemplified in the preface to *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance* (1852) in which Esdaile compares himself to Galileo by citing a letter written by Galileo to Kepler about a professor of philosophy who refused to accept observable evidence through a telescope. The danger to Esdaile's reputation among his professional peers is likened to the threat of death faced by Galileo (*Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance* x). This is an interesting textual moment that illuminates the nature of the narrating "I" in this document. Esdaile's self-identity is not simply expressed but is magnified or refracted in the text through the historical figure of Galileo. His narrating voice is caught in a limbo of great expectations because he hopes that at any moment, as a result of his testifying to a truth that is apparently ahead of its times, he will enter the cosmology of great personalities in the annals of Western medical history.

More importantly, we should note here of this self-conscious autobiographical manoeuvre of locating one's own identity in the same coordinates as that of an existing historical figure, rather than asserting one's own individual uniqueness. Sameness rather than individuality appears to be the narratorial aspiration in the document. This comparison also indicates that Esdaile's own identity is in a state of incompletion which is also a state of non-recognition by the others that he is, in fact, the same as Galileo—an immensely recognisable figure for all educated men in the 19th century. Sameness seldom features in documents of

life-writing as an autobiographical articulation of the Self. The desire to duplicate oneself in another's image is a narrative feature that begs our attention within the study of life-writing. Galileo becomes the narrator's historical double, his mirror-image, his referential model. Galileo also becomes a prophetic textual figure which hints at the future validation of the text and of its narrator; an icon that navigates Esdaile's relationship with history from "humble" to "major." Esdaile does not identify with Galileo the way in which the narrator of a testimonio identifies with his/her community and projects a collective Self[5] nor does he seek a psychological identification with Galileo, of whom he knows very little as a person. Rather, he wishes to mirror the external coordinates of Galileo's identity within a history of ideas in Western medicine. It is an identification devoid of interiority.

The relationship between Esdaile and Galileo is further consolidated in the text in the form of the Church's refusal to accept mesmerism as a Christian practice as evidenced in the correspondence between the Archbishop of Lausanne and Geneva and the Sacred penitentiary at Rome (*Mesmerism* 41-43). However, soon afterwards in *Natural and Mesmeric Clairvoyance*, Esdaile also makes a reference to Galileo's recanting under the threat of death. "I have been in the habit of excusing Galileo's recantation," writes Esdaile, "by likening him to the keeper of a madhouse whose patients have risen in rebellion […] Surely, it would be quite allowable to save one's life in such a predicament" (*Clairvoyance* x). The prospect of recanting, no doubt, casts a pall over Esdaile's assertions of fact in the text. It is yet another feature of the egodocument that because it is an outward-facing text, it holds the ability to delete itself officially and to have never been said.

5. See George Yudice's argument in "Testimonio and Postmodernism" that the witness/narrator of a testimonio writes, not as a representative, but as an agent of a collective memory.

We may think about several other varieties of life-writing (such as autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, and even personal letters) in which the possibility of reversing the act of narration, of withdrawing the spoken word, of *unspeaking* in some sense, is incompatible with the confessional and interiorised nature of the text. While recanting is a term associated with the Church and with the judiciary, all public documents carry this subtextual capacity to be withdrawn. When it comes to public documents of this kind, it produces a very specific type of "ego" or "I" which narrates under the possibility of having to recant.[6] This is a contrast to the relatively absolute quality of truth-telling one finds in autobiographical texts.

IV. Lastly, we understand from Esdaile's text that a egohistorical document, being a text of technical expertise or a treatise or a survey/ interview of some kind, forms the unexpected substratum upon which the autobiographical trace of a truly subaltern subject may be formed. In Hooghly, during the 19th century, the impoverished and decrepit image of the native emerges in medical discourse as a body afflicted with the so-called 'tropical' diseases. Many of these tropical diseases were markedly spectacular in nature, involving inflammatory diseases such as elephantiasis which results in engorged and disfigured body parts. While there are records of such diseases affecting the poorer sections of Bengali society, this diseased native patient as a speaking subject is hard to find among documents of the period. Even in cases when the doctor might have interacted with the patient, such conversations were seldom retained in the form of records of a testimonial nature as they were unnecessary. However, Esdaile's practice of mesmerism and the associated pressure to prove its effects in public results in the meticulous

6. Recantation constitutes a unique social function of language which is, for example, explored by Kate Roddy in "Recasting Recantation in 1540s England: Thomas Becon, Robert Wisdom, and Robert Crowley" (2016) in which she talks about the "inherent instability of meaning" (76) in a recantation and how it is used for subversive purposes.

recording of every interaction in his clinic. The figure of the speaking native patient is thus allowed to emerge in this document and this figure is configured rather unconsciously between the poles of speech and silence.

If Galileo is the narrator's historical double, the native patient is his material double whose presence is recorded as a verbal and physical manifestation of Esdaile's truth. Under the section titled "Questions Put to Patient" Esdaile notes down the interaction between Madhab Kaura and himself in the presence of two witnesses appointed to attest to the authenticity of the process (*Mesmerism* 47—49). A series of questions are asked to which the patient gives simple Yes or No answers. At the end of the questioning, Esdaile notes that "[h]aving answered all these questions readily and frankly, he began to cry, thinking it was some kind of judicial investigation, I suppose" (*Mesmerism* 49). This speaking patient is not an agent or an ego or a Self in the same manner as the narrator of the document or any of the other witnesses in the clinic who attest to this conversation (the attestation is considered to be proof that the patient was not in pain or conning the public in exchange for money).

Note the phrase "I suppose" at the end of the sentence. Esdaile is not entirely sure why the patient is crying but he assumes that the patient must have mistaken the questioning as an interrogation. This gives us some clue regarding the thoroughly uninformed condition of the patient. Elsewhere in the journal, the infected thumb of a patient called Sibehurn Sing is cut off while under the trance without his knowledge. Upon waking up, the patient exclaims in surprise to find his thumb missing and the following interactions ensues. ""Who did it ?" "God knows." "How did it happen, has it fallen off itself?" "I can't tell—I know nothing about it." (*Mesmerism* 209). The patient's words attest to the medical validity of the cure but the patient experiences the cure as a miracle rather than as medical procedure. The patient, in the above interaction, is participating in the egodocument like a subject would participate in census-taking or

feature in an economic survey. But unlike in a survey, the clinical procedure along with the pressure to prove, ensures that the native patient's words are sanctified (for their use-value) even as his Self and his ego are being denied narrative relevance. The patient's words and his body are an integral part of the egohistorical document but without providing a space for the emergence of his ego as a speaking subject. Thus, the egodocument finds itself in a relationship with the unconscious autobiographical trace of other subjectivities which form the material conditions that permit the text to come into being.

Esdaile's document is predicated entirely on the free and limitless availability of such unwitting patients from the jail. They are ideal subjects for Esdaile's egohistorical efforts precisely because they are denied an ego. A native patient is the ideal subject, according to Esdaile, on account of his/her supreme passivity and ignorance regarding the grand mission to which s/he is made an unwitting party. What becomes particularly ironic here is that Esdaile's evidentiary document is fuelled by a Cartesian logic but it requires a thoroughly anti-Cartesian non-thinking, non-knowing subject who functions exactly like an object. "The success I have met with is mainly to be attributed, I believe," writes Esdaile, "to my patients being the simple, unsophisticated children of nature; neither thinking, questioning, nor remonstrating, but passively submitting to my pleasure, without in the smallest degree understanding my object or intentions" (*Mesmerism* 27).

The egodocument carries traces of the subaltern whose speech is, otherwise, marked only by the fact of its absence in the annals of history. It is precisely its foundations of false consciousness that permit the egohistorical document to unwittingly give way to certain voices from the margins. In service of the truth, Esdaile even records those utterances by the patient which are considered gibberish by the onlookers. For example, in one instance, a patient under the trance says, "I am his father and mother, and had given him life again" (*Mesmerism* 46). There

is no attempt made by Esdaile to explain or understand this pronouncement. That is not the narrative function of the egodocument in this case. The patient's words are recorded along with all the other observations about what the patient is saying and doing while under the trance with an empiricist zeal and belief in the complete disjunction between the patient and the manifestation of evidence on the patient.

The recording of voices, sans ego (thereby silenced even in the act of speech), within the egohistorical document allows us to further map its position within the field of life-writing. The subaltern voice appears in the egohistorical document in the form of an "untamed fragment" or "the residuum of a dismembered past" (Guha 37). It does not exemplify a complete representation of the subject. The voice of the subaltern appears as a notation inside the text, both trivial and grandiose in terms of its function. Its non-representation of the native patient "violates the actual sequence" (Guha 39) of his lived experience for the sake of the coherence of a colonial medical anthropology.

I have borrowed the terms "egodocument" and "egohistorical text" from the writings of Jacques Presser and Jean-Louis Jeannelle respectively in order to characterise Esdaile's medical journals as a distinctive category of life-writing marked by its own narrative peculiarities and linguistic functions. In doing so, I have also extrapolated these terms from the context in which they were used by these scholars. In the recent past, academic scholarship in the field of life-writing has gravitated towards the form of the autobiography and the memoir, leaving behind little opportunity to consider the outward-facing or public "ego" underlying the prosaic documents that record facts and prefer the use of a disciplinary rather than personal voice for narration.

As we can see in the above sections, the terms "egodocument" and "egohistorical text" allow us to reclaim the self-effacing yet emphatic traces of an ego that we find in such narratives, most of which have thus

far been of interest only to sociologists and historians—probably on account of the fact while there is a narrating "I," what is being narrated is not a life-story but a set of observations about something other than the narrator's life. Thus, the process of referencing the autobiographical is equal to referencing new ways of knowing and "unlikely documents" such as "a deportation list, an art exhibit, reality TV, Internet websites and chat rooms, memos and propaganda documents" (Perreault and Kadar 2) surface in the historical archives every now and then forcing us to reconsider the horizons of the field. Texts that are documentary in nature, like Esdaile's medical entries and public entreaties, can be called an "egodocument" in order to resuscitate their "unlikely" value as important examples of life-writing, not only because they contribute to our understand of an individual's life but because they attune us to certain social functions of language as well.

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INTERWEAVING OF MEMORY AND 'POSTMEMORY': A STUDY OF HOLOCAUST MEMORIES IN ART SPIEGELMAN'S GRAPHIC MEMOIR *THE COMPLETE MAUS*

Deepthy Mohan

Abstract:

Art Spiegelman's two-volume graphic novel, *The Complete Maus* is a novel which presents the traumatic memories of the author's parents, Vladek and Anja, which left deep imprint on their psyche. It depicts Vladek's experiences in the Holocaust, and it also portrays his relationship with his son, Art Spiegelman. As Vladek's story is told by him directly to his son in a series of interviews which is then made in to a comic book, it can be considered largely a biographical work. But *Maus* defies definition in terms of genre. It is a mix of biography, autobiography, memoir, fiction all rolled in to one and told in the comic medium. Or else we can say that *Maus* exists somewhere outside of the genres.

Spiegelman's two-volume graphic narrative *Maus* depicts the memories that he recollects related to the trauma experienced by Art's father, Vladek, a Holocaust survivor and it also displays how this trauma is passed on to his son, the writer of this work who was born after World War II. *Maus* is the story about the life of the Holocaust survivors and it is also about the experiences of the Holocaust itself. The paper applies Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' to *Maus* which is a synthesis of the memory and postmemory of the Nazi genocide. The multi-layered narrative structure of the work helps the author to synthesise memory

with postmemory. The paper also analyse in detail the presentation of the experiences of the Holocaust survivors using the frame work of 'collective memory' and the form of graphic narrative.

Key Words: Graphic novel, Holocaust, postmemory, collective memory, metanarrative, trauma

Trauma in its nature is difficult to define. As Cathy Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* says, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (1996, 5). The victim is traumatized by not only the events but also by the way it occurred and the experience may vary from person to person. Thus these events mostly appear in the form of memories which are not bound by time and they may not appear chronologically. There are two kinds of trauma presented in Art Spiegelman's two-volume graphic novel, *The Complete Maus*. One is the personal trauma as experienced by Spiegelman due to the loss of his mother and the other one is transgenerational trauma that is passed on to him from his Holocaust-survived parents.

By referring to neurological studies, Jeffrey K. Olick in his article "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures" states that,

> Memories are not unitary entities, stored away as coherent units to be called up for wholesale at a later date. Neural networks channels bits and pieces called 'engrams' to different places in the brain and store them there in different ways. The process of remembering, therefore, does not involve the 'reappearance' or 'reproduction' of an experience in its original form, but the cobbling together of a 'new' memory (1999, 340).

Maus is a graphic novel which presents the traumatic memories of the author Art Spiegelman's parents, Vladek and Anja, which left deep imprint on their psyche. It depicts Vladek's experiences in the Holocaust,

and also sketches his relationship with his son, Art. As Vladek's story is told by him directly to his son in a series of interviews which is then made in to a comic book, it can be considered largely a biographical work. But *Maus* defies definition in terms of genre. It is a mix of biography, autobiography, memoir, fiction all rolled in to one and told in the comic medium. Or else we can say that *Maus* exists somewhere outside of the genres. It traces his experiences and those of his family from pre-war Poland to Auschwitz to his eventual return home.

In this novel the Jews are drawn as mice and the Nazis as cats. This allegorical presentation itself attracted critical attention to the work. Spiegelman drew *Maus* in black-and-white panels using a simple style which heightens the impact of its theme. He uses many literary devices from visual foreshadowing to frequent flashbacks interspersed with flash forwards that creates a long-lasting impression in the reader's mind. The work as a whole takes the form of a memoir by Art in which he tells us of his interviews with his father. Thus the novel is based on his father's testimony in which he talks about his obnoxious life under the Nazis. He narrates his experiences in the concentration camp and the constant struggles he had to undergo to keep himself alive. As he tells his story, Art's voice give way to Vladek's, so the bulk of the narrative technically becomes a flashback.

The book is the story of Vladek's persecution and survival and it is interconnected with the story of Spiegelman's effort to present it on page. Spiegelman's painstaking efforts to get the visual details correct is highly commendable. He consulted drawings by Holocaust survivors and photographs and maps to ensure that nothing was misrepresented. He has included many of them in the narrative as well. Due to this combination of research and personal narrative, *Maus* provides a realistic portrayal of the Holocaust, thus giving it a historical dimension as well.

Revisiting the painful past is not an easy task and traumatic memory in its nature is difficult to communicate as it is not something that function chronologically. In *Maus* we can see a mix of past and present. Visual intersection of past and present appears throughout the panels. If the memories are not encoded in words and in a chronological order, it becomes difficult for the victim to retell the event. Many studies have highlighted this peculiarity of memories being fragmented and that it is really difficult for the human beings to recollect past events from his memories in chronological order. This episodic and fragmented nature of memory is reflected in the novel at various instances. Vladek's narration has its own breaks and gaps and it is Art who intervenes and tries to bring an order by asking questions repeatedly.

In the case of certain tragic events that a person has gone through, the impact of such events is so unsettling that words sometimes fall short of representing it in narratives. That is why the graphic form plays such an important part in retelling these traumatic events as the author can recreate the traumatic experiences in the form of images here. Another advantage of images is that they easily enter the mind of the readers and leaves a lasting impression.

Maus can be considered a reservoir of memories. But it is not just Vladek's memories that are presented here, even though it constitutes the major part of the novel. We can see others like Mala also trying to contribute. Even Vladek's memories will certainly be influenced by those around him, especially those who were with him during his days in the concentration camp. It is not necessary that all the incidents that he narrates are his own personal or direct experiences. He might be including some information which he got from others round him. One can also find Art's memories in the novel wherein he recounts incidents related to his mother. So, in that way, one can highlight the notion of 'collective memory' related to the novel. It is Maurice Halbwachs who developed

the notion of 'collective memory' which indicates that personal memories are located in a broader collective framework and that memory is a social phenomenon.

There are at least three levels of narrative in *Maus*: the story of Vladek's experiences during the Holocaust — the narrative; the story of his narration of these experiences to his son Art— the metanarrative; and, Art's story of composing the narrative — the meta-metanarrative. The narrative layer deals with Vladek's quest for survival. We follow Vladek from pre-war Poland in the 1940s, struggling for surviving the Holocaust. Vladek is our eye-witness of the horrors of the Holocaust. The metanarrative is about the communication between father and son which reveals more about their relationship. Here Art interviews Vladek and they discuss his testimony. We can also see here Art questioning Vladek's memories about his past. This narrative is where past and present meet. The third narrative is that of Art's meta-comments. It is Art's story alone, paralleled with his interviews with his father. This is where he philosophizes and gives meta-commentary on the creation and publication of *Maus*.

The first volume of the book titled *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* is a restructuring of history in author's own language, through the medium of comics. It is a painful process for Vladek as the subtitle suggests. The whole process is for him just like reliving those painful days. Towards the end of the second volume of *Maus*, Vladek protests to Artie, "All such things of the war, I tried to put out of my mind once and for all…Until you rebuild me all this from your questions" (1986, 98). Vladek's bleeding is his son Artie's textual, visual rebuilding. In this process of rebuilding history, Spiegelman interweaves past and present many a times. One can see this mix of past and present even by means of the merging of panels. For instance, when Vladek is narrating his experiences of serving in army years back to Art, that there is an intrusion

of Art's legs, which represents present, in to the panel which portrayed Vladek in army uniform, which is a representation of past (see fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale I: My Father Bleeds History*. Pantheon, 1986.

The Holocaust has profoundly affected the Spiegelman family. Art Spiegelman, not only the author but also one of the characters in *Maus*, is fully aware of this though he represents the post-Holocaust generation that did not have the first-hand experience of the war time trial. But he carries inside his mind a kind of guilt over not sharing his parent's experience of Holocaust which haunts him throughout. Art knows very well that his life has been affected by his parent's psychological wounds from the past. As Joshua Brown claims, "The ghosts of this past swirl around Art who is haunted by the irretrievable experiences of the dead, their residue found in familial relationships characterized by guilt and manipulation" (1988, 93).

Art's mother takes her life in 1968 without leaving any note and his father becomes estranged from him. They do not understand each other. Vladek considers his son's life devoted to art as meaningless, while Art cannot comprehend his father's odd habits and unusual behaviour. The distance between them is also caused by Art's neglect of

him, as he visits him very rarely. For Vladek, the interviews made by Art became a means of reconnecting with his son.

Maus depicts how the trauma experienced by Spiegelman's father, who is a Holocaust survivor, is passed on to his son in the form of recollections, even though his son was born after World War II. Spiegelman suffers from not only the trauma that was passed on to him by his father, but also by the personal trauma caused by his mother's suicide. His personal trauma is reflected in his comics, 'Prisoner on the Hell Planet' which is included in the novel. Since Spiegelman has no direct experience of the Holocaust, the tragic events are mediated to him through interviews with his father. He re-interprets it by writing this graphic novel and in doing so, he acquires what can correspond to Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (2001, 22). It distinguishes memory acquired from personal experience from the memory that is passed down to the following generations.

According to Hirsch, "postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (2001, 22). The graphic interpretation of testimony in Maus is, to some extent, a synthesis of the memory and postmemory of the Nazi genocide.

Spiegelman has no first-hand experience of the Holocaust and he uses a distancing technique to show this generational distance by presenting animal figures in the novel. He uses different animals for people of different nations: mice for Jews, cats for Germans, pigs for Poles, dogs for Americans, and frogs for the French. He makes use of the concept of antagonism between cats and mice to represent the predator and the prey. This distancing technique of using anthropomorphic animals

enables Spiegelman to ward off the accusations that may arise in relation to the inappropriateness of handling an event that he has not lived though.

The only part of the book where the characters are depicted as humans is Spiegelman's comics insert "Prisoner on the Hell Planet". Here there are human figures and in turn no authorial distancing as Spiegelman is presenting his personal experiences following his mother's suicide in 1968. This comic strip appears in the first volume of *Maus* and it is distinct from the rest of the novel in style. The page numbers of *Maus* stops as it begins and its pages are set against a black background that stands out as a black line when the book is closed. In short, it appears as a separate entity and at the same time, because of its personal connection of the story told through it, it becomes an integral part of the work.

The drawings of the 'Hell Planet' section are totally different from the rest of the volume. Not only are they drawings of humans rather than of mice and cats, but they express grief and pain in much more direct, melodramatic, expressionistic fashion – tears running down faces, skulls confronting the viewer, Vladek lying on the top of the casket screaming "Anna" and so on. Art himself is dressed in the striped concentration camp uniform that has come down to him through his parent's stories. He thus metaphorically parallels his own confinement in his guilt with their imprisonment in the concentration camp. Art remains imprisoned in his camp uniform and drawing *Maus* represents for him an attempt both to get deeper in to his postmemory and to find a way out.

Art's sense of guilt is actually aggravated by revisiting this personal memory and he becomes painfully aware of the lack of empathy he exhibited towards his mother. He feels that this contributed to her sense of loneliness which ultimately led to her suicide. He remembers her asking him: "Artie…you…still…love…me…don't you?" (1986, 103). His insensitive reaction still hurts him: "I turned away, resentful of the way she tightened the umbilical cord. 'Sure, ma!'" (1986, 103). His sense of guilt is heightened by the fact that Anja left no suicide note.

Maus is dominated by the absence of Anja's voice, the destruction of her diaries, her missing note. Anja is recollected by others, she remains the visual and not a verbal presence. She speaks in sentences imagined by her son, recollected by her husband. She is in a way shaped to the needs and desires of the one who remembers. Vladek explains to Art, "One time I had a bad day…and all of these things I destroyed." "You what?" Art exclaims. "After Anja died I had to make an order with everything…these papers had too many memories, so I burned them." (1986, 158). Much of the text rests on her absence and the destruction of her papers. Through her picture and her missing voice Anja haunts the story told in both volumes.

Art's depression arises from his feeling of incompetence which increases his feeling of guilt. He feels that he has failed to meet the expectations of his parents and has become a source of disappointment for them. He is convinced that he could never emerge from his brother Richieu's shadow. Richieu was killed during the war and though he has never met him, as he was born after his death, he considers Richieu as a perfect kid. He is unable to overcome his inferiority even though he is fully aware of the absurdity of rivalry with his dead brother. His sense of himself as an imperfect substitute for his brother is confirmed by the fact that his parents keep a photograph of Richieu in their bedroom, but no pictures of him could be seen anywhere there. Thus Richieu's presence in the form of his photograph, which in fact is a powerful source of memory, and his parent's recollections of him, looms large in the book.

Photographs are considered storehouse of memories. They function as emotional stimuli which triggers train of past memories. Spiegelman has included three photographs in *Maus*, one of Art and his mother in the first volume and other of Artie's dead brother Richieu and the third one of Vladek in a starched camp uniform, both in the second volume. These photographs connect the past and the present, the story of the father and the story of the son, because these photographs are documents both of memory and postmemory. The photos in the novel

represent what has been violently destroyed. They tell their own narrative of loss and mourning.

The impact of Vladek's traumatic experience of the Holocaust complicates the father-son relationship. Vladek often acts as if he is still in Auschwitz and not in New York's Rego Park or the Catskill Mountains, the summer resort where he suffers lonely during his old age. An example for how the traumatic memories of past still haunts Vladek can be seen when he scolds Artie for spilling cigarette ashes in the room. Vladek was actually talking about how prisoners like him had to toil in the concentration camps and how they were forced to clean the stables. The term 'stable' that he utters connects his past to the present (see fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale I: My Father Bleeds History*. Pantheon. 1986

The multi-layered narrative structure of *Maus* enables Spiegelman to synthesise memory with postmemory. The memory of the survivor, Vladek and the postmemory of his son, Art, do not appear in opposition. Spiegelman distances himself from his parent's trauma by using animal figures, and this distance is only lost in the comic strip 'Prisoner on the Hell Planet', in which he relates his personal traumatic memories. But even here he connects his personal traumatic memory with the historical trauma of the Holocaust. We can say that while 'Prisoner' is the work of memory, *Maus* itself is the art of postmemory.

A problem with memory of course is the inability to remember each and every detail. It is quite natural that one cannot retain details of each and every past incident in his memory. Those gaps are filled either by himself using imagination or with the help of others. There are instances in the novel where we can see the intrusion of son's interpretation in to the father's memory. An example is the episode which is introduced in the context of Vladek's telling of the endless roll calls in Auschwitz. The page opens with two panels depicting long rows of prisoners. In the first panel the prisoners are anonymous; all are in striped prisoner garb making the crowd of prisoner one great mass of undistinguishable faces. The second, slightly taller panel zooms in on a portion of the group, making it possible to discern individual faces—some mice, some pigs. In it, a 'mouse' prisoner steps forward to protest to the guard: "I don't belong here with all these Yids and Polacks! I'm a **German** like you! (1992, 50). In the next row, comprised of a symmetrical pair of panels, doubt about the prisoner's identity is visually expressed, a doubt that can be attributed to Artie, the visual narrator, of Vladek's story.

In the first panel, the prisoner is a mouse against a black background. In the second panel of the pair, Artie in the foreground asks Vladek, "Was he *really* a German?" (1992, 50).Visually, doubt as to the prisoner's identity is represented with a heavily shaded replica of the

previous panel in the background, with a meaningful substitution of the prisoner's mouse head with a cat head. Because Vladek is not sure of the past, it comes to the complete decision of Artie to finalise whether that prisoner was German or not. Either he can draw the prisoner as a cat or as a mouse. Here we can say that Artie struggles to find an appropriate illustration as he has no way to verify the story which actually visualises the problem of memory. But this does not wean the readers from believing the story; and Art's decision to draw the prisoner as a cat shows the intrusion of fictional elements in Valdek's memoir (see fig. 3)

Fig. 3. Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale II: And Here My Troubles Began*. Penguin, 1992

Mark Freeman in *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* argues that even though memories are partly removed from our previous experiences, they "deserve to be considered real and potentially important as sources of information about ourselves and our past" (1993, 91). Memory fragments the past events and causes it to undergo many changes. That is why Art states that he is trying to portray his father as accurately as possible. He knows that memory has its limits. Thus by reflecting on the difficulties and acknowledging the possible gaps and omissions of remembering and knowing for certain, this graphic memoir reminds readers that what they are reading is a very human story, one in which the narrator is not a super, all-knowing being, but rather an ordinary person telling his life in his own terms as best as he can. Memory is a

multi-disciplinary endeavour which requires the researcher to use tools from different disciplines to analyse and find meaning. Through remembering, one can recognise the victims, acknowledge their pain and make sense of the past. Thus these life histories presented from the perspective of collective memories help us to receive new versions of the past in different and interesting ways.

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BLENDING TRADITIONAL AND MODERN: EXPLORING THE MINIMALIST LIFE NARRATIVE ACROSS GENRES

Alicia Jacob

"Love people and use things, because the opposite never works"

-Joshua Fields Millburn

Life writing is a modern phenomenon. Literary criticism of autobiography, memoirs and life narratives is a late 20th century and early 21st-century development and has become truly interdisciplinary (Hobbs 407). Life narratives is a form of identity creation that incorporates heterogeneous events in life to identify oneself and create self-continuity and meaning in life (McAdams, *The Psychology* 100). Life narratives, in the broadest sense, refers to self-referential writing or the writing of one's own life and is often associated with the genre of Autobiography. With the emergence of postmodernism and postcolonialism, the association of the term 'autobiography' to life narratives was considered as one of exclusion and thereby considered inadequate to describe an extensive range of genres and practices of life narratives as it undermines other self-referential writings like memoirs, slave narratives, women's narratives, testimonials etc. Smith and Watson in their book *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* identifies two terms 'life writing' and 'life narrative' as "inclusive of heterogeneity of self-referential practice" (Smith and Watson 4).

> "Life writing as a general term for writing that takes a life, one's own or another's, as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or explicitly self-referential and therefore

> autobiographical...life narrative, by contrast, as a general term for acts of self-presentation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer's life as their subject, whether written, performative, visual, filmic, or digital. In other words, we employ the term life writing for written forms of the autobiographical, and life narrative to refer to autobiographical acts of any sort." (Smith and Watson 4).

This definition categorises life writing as a subcategory of life narrative that includes only the written forms of self-referential writing and life narrative as an embodiment of written, visual, or digitalised genres of any pattern that are self-referential in nature. This paper attempts to explore the works of two individuals, Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus, together known as 'The Minimalists'; who have popularised the cultural movement of Minimalism around the world. The paper analyses the different genres used; written, visual and performative modes like books, documentary, social media platforms, website and podcasts; as a means of self-representation and how a fusion of traditional and modern genres invariably creates a life narrative.

Minimalism is essentially a post-World War II art movement, especially in the genres of visual arts, music, architecture etc, which gained momentum in the 1960s and 70s. But 'minimalism' as discussed in this paper inherently varies from this idea and is more of a lifestyle change and cultural movement. "Minimalism has traditionally been linked to pure, intentional art and design concepts. But we believe it's much more than that. We define minimalism as the process of identifying what is essential in your life and eliminating the rest. Less is more" (Ofei). Minimalism, in its broadest sense, refers to a cultural movement which began as a resistance to the consumerist lifestyle which focused on accumulating more and more material possession. There is no single definition for this concept. Joshua Becker, a follower of the minimalist

lifestyle, defines minimalism as owning fewer possessions. "Minimalism is intentionally living with only the things I really need—those items that support my purpose. I am removing the distraction of excess possessions so I can focus more on those things that matter most" (Becker). "Minimalism is all about living with less. This includes less financial burdens such as debt and unnecessary expenses" (Murray).

Minimalism, as a practice, existed centuries back but it was reintroduced into the 20th-century consumerist society as a key to finding happiness. It was popularised by two Americans, Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus, through their Documentary, *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things*, released in 2015 and since then they helped over 20 million people live meaningful lives with less through their website, books, podcast, and documentary. They also have a Netflix Documentary, *The Minimalist: Less Is Now*, directed by Matt D'Avella scheduled to be released on 1st January 2020. Psychological scientists and practitioners opine that life, when turned into narratives, becomes beneficial to the producers as well as the consumers of this narrative. "Beginning at a certain point in the human lifespan, many people become authors of their life, constructing internalised and evolving narratives to the self to provide their lives as well as others with some semblance of meaning and purpose" (McAdams, *Life Narratives* 590). This holds true for these two minimalists.

Life narrative created by these two individuals is exceptional with respect to the different means used by them to create their story. They do not rely on a single mode of transaction but on multiple genres. Owing to technological advances and the availability of a number of digital platforms, a wide new range of possibilities are now open to convey life narratives. In an article, *Reading the Self in Selfies*, the author analysing recent theories from auto/biography and media studies, associate selfies as a text and means of representation which creates meaning in a

narrative framework (Westley 388). From selfies to the content posted and shared through social platforms, all of these enable an individual to create a linear narrative of self-representation and identity. Smith and Watson agree with this concept and talks about how visual, auditory, digital and social media platforms become a means of creating life narratives. "Autographic. Installations. Performance art. Blogs. StoryCorps. Facebook. Myspace. PostSecret. LiveJournal. YouTube. "This I Believe." Second Life. Open Social. Webcam documentaries. These are just some of the diverse forms utilizing new media and locations for visual self-presentation and self-narration. As the platforms, templates, and modes of communicative exchange increase and intersect hypertextually, they add to the forms of visual life narrative produced during the twentieth-century virtual forms of social networking systems that link people around the world instantaneously and interactively" (Smith and Watson 167). This legitimizes Millburn and Nicodemus's use of various genres and social platforms to create their life narratives. But what makes them stand out is their fusion of both traditional and modern methods of self-representation. The function of online representation and traditional means of representation remain invariable even though the modes of demonstration differ.

In the essay *The Autobiographical Pact*, Phillippe Lejeune identifies the distinguishing elements of an Autobiography, the term autobiography here by extension refers to a wide range of life narratives, as a contract between the author and the reader. "What defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name. And this is true also for the one who is writing the text" (Lejeune 19). According to Lejeune, the author of the work and the narrator should share "vital statistics" which can be identified by the reader. Taking this into account, every platform used by the Minimalists be it their website, books, social media, podcasts, and documentary are produced and operated by Millburn and Nicodemus,

and share self-referential experiences. But then comes the question of collaboration between two authors. Can self-referential writing or narrative be created through collaboration?

Collaborative forms of life narratives is a contemporary initiative where two or more people jointly produced the text working together in a joint intellectual or aesthetic activity. "Contemporary writers, artists and critic working in prose, installation art, cinemas, video and visual and performance art frequently chose collaborative modes of working, often to put forth and simultaneously render ambiguity in their representation of subjectivity, cooperation, history and/or authenticity within the life narrative they construct...Collaborative life narrative emerges as a form of both collusion and contestation as an instrument of dominance and of resistance" (McHugh and Komisaruk viii-ix). Millburn and Nicodemus have been friends since the age of 7 and have been a constant presence as well as influence in each other's life. The background, culture, lifestyle and growth trajectory of these two individuals are similar in every aspect and works together to better represent, authenticate and even provide additional credibility to their life narrative. Although their website, YouTube channel and books are co-authored/produced by the Minimalists, the documentary and the podcasts are done through additional collaboration with other individuals leading a similar lifestyle. Their documentary, *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things,* includes narratives from Jay Austin, Tammy Strobel, Joshua Becker, Colin Wright, to name a few, and again these individuals share a similar lifestyle, and their experiences and attestations provide more credibility to the life narrative as well as enable the reader to associate with the narrative. The same goes for the podcast, which is around 267 in number till date, most of which are conversations among Milburn and Nicodemus and occasionally has a guest speaker to elucidate on the topic of deliberation.

The merging of genres and the method of collaboration still renders the works of Millburn and Nicodemus the status of life narratives. Yet life narratives are not just governed by the genre used or the author, it is much more complex in its structure and subject. There are 5 areas of autobiographical subjectivity that add value to the life narrative and they are Memory, Experience, Identity, Embodiment and Agency (Smith and Watson 16). Each of these constitutive processes of autobiographical subjectivity will be analysed in the context of the life narrative by the Minimalists to explore its complexity.

Self-referential writing has memory as an inherent element as it connects the past and the present as a collective whole. Most life narratives, in order to create a chronological framework, begin somewhere in the past that marks the beginning or turning point in a person's life. The Minimalists do employ memory as a means of meaning creation in their memoir *Everything that Remains,* the documentary as well as in their Podcasts where they recollect their past life choices, the trauma associated with their childhood which led them to take many life decisions and the events in their past that propelled them to adhere to a new path of minimalism. They go a step forward and take the readers on a step-by-step journey in achieving this lifestyle. "All biographies are retrospective in the same sense. Though they read chronologically forward, they are composed essentially backwards" (Smith and Watson 32). This is not essentially true in the case of the Minimalists, as all of their work, the memoir and the documentary, begin in the present and move back and forth connecting the past and the present. Moreover, other modes like their website, podcast and social media platforms take away the limit of autobiographical writing, which can only incorporate a certain timeline. The Minimalists, by their reliance on digital media, create a linear structure of narration that is never-ending. The followers/readers are part of their journey which is ongoing and is continuously updated on social media platforms.

Memory and experience are entwined subjects that make a life narrative more personal. Experiences, more often than not, are mediated through memory and is an interpretation of our past and is an influence on our present. Experience creates subjectivity, it is the experience that moulds individuals into associating with a certain identity in the social sphere, thus making them a subject constituted through experience. Both Joshua Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus share their experience of living in a toxic household with divorced parents who are struggling with addiction. Need for money has always been a driving force that influenced these two friends to chase the American Dream. Like every other American they too began associating happiness to their material possessions until a great tragedy in Joshua's life prompted him to reassess his situation and adopt a minimalist lifestyle. Soon his friend Ryan followed his footsteps. Through their experience of leading a minimalist lifestyle, they found a sense of freedom and happiness which they wanted to share with the world through their life narrative. Unlike the traditional form of life narrative, through their podcast episodes and YouTube content, they share their experiences in very minute detail which may otherwise be impossible while employing only traditional modes.

"Autobiographical acts involve narrators in "identifying" themselves to the reader. That is, writers, make themselves known by acts of identification and, by implication, differentiation" (Smith and Watson 32). Identity is neither inherited nor static, it is constantly subjected to change. It is constructed through external social cues, internalised ideas and experiences. The concept of Identity in self-referential writing is one of difference and commonality. The identity is different enough to gain attention and stand out of the quotidian but at the same time common enough for the readers to associate. Minimalism was a lifestyle practised by a very small percentage of the US population and was an entirely new concept to the readers. The identity of Ryan and Joshua in association with the readers was one of difference. Yet the readers could easily

identify how consumerist tendency had given them a false sense of security and deprived them of the essential feeling of freedom and happiness creating a ground of commonality between the authors and the reader. Further, their life narrative becomes a means of inspiration to millions of followers to adopt these lifestyle changes creating a larger community of minimalists.

Embodiment is yet another element associated with memory, experience and identity. Embodiment by definition refers to a tangible or visible form of an idea or representation or expression of some concept. The physical body, the location, as well as our actions can all be seen as the embodiment of our ideology and therefore becomes a site of self-referential study where the autobiographical narrators become embodied subjects. Embodiment gives the work more credibility and creates a sense of trust among the readers. Both Joshua and Ryan have embodied the concept of minimalism in their daily life, not just in the material sense, but also financially, interpersonally and spiritually. They are men who own very few possessions, with no financial burden, meaningful relationships and a life of value. From the clothes they wear to the way they prioritise their time, every aspect of their life embodies the values of minimalism. Unlike in a traditional form of life writing, the inclusion of visual representation puts their life under the microscope. A slight fluctuation from their claims can cause the readers/consumers of their content to question their credibility. Since the life narratives of the Minimalists is publicized through the social platform, it holds them accountable to their commitment to minimalism.

The final area identified for autobiographical subjectivity is agency. Agency here stands for the ability to take action or intervention that humans have in their own life. Rather than being a passive observer, or unconsciously inculcating societal stipulations and identity, man can be held accountable for his life choices and that makes all the difference. "Consequently, we tend to read autobiographical narratives as proofs of

human agency, relating actions in which people exercise free choice over the interpretation of their lives and express their "true" selves. In fact, traditional autobiography has been read as a narrative of agency, evidence that subjects can live freely" (Smith and Watson 42). The role of the agency is evident in the life narrative of the Minimalists. When the majority of the society indulges in materialistic lifestyle and creates debts over debts, the Minimalists power through and break free from the consumerist American society and start to follow a path that very few people would chose. This decision has changed them for the better. Not just them but also the millions of people who follow the Minimalists and incorporate the minimalist lifestyle as their own. Here, the narrators claim, exercise and narrate their agency and are still continuing the practice.

The Minimalists, Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus, have uncovered the secret to leading a life of purpose and value. While incorporating and practising this new lifestyle they have also shared their life, their past consumerist self and their transformation into new identities through their life narratives. Their narrative incorporates five areas of autobiographical subjectivity; Memory, Experience, Identity, Embodiment and Agency; creating constitutive processes of complex autobiographical subjectivity. Although, adopting various modes and genres for narration, both traditional and modern, is unique, it in no way undermines the value or authenticity of their life narrative. On the other hand, it has enabled them to adopt various means of representation creating more credibility as well as a mass cultural impact among their followers. A lot of their followers have taken to YouTube and other social media to share their own journey into minimalism thereby validating the Minimalists' life narrative. Furthermore, incorporating digital, visual and social media platforms as a mode of narration has also enabled them to provide the readers with a continuous narrative as well as has given the readers an opportunity to interact with the authors themselves making this narrative more authentic, credible and influential.

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MEMORY, IDENTITY AND LIFE WRITING: SCOPE AND DEBATES

Rajesh V. Nair

The intersection between life writing and memory studies is one of the most potential areas of future research and I attempt to unravel the politics of representation of memory through multiple forms of life writing. Here, it is significant to problematize the issue of identity formation and its underlying ideological predilections. Perhaps, we may study the play of memory in life writing within the framework of cultural memory studies where aspects such as resistance, ethnicity, caste, and gender deserve deeper analysis. In fact, remembrance is a political statement and "forgetting is the catastrophe; and a given semiotic order is obliterated" (Lachmann 302). Modes of literature such as life writing is a mnemonic art because "writing is both an act of memory and a new interpretation, by which every new text is etched into memory space"(301).

Cultural Memory Studies

Memory is narrative by nature, it is remembered only after an event and therefore, mnemonic enactment cannot be a neutral process as filtering takes place during this process, with profound ideological ramifications. Memory studies emerged as an interdisciplinary field, addressing the nuances of narrating different memories. It may be reckoned that the Holocaust has given a fillip to memory studies in 1970s. Ever since, memory studies has been a bourgeoning area of research, with the culture of trauma becoming a crucial component of it and one can witness the proliferation of edited volumes, journals and university

courses on it. Different modes of self-articulation such as diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, witness narratives and biographies, excruciating traumatic memories were recounted and mediated. The intertwining of memory and remembrance is so significant that Pierrie Nora, the theorist calls our era ' an age of commemoration.' However, bringing back crucial episodes in the past through narratives is indeed a political act, which frames and unframes our social memory and shared collective identity.

During the classical period, there was Plato who talked about mind as a wax tablet whereas in the enlightenment period John Locke considered self as the ultimate source of memory. Later on, in the modern period, there emerged cognitive psychology and subsequently, the interlinking of memory and tradition by Eric Hobsbawm followed by memory and nation- making by Benedict Anderson. Among the key theorists of memory studies, the name of Maurice Halbwachs is preeminent. In fact, it was he who introduced the notion *memoire collective* (collective memory), and argued that personal memory is collective memory because individual memory is a creation of tradition, the one dependent on social frameworks. Another theorist, Pierre Nora in *Realms of Memory* (1996) connects memory with history and nation and introduces the concept 'sites of memory.' Andreas Huyssen expands Nora's point and studies sites of memory under postcolonial, multicultural, diasporic, transcultural and transnational perspectives. Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann, the German theorists approach memory by tying it with material objectivations. According to them, memory is constituted by social groups with the help of a system of values. In his essay "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity"(1995), Assmann defines Cultural Memory as " … a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation" (126).

In the Indian context, Memory studies is marked by heterogeneity and lack of uniformity as we can find so many streams of parallel experiences with regional and cultural differences. For instance, one can observe a bewildering range such as tribal memory, dalit memory, subaltern memory etc. As a matter of fact, we may notice certain unique sites of memory in India associated with partition, Sikh riot, Godhra riot, Tamil issue in Sri Lanka to make them more complex and variegated. Apart from the above, migration studies do bring to the fore issues such as diasporic memory and interestingly, inner diasporic memory resulting from internal flows of people across India. However, we may notice the paucity of proper theorists in the field of memory studies, though we have some names such as Ashis Nandy, Sudhir Kakar, Gopal Guru, D. R. Nagaraj and M.S. S. Pandian who have contributed substantially to the growth of this area.

Literature and memory

Literature is a medium of cultural memory; it is a mnemonic art, a 'symbolic form' of cultural memory and a way of 'memory- making' and 'world – making.' In fact, every act of remembering is a creative and constructive process. Writing is an act of memory and a new interpretation by which every new text is etched into memory space. We can see that cultural memory is formed by repeatedly used texts, images and rituals which involves highly political statements. Literature helps in the transmission of historical knowledge through representation; it is even more important in the case of occluded memories where we see representation of subaltern cultures such as dalit memorial cultures. Memory theorist Jan Assmann argues that all representation whether oral, written or visual are 'storage and transmission medium,' 'cultural texts' across spatial and temporal borders ("What are Cultural Texts?"(1995)). Literature performs a 'symbolic function' by producing cultural identity and coherence in a society. It constructs cultural, national or regional identity and shares certain values and norms. Literature/life

narratives are texts of memory; they are "interpretations of the ways in which memory was produced, constructed, written and circulated" (Saunders 323).

Memory and identity

If one looks generally at the politics of life narratives, it can be concurred that constructing identities is the key factor and as a matter of fact, narrating identities occur at two different levels – individual as well as collective. Here, it may be repeated that subjectivity in the myriad modes of self-articulation is made possible, mainly through writings and then the material medium such as statutes, memorials etc. However, one cannot at the same time turn back against the role of online platforms such as blogs, You Tube and Facebook in inscribing identities. At this juncture, we may notice that the typical subjects are selected or rather appropriated, if one may say, as cultural state apparatuses for ideological indoctrination, given the fact that each subject represents certain redeeming values and belief systems of perennial relevance. Take for instance, the case of Mohandas Gandhi and the ever-flowing gush of life stories about him in the form of biographies, biopics etc. Hence, the 'abduction' of subjects (Denzin) by the state takes place because the state ideology compliments the values for which they stood; this appropriation takes place only in the case of ideological complementarity and not dissonance, then only the people can be disciplined in the 'proper way.'

Every life story is woven around a set of crucial events in a subject's life and it may be taken for granted that the process of selecting/omitting incidents which form a life-text has profound ideological implications. Such selected events frame the structural coherence of the text and contribute to the memory archive of a text, notwithstanding the fact that the memories evoked by/for the subject are fool proof or authentic. Anyway, such mnemonic shreds and traces eventually aid in

building up what we call social memory or public memory. Here, the social impact and reach of privileged subjects cannot be easily brushed away. Thus, the intricate discrepancies in the cultural values attributed to various subjects by the state and the resultant power dynamics in the formation of social memories are worth interrogating further, though it does not come under the scope of the present study. Another important aspect worth noting in life writing is the question of agency and its role in manipulating scales of memory. On the one hand, we have first person modes of self-enunciation such as autobiography, diary, testimony etc. where the subjects acquire gency to frame their own memories into narratives, but on the other hand, there are also mediated lives where a second person acts as an active agent in conceiving a life. Thus, we can see that the framing/unframing of memories in life histories and the circulation of 'commodified' subjects have divergent ideological predilections and interests. But one cannot also overlook the narratives of counter-memory showing dissent and protest circulating in our society. What role do these discourses play in identity formation in society? There is hardly any doubt that these narratives of resistance do help in unframing and then reframing public perceptions and deeply – entrenched social memories though they very often appeal to social conscience in the manner of projecting ghastly and deplorable human rights violations around us. Subsequently, the formation of what may be called, a counter-public sphere becomes a possibility. To explain this point with the help of an example, I take Eachara Varier's highly disturbing *Memories of a Father* (2004), a memoir on his son Rajan whose body was found 'missing,' subsequent to brutal tortures in police camps during the murky, notorious emergency days. Varier raises his dead son through his memories and the finger is pointed not only at the state and its agents but also toward civil society in general. The so-called established official versions of the state are challenged, opening a pandora's box of shocking revelations (though not free from memory gaps and factual wrongs) and the readers

are the witnesses of this highly political act (of writing and thinking), and subsequently, the memoirist appeals to social conscience, without malice towards anyone for their wrongdoing. Finally, what we see is the collapse of memories circulated by the state and its emissaries. One more aspect of identity formation regarding memory in life writing is the case of material cultural artifacts. Statues, monuments and memorials may be approached as crystalized forms of life narrative. In their case, resemblance to a subject is taken for granted and mandatory because by the time a spectator looks at them, his mind should be filled, if not overcrowded with the memories associated with events in the lives of the privileged subjects. Gandhi is a case in point here.

However, there are certain dimensions of identity construction such as ethnicity/nation, caste/class and gender which are the preoccupations of many life narratives and hence, a little elaboration on these is logical and mandatory for our understanding of the role of memory in life writing. There are life stories which inscribe a race through their unique memories. Autoethnography is a mode through with a subject tells his story on behalf of the community. C.K. Janu's life narrative *Mother Forest* (2004),documents the struggles of Adiyar community in Wayanad, Kerala. Though it describes Janu's story, the text acquires a wider dimension because essentially tribal memories are documented. Here, a subnational identity is imagined through this life-text and where to identify/locate such indigenous identities is a problematic issue. Another example is Maya Angelou's serial autobiographies which document the history of Afro American people. On the other hand, we have Mahatma Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth* which is an autobiography, frankly detailing the subject's experiences. At the same time, Gandhi's story runs parallel to the history of modern India and one may call this autobiography the biography of co-modern India. Thus, an autobiography as a life narrative can also imagine a nation and its identity as a whole.

In the case of caste, Dalit self narratives in India in various languages inscribe their memories in which protest and humiliation are the notable traits. They document a collective identity and collective memory on behalf of their community. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2008)or Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003) are testimonies. Some life narrative embody gendered memories; they essentially target patriarchal oppression and in the case of liminal life stories, such as those of sex workers, transgenders, tribals, the situation is complex– they target both patriarchy and state. Cyberspace also conjures some painful memories in the form of blogs of rape victims.

Conclusion

In a discussion of memory and life writing, one cannot leave out the aspect of trauma and its connection with memory. In *Trauma*: *Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth continues that , "there is no single approach to listening to the many different traumatic experiences and histories we encounter, and that the irreducible specificity of traumatic stories requires in its turn the varied responses—responses of knowing and of acting—of literature, film, psychiatry, neurobiology, sociology, and political and social activism (ix).Memory is a symbolic or metaphoric representation of the unbearable and it may not be taken as an accurate description of an event. Traumatic memory is the result of the inner workings of the mind; the fantasy which is created through that act is full of elisions, interruptions and reinventions. Here, one may distinguish between traumatic memory and narrative memory for a better understanding of trauma. As Caruth argues traumatic memory takes so long to communicate unlike narrative or ordinary memory because it is a "solitary activity" (163) not addressed to anyone. Secondly, there is no social component in traumatic memory unlike the narrative memory which is essentially a "social act" (163), a mode of communicating the unspeakable experience to readers. Besides, narrative memory is

subjective as it is structured by individual mental constructs with ideological underpinnings. Traumatic narratives of memory contest the past and they help as corrective forms of history and even problematize nation - making. For instance, T.V. Eachara Varier's memoir exposes the brutal oppression of state during the emergency period, muffling all sorts of dissent; in fact the missing body of his son Rajan during the notorious emergency period for his alleged involvement in Naxalite movement is a dark episode in Kerala history. The memoir reframes public memory by bringing in an alternate reading of the incident which challenges the official, state version. The memorial turns out to be a counter- text, a counter-memorial narrative when he claims: "…the fathers of our judicial system were that particular that no innocent person should be punished wrongly. But today our enquiry officers never care a damn whether the real culprits or the innocent are the ones punished" (23).

Thus, memories documented in various forms of life writing do persistently appeal to public conscience and they are political statements and human rights narratives. I also perceive that as narratives of healing, they act as a therapeutic antidote to ignominious humiliations and sufferings of subjects. We often look only at the success stories of the subjects, playing down such affective dimension mentioned above. Needless to repeat that ideologies do relentlessly structure/restructure the narrative frameworks through obvious gaps and silences. Are these life narratives good enough to contribute to historiography is another point of interrogation. However, perhaps one may not leave out the ethics of writing lives and the encoding of memories as a part of it in this age of surveillance and control. Memories will continue to enrich life writing in future. To conclude, studying life narratives within the paradigm of cultural memory studies offers a new, fresh perspective for understanding different cultures and the nuances of their identity formation.

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INTIMATIONS ON TRANSGENDER LIFE: READING VIJAYARAJAMALLIKA'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY *MALLIKAVASANTHAM*

Anu Kuriakose

Abstract:

This paper analyses *Mallikavasantham,* the autobiography of transgender poet Vijayarajamallika, published in 2019 in Malayalam language. Mallika, who had an intersex condition at birth presents her autobiography as a narrative and as an archive of her gender queer experience and this paper examines the ways in which the embodiment of her transgender self is mapped in her autobiography. This book is the first-hand account of a trans woman about her gender dysphoria, transgender identification, her struggles, survival efforts, and above all, it is a testimony of her poetic oeuvre. *Mallikavasantham* is an assemblage of memory through poetry, prose, and photographs that connects Mallika's own gender identity and its mainstreaming in a society that more or less continues to be transphobic. I analyze how Mallika marks and places her transgender identity and her trans body in her autobiography, and how she sees herself in a cisheteronormative society as a trans woman poet who has found a space of her own. The paper also critically views how this autobiography consolidates a trans historiography in Malayalam.

Key words: Gender identity, Memory, Transgender autobiography, Trans historiography, Transphobic society.

Full Paper:

"All transgender individuals will have a story to tell, but I have not just stories. I have a narrative on the paths I took, which is filled with memories, experiences, and milestones. This is a confession of a trans woman" (Vijayarajamallika 8).

The autobiography of Vijayarajamallika opens with this statement which underlines her purpose of writing about her life. The term 'autobiography' is derived from a Greek word that conveys the sense of "self," "life," and "writing" and Mallika's opening statement encompasses this definition by all means. *Mallikavasantham* is not a mere narrative, this autobiography gives the trans woman an agency to speak about her transgender[1] self, her experiences in a transphobic society, and the memories of a traumatic past. In this article, I attempt to critically observe how Vijayarajamallika's autobiography acts as a bridge for the cisheteronormative[2] society to comprehend trans experience and how it provides not only a critique at the transphobic society, but also marks a

1. An umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. People under the transgender umbrella may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms - including *transgender*. In the West it is used as an adjective rather than a noun and using it as a noun is considered as a dehumanizing practice. I have used 'trans' as an adjective to the nouns 'people', 'person' individuals, man/men, and woman/women in this paper, considering it as a shorthand to refer to a transgender or transsexual identity. However, transsexual is an identity category and medical category which is used to refer to people who seek to change their bodies through medical interventions, including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike *transgender*, *transsexual* is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word *transgender* (See: GLAAD Media Reference Guide).

2. Cisheteronormative/cisheteronormativity/cisheteronormalcy are the concepts around which the assumption of gender essentialism works. Cisnormativity is the assumption that a person's gender identity should match their biological sex, otherwise known as being "cisgender" or "cissexual." (See: Steen 2018). Cisheteronormativity also refers to the systemic normalization and material privileging of bodies, identities, and subjectivities that most closely align with white cisgender and heterosexual cultural expectancies in the West (Le Master et al. 2019, 27).

trans person's internal conflicts, their struggles and survival efforts. This autobiography records her journey over thirty years; from a child born with intersex[3] condition to a well-known trans woman poet in contemporary Malayalam literature.

Autobiographical narratives centre on authors' account about their experiences, memory, and in this respect, it is a self-presentation. People from marginalized communities can use autobiography as a tool to represent their identity and this documentation could be seen as important tool due to its socio-political nature to engage in academic debates on marginal identities. E. Stuart Bates, offers a functional definition of an autobiography in his book *Inside Out*, it is "a narrative of the past of a person by the person concerned" (Bates 2). The format of autobiography uses memory, and it paints a picture of the society existed during the autobiographer's review of their life. Mallika's autobiography is an account of the society when she lived and how it treated her and what transformation has happened to society over the last thirty years. In this sense, this autobiography could be seen as an archive of social change in terms of carving a trans inclusive space. Hence my aim in this paper is also to point out how Vijayarajamallika's autobiography is an analytical piece of social transformation. This paper is broadly divided into three parts; the first section provides an outline of the structure and format of Vijayarajamallika's autobiography. The second part evaluates how Vijayarajamallika expresses her trans identity and experience through a journey of remembering. Finally, I will examine how this autobiography initiates a discussion on Kerala's transphobic public sphere slowly migrating to trans inclusive spaces of late.

3. An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. Those variations are also sometimes referred to as Differences of Sex Development (DSD. While some people can have an intersex condition and also identify as transgender, the two are separate and should not be conflated (See: GLAAD Media Reference Guide).

Transgender Autobiographies: Zooming the Format

Mallikavasantham is structured as an anthology of memory, with poetic inscriptions at the beginning of each chapter, and a collection of photographs of Vijayarajamallika's intersex past and trans identity at present. This is an interesting linkage of memory, art, and the expression of trans subjectivity. In the forward to this autobiography, she states her aims of narrating the life story while in her mid-thirties; i.e., to present her transgender self and to motivate those who have been going through similar conditions. Vijayarajamallika prefers to call her journey as a 'struggle for liberation,' a struggle against all the odds that continue to burden transgender community (Vijayarajamallika 8). She also promises her readers that she will be writing a sequel to this if she will be alive after thirty years. A significant feature of this autobiography is Mallika's language; she, being a poet, uses both prose and poetry to narrate her trans identity. The culmination of different genres within a single text represents her own struggle about embodying her gender queerness.

Life writings of trans identified people has had wider attention outside the Indian context since the early twentieth century onwards. Juliet Jacques in her article (2017) examines the different forms of writing used by trans people in North America, the U.K., and Australia. These accounts convey their experiences to public against the sensational media coverage and later, the feminist critiques of that led to 'post-transsexual theory.' Jacques argues that autobiographical writing would remain the dominant mode of trans discourse as they reject the established structures of a memoir. Their autobiography has the capacity to look at how transphobia affected medical establishments and mass media, that in turn influenced the trans lives. Trans-identified authors have also used fiction, or a blurring of boundaries between autobiography and fiction, to resist some of the structural and social limits of trans life writing, to suggest ways in which how it may be more rewarding, both aesthetically

and politically (357-58). The first autobiographical account, *Man into Woman* was published in1933 about the life on Danish artist Lili Elbe, who died in 1931 after a failed sex reassignment surgery. This book was not a linear story, nor was Elbe its sole author, but the book incorporated Elbe's diaries and letters. Many others then started using memoir, diaries, and a number of other genres as a form of resistance against the mainstream narratives on trans identity. Most recent among such autobiographical accounts from the West is *The Autobiography of a Transgender Scientist* (2017) by Ben Barres that describes his life, his gender transition, his scientific work, and his advocacy for gender equality in science (MIT Press).

Though transgender autography is quite novel in Malayalam language; there are a few autobiographies of transgender people which contribute to the trans historiography. Vidya's *I Am Vidya* (2007), A. Revathi's *The Truth about Me: A Hijra Life Story* (2010), Jareena's *Oru Malayalai Hijadayude Athmakatha* (2013), and *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015), etc. are among them. Though Jareena's autobiography was published first, *Mallikavasantham*can be considered as the first transgender autobiography written solely by a trans person. Unlike the other autobiographies mentioned, Vijayarajamallika's autobiography is not a collaborative autobiography.[4] The speaker and the subject are Vijayarajamallika, and this work is an obvious reference to her skill in using memory to narrate about her sense of self, body, gender identity, and sexuality.

While looking at the format, one could observe that Mallika uses a number of photographs to recall her sense of self and gender identity

4. A collaborative autobiography combines elements of autobiography and biography. There are different kinds and degrees of collaboration, but in the most familiar arrangement, "as-told-to" autobiography, the writer is one person, while the narrator and subject are someone else. In this scenario then, one partner supplies "life," and while the other provides the "writing" (Couser, Thomas G. 1).

apart from the prose and poetry in this autobiography. These photographs present Mallika as a baby, and as a school boy who was probably six or seven years old, then as a teenager, and as a young male, in front of the readers. Scholarly studies on photographic images point out how photographs are often perceived as a memory device. Le Goff underlines this in his study of the sociology of family photography, "The family album expresses the truth of social remembrance (…)The images of the past arranged in chronological order, "the natural order" of social memory, arouse and transmit the remembrance of events worthy of preservation"(89). This act of social remembrance using photographs can be observed in the exhibition of old photographs in the autobiography of Vijayarajamallika as well. She uses the photographs of her as a proof to point out how society perceived her cisgender male identity as normative. The cisheteronormative appearance of Mallika forced the society to frame her as 'abnormal' whenever she expressed her gender dysphoria[5], until her intersex condition was medically diagnosed. Hence, I shall argue that Mallika has used these photographs to juxtapose her past and present inorder to critique society's own gendered sense of self. Society is so prejudiced about a child who is born with intersex condition, as children are too young to take decisions about their own life, they are forced to adhere to any of the cis binary. The recent photographs that capture the sari-clad trans woman underline how society's judgement can go wrong in perceiving a person's gender identity. However, I would like to point out two limitations of these photographs in narrating transgender self. In almost all of these photos, the body/image,

5. American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines 'gender dysphoria' as a psychological distress that results from an incongruence between one's sex assigned at birth and one's gender identity. Though gender dysphoria often begins in childhood, some people may not experience it until after puberty or much later ("What is Gender Dysphoria" Accessed on 30 May 2021. https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria) Less medicalised terms such as 'gender incongruence' (GI), are also used to denote this condition (Claahsen et al. 2021, 1349).

subject/object model often relies on and reinforces our own binary idealization. I do not wish to deny Mallika's choice to embody her desired femininity, yet I wish to point out how much it is relational to cisheteronormativity and thereby constructing a homonormativity[6]. Secondly, these photographs are printed on black and white, which limit it to and/or endorse the binary view further, but that may be purely coincidental.

Mallika's efforts to combines all these materials, the prose narrative, poetic illustrations on trans experience, and the photographs as mutually inseparable entities while unravelling her life narrative are worthy enough to be lauded. Her diction and the images strike a chord with the gender identity confusion and struggles to mainstream one's identity in society amidst the recurring conflicts she had experienced within. I shall now venture into my critical reading of Mallika's efforts to voice her transgender self in her narrative.

Narrating Trans Life: A 'Jasmine Revolution'

By recalling her past as 'trapped in a wrong body'[7] in the opening chapter, Mallika uses memory in unravelling her identity. This act of remembering itself is a painful process for her, but she performs it with ease as if she is playing with words. "The Prisoner of a Male Castle," "Shy Boy" are the titles of the first two chapters, which are reminiscent of the mind- body conflict Mallika underlines in this text. Pallabi Baruah (2016) observes this rightly in her examination of Living Smile Vidya's autobiography:

6. The term 'homonormativity' was made popular in Lisa Duggan's celebrated work *The twilight of equality?: neoliberalism, cultural politics, and the attack on democracy* (2003). It critiques endorsing heteronormative ideals on LGBTIQ people.

7. 'Trapped in the wrong body' is a heavily critiqued notion in the West and the use of this phrase in this paper corresponds to the use of it in the autobiography discussed.

> Sex transformations being an important part of the plot, the focus is on the body and the narrative intertwines in and out of the mind and the body. There autobiographies act as a means to survive the trauma of self-realisation and social realisation, sex change and loss of identity, acclimatizing with the new found identity and empowerment (47).

Mallika's autobiography progresses in a linear fashion through a series of images from her past, the gender dysphoria and her non-conformity in the assigned male sex at birth, her difficulty to assimilate with the masculine gender role, and with the underpinnings of sexual fantasies and sexual drives. The elaborate description of the childhood events and the conflicting psyche point to her fluid experience that is overlapping in the gender spectrum. In many places in the autobiography, she stresses on the plurality or fluidity of her experiences through narrating her sexual desires and gender identity confusions. The initial concern as whether she is a same sex desiring cis male or not, then the embracing of trans feminine identity, a medically diagnosed intersex condition of late, all contribute to the plurality of this spectrum.

A major portion of the autobiography portrays the trauma and also the aestheticization of the transness. While the trauma arises from internal and external conflicts, Mallika tries to picture the beauty of her transness through the poetry she appends in the autobiography. "We are wounded by gender/ What do we deserve? Gender Justice/ or Human Justice," jots Mallika at the beginning of a chapter that details her transition experience (88). The chapter focuses on voicing the conflicts a trans person experiences; the confusions on sexuality, desire, gender identity, and body/image. The beauty of her narration lies in its authenticity, as a transgender person is explicating the confusions within the transition and self-realization. The elaborate descriptions of the medical condition of her body and the surgeries are cleverly aestheticized by the poetic

qualities of the narration. A significant feature of this narration is the randomly recalled events that bind experiences of desire, gender, and body. Mallika is clinical in her observations on the influence of cisheteronormalcy on trans bodies as well. I would like to point out here that Mallika herself was ignorant of her gender nonconformity when she was younger. She adopts a gender essentialist approach by placing herself in the binary of sex and gender identifications and tend to see herself as 'abnormal.' She pathologizes her by calling herself a 'nymphomaniac' (90), and this could be observed as arising from the heteronormative conditioning.

Mallika's autobiography overtly narrates her sexual tension and the sexual advances she received from many cis men. What one can also note in this narrative is, how the cisheteronormative society exploit trans people as sexual objects. The elaborate descriptions of the inner sexual tensions are emblematic of her gender dysphoria. In the poem "The Capricorn Bodied," the reader can sense this sexual tension, when she describes her thoughts (106). The use of sex as an image in this poetry points at the vulnerability of trans persons in their quest for love, the lovelessness, rejection, and desertion they experience. Mallika's description of trans experience is vivid, it is rich with images of nature, spring, sex, desire, and these images create striking, occasionally paradoxical frames. In another chapter, "Feminine Bodies without Menstruation," Mallika further elaborates the desire for being loved, getting married, and having a family. The cisheteronormative imagination and social conditioning imposes patriarchal familial norms, and one cannot dismiss a trans woman's hopes for finding love and solace in family. It also underlines that we cannot just exclude trans people from the collective unconscious of familial formations and we have to acknowledge their marginality and subjugation. In one sense, by narrating her trans experience and sexual fantasies Mallika seems to celebrate her "life," "self," and her ability to narrate them her own. As she states at the

beginning, this is revolutionary; she calls her autobiography "Jasmine Spring" (Mallikavasantham) and re-emphasizes that it's a revolution.

The Formation of Trans Historiography in *Mallikavasantham*

There is a need for documenting the political, legal, cultural campaigns, and activism of transgender people across the world for affirming their identity in the public sphere. Considering a greater range of trans identities and experiences, especially in the multicultural context of Indian subcontinent, this issue of an authentic historiography by trans people themselves requires serious attention. Many of the existing documents of trans experience is from cis perspective and in the context of trans people in Kerala there is the dearth of a dignified term in the regional language to address them. Most of the literature about transgender people are from the English-speaking West and 'transgender' itself is a loaded term since the use of it in the multicultural and transnational scenario at present. The significance of an autobiography by a Malayali trans person lies here. As a writer, Vijayarajamallika documents her personal experiences and through this process, she engages in an activity of writing a Kerala trans historiography of social transformation.

Vijayarajamallika's autobiography connects the people outside the trans identity to experience the world of trans women. Mallika draws a pen picture of the transphobic society from the initial chapters itself. During her school and college days, she was unconscious of her difference, but once she started experiencing it, she sought support but could not get any compassionate treatment from the family and society. As she narrates her attempts to die by suicide by drinking ink, the reader learns about the tension a trans person goes through due to society's intolerance towards them. In the first chapter itself Mallika stresses how insensitive the health practitioners have been. Though it was identified

that she had the physical condition of hypotestosteronism, the doctor she approached was inconsiderate towards her. The attitude of her parents also underlines the cisheteronormalcy of the society and their unfeeling for trans issues.

When this autobiography proceeds, Mallika recollects a number occasions before, during, and after her transition, in which the readers could identify a shift in the social perception of trans identity. The initial descriptions of the dysphoric childhood slowly transition to a troubling and haunting adolescence and she tries to read her experiences against society's double standard and intolerance on gender queer identities. Apparently, Mallika is outrightly candid in her narration about the contemporary society that treats queer people as sexual objects. The chapter titled "On the Way of Hypocritic World" (*Kapatalokaveedhiyil*) portrays two negative experiences she met with, in which, being a trans woman was humiliated by an insensitive government official and also a by a heterosexual friend. In both these instances, Mallika testifies how hypocritical is the world we live in. There are references to the shifting social perceptions on trans people in the description of her wedding ceremony that was held at the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad state committee office (186).Hence, it could be observed that Mallika does not present society as dystopic, she acknowledges the slow emergences of inclusive spaces as well.

What makes this autobiography a trans historiography is the careful organization of social events and how Mallika develops them to point out the social marginality and exclusion of transgender people in Kerala for a long time. Mallika notes that she has received literary accolades as an emerging trans author while at the same time, the society continues to be inconsiderate about gender identity. In a chapter, Mallika recalls a public event which underlines the double standard of the society. There was a celebrity guest from another state invited to

inaugurate a public event, but there were no trans community members among the invitees. When Mallika raised her concern about this, she was mocked by the organizers with a cold remark: "Those folks will wear a lot of makeup and put up a show here" (103). Such revelations may be shocking for a reader but Mallika affirms that she has been used with it. The memories packed in this autography are so sharp and piercing as they have the capacity to echo a social critique. Mallika recollects the personal but it also becomes an act of remembering the society where she has been living. The social recognition of Mallika as a trans poet, her union with her beloved, and the compassionate gestures she received from many are also highlighted in this text. In this sense, one could read this autobiography as an act of writing a history on trans lives' coming out in Kerala and the social reaction towards that.

Autobiography is an act of remembering the personal, however, in Mallika's autobiography it becomes a political activity. As she rightfully explained at the beginning, there is no boundary for this self-exploration and narration; it is also a process of meaning making. What she remembers about her past becomes a text for those trans people who are enduring similar events in their life, as it will motivate them to struggle against the discriminatory practices and social exclusion. Mallika's effort is to strengthen her community, after all, finding one's own path is an achievement according to her. It is historical for the trans community in Kerala to express their gender identity and experience using the mode of an autobiographical narrative. Moreover, the speaker is an authentic agency as it is a non-collaborative autobiography. Among other literary accounts of the trans community in Kerala and the contemporary social shift, this autobiography performs the role of celebrating identity and motivating many others to tell their own stories to add to the trans historiography of Kerala.

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ANITA R. RATNAM'S "MA3KA:" AN ASSERTION OF FEMINIST LIFE WRITING

Anomitra Biswas
Tonisha Guin

This paper reads Anita Ratnam's Ma3ka (as seen in live performance at Vasvik Auditorium, Vadodara, on March 15, 2020) as an act of life-writing writ large through dance-theatre performances that stage an interwoven depiction of divine and mortal life. Dr. Anita R Ratnam is an arts entrepreneur based in Chennai. She has Masters and doctoral degrees in dance, history, theatre and women's studies and has been a visiting professor in the University of California, George Washington University, Wesleyan University and Rice University. Ratnam is a voting member of the Dance Critics Association, USA, and a fellow of the World Academy of Arts and Sciences. She served on the Executive Board of the Sangeet Natak Akademi and the ICCR, and is now the Vice President of ABHAI, the Chennai-based organization representing Bharatnatyam dancers throughout the country.

Ratnam has incorporated elements and techniques from her formal training in Bharatnatyam, Mohiniattam and Kathakali into a technique she calls Neo Bharatam. Her work—characterised as intersectionist—weaves together dance, spoken-word and theatrical performance with information gleaned from archaeology and dramaturgy. Ratnam notably makes use of Vedic hymns, ritual movement, and traditional as well as contemporary mythology in her choreography, as may be seen in *Gajaanana, Daughters of the Ocean, Neelam, A Million Sitas, Seven Graces,* and *Ma3ka*. Her performances have been invited to

museum spaces: notably the Peabody Essex Museum, and the National Museum in New Delhi. Ratnam has conceptualised and coordinated several conferences and dance festivals, including The Other Festival, as well as national and international conferences like Old Texts New Textures (1994), Ancient Futures (2000), Epic Women (2012). She has also restored the 15th century ritual theatre performance of Kaisika Natakam in her ancestral village of Thirukkurungudi, Tamil Nadu.

Ratnam works both widely and deeply with epic and mythologic themes in her work, often imbuing them with personal narratemes. Of her performances, *Ma3ka*—first staged in 2009, and regularly performed since—may be most productively read as life-writing. It is a dance-theatre in three acts, each occupied with a goddess: Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Meenakshi. The narrative is both mythological and familial-personal, as Ratnam draws upon the life of her grandmother—an illiterate, and then self-taught Saraswati—for the first act, while those of her mother and daughter inform the latter two; her own diary entries accompany the orature. Further, Ratnam makes use of contemporary music, gestures and props in the course of her performance, bringing out the complexities and apparent-contradictions of modern Indian life.

The anxiety of authorship, a concept formulated by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, is a familiar one in literary criticism, especially feminist literary criticism. Briefly, scholars like Harold Bloom refer to the anxiety of influence any author is subjected to, insofar as they are terrified of imitating and/or being insidiously unoriginal or inferior compared to their predecessors. It takes up a deeply Oedipal metaphor where creativity, as the proverbial Muse, must be tantamount to Oedipus' mother and wife, Jocaste, in the act of creating original or canon-worthy work. For Gilbert and Gubar, inadequate feminist historiography and predominantly patriarchal canonisation of literary works results in this not being an anxiety of influence for feminine authors, but an anxiety of authorship

itself, in the absence of visible literary foremothers. Arguably, what they suggest in the domain of literary fiction holds true for any performative, creative exercise that draws heavily from conventional knowledge, including that of something like classical Bharatanatyam, perhaps especially in Bharatnatyam, which disavowed its ancestry in a move towards gentrification in and since the 1940s.

The resolution of this anxiety of authorship that haunts any creative work is further transmuted in work based in the pluriversal world of epics. In women's work, this anxiety may be resolved through an identification and kinship with the otherised woman, as one may see in Anita's performance. While the anxiety of authorship is promulgated by Gilbert and Gubar in relation to text, one may also spot it in the reception of women choreographers, who have to similarly contend with long traditions of female (and male) bodies moving in accordance to the instructions of male choreographers. The reception of Isadora Duncan, whose ballet performances were famously regarded as not choreographed, unstructured, formless, was because of its decisive differences from the limits of traditional ballet. This reaction to Duncan, as Anne Daly says

> …is part of a wilful denial of Duncan as choreographer, as creator—in a traditionally male domain. Instead, she is defined (even by sympathetic writers) as a dancer, emphasising only the immanence of her body—a traditionally female domain. From here, it is a short leap to the conclusion that Duncan was merely acting out an erotic fantasy…From Heppenstall to Kirstein and beyond, all sorts of imaginatively revisionist writers have made out of Isadora a suspect female who capitalized on her near-naked body in the guise of art.

There are of course, female ballet instructors and choreographers, just as there are famous female choreographers in Indian dance. Despite

their presence, mainstream classical and modern dance in India are attributed to authoritative kyriarchies: this extends to Bharatanatyam which was 'rescued' from its courtesan origins and gentrified shortly after Independence. Using Bharatanatyam to explore female relationships and lineages, therefore, is doubly defiant of presuppositions of familial and artistic patriarchy. Anita's body itself becomes a liminal space within the dance to claim her distinct authorial voice: productive of not just new iterations of old interpretations that are assumed to be watertight, but new conflations of differences. The performance creates a non-Oedipal space, incapable of Oedipal meaning-making, instead creating points of incomprehension/incoherence within the older frameworks.

One may presume that Anita's use of classical Bharatanatyam symbols of meaning-making in modern, hybrid, fractured iterations, alongside shaded glasses or lipstick (with their associations of "fast women", promiscuity and slut-shaming) is a way of alluding both to Bharatnatyam's origins with Devadasis and its latter rise to high cultural prestige associations that systematically obscure these origins. These acts of objectifying oneself may be read as either an agentive or passive act, something that aids in holding attention as a desirous subject and desired object, simultaneously. The performance embodies, iterates and analyses the extensions, continuums of meaning in a "modern" sanitised culture that continues to be just as attached to the symbolic values associated with (and conflated/ anthropomorphised into) the goddess figures.

Anita's performance, in her deliberate use of the tool of autobiographical storytelling, claims ownership of the narrative she produces therefore on her hybrid body, with the hybrid plurality of the motifs explored rather than entrenching them further. This lens allows one an unconventional reading of her *Ma3ka*'s portrayal of the three Hindu goddesses: Saraswati, Laxmi and Meenakshi.

In the first act, the audience is not allowed to forget her deliberate, reiterative conflation of the figure of the goddess with her grandmother Saraswati. Rather, this connection/conflation allows for the creation of new points of meaning. At first sight, it looks like a paradox, an anomaly that the artist wishes to foreground: a woman not educated beyond the second grade—married at twelve and a mother at fourteen—shares the name of the goddess of all learning and artistic expression. But Anita slowly and deliberately starts unmaking the paradox she initiates. The performance unfurls into her grandmother's emergence as a woman who taught herself to read and write in both English and Tamil, a woman who insisted on her daughter's right to everything she had been denied. It establishes a remarkable woman, widowed at forty, living to ninety-six, nurturing and nourishing a family of women and children with a treasure trove of stories and home remedies. In Anita's work she emerges as goddess-like in her exceptionality, a human echo of the goddess who argued with her husband—the Divine Creator—and refused to be content with her place as one of three docile wives. Her spate of questions is the murmuration of river water, an interrogation and incrimination of the patriarchal system, both mortal and divine. Saraswati here is not the goddess of learning and aesthetics, but rather Vak, the goddess of speaking out, who becomes so through her first act of disobedience, her questions and unwillingness to conform to the status quo. A slight aside also to the frequent complaint about women who don't know how, or when or what to shut up about helps anchor the performance in everyday commonplaces with which the audience may be familiar.

The performance concerns itself largely with identity and self-expression, exploring the question of what it means to be a speaking subject, whether as a mortal woman or a goddess. It does so primarily by exploring the notion of the Other, in this case that of the figures of goddesses distanced and put on pedestals, alienated from the quotidian. In the process, it draws the attention of the audience to the ways in

which the sacred is in fact the profane in all three of the instances iterated through dance. Thus Anita embodies through performance the disobedient and rebellious Saraswati, the madly attractive and capricious desirability of Laxmi with its associations of sexuality turned lucrative in the professions of modelling, sexually-inflected dancing, and the queer-feminist intersections created by Meenakshi's gender fluidity. Anita makes deliberate use of conflations, anomalies, apparently-paradoxical elements, which serve as the key to the transformation through reiteration of the meanings encoded in the dance.

Anita's performance personalizes, and in some way localizes, the shared notion of the goddess into a very particular iteration through the imagination of modern continuums of the values attributed to the goddess. These values are also conflated with the embodiment of goddess—a conflation Anita explores in great detail to drive home her stance. In the case of Lakshmi, this involves an imagining of the transformations undergone by a modern avatar of the goddess. The performance features an interplay of the local and the universal, through the use of stereotypes and familiar narratives through auto/biographical anecdotes. The repeated and explicit use of diaries by women foregrounds and emphasises the foregrounding of female memory in this performance as a tool to complicate if not counter grand narratives.

The performance not only embodies its chosen art-form, but also deliberately distorts it at every step, deploying the body as an art object to share the narrative which is, in turns, traditional, mundane, scandalous and distorted.

Anita demystifies and deconstructs the process of production, by changing costumes and props on the stage itself, calling the props and soundtrack co-performers and thereby mixing codes. The accompanying sound, too, is beautifully eclectic, echoing the fragmented

nature of female existence, with personal commentary morphing into music ranging from Bharatnatyam *talam/bol* to popular Bollywood songs like "Sheela ki Jawani" and pop numbers like Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance." These songs are overlaid with the Sanskrit descriptions of the different aspects of Laxmi, creating the apparent dissonance of conflating the goddess' classical self with its imagined modern iteration. Though there is an abundance of props on the stage, no conventional Bharatanatyam costumes delimit expectations: instead the performance makes fluid use of clothing, jewellery and accessories like sunglasses. Especially notable is a long rope of bedecked hair, deliberately donned on-stage: it begins as a symbol of beauty and prosperity shared by the divine and mortal woman, and transforms into an ornament, a rope, a noose, and bodily affectation. The use of props in this performance is marked by bricoleur and frugal innovation (*jugaad*) rather than following set rules, in a way which enriches the dance and music: notable is the use of colours and masks as symbolising the third eye, and Meenakshi's third breast. This deliberate disruption of the expectations associated with Bharatanatyam may also be noted in the focus on androgyny rather than the typical obscuring of it, whether in the warrior goddess' unfeminine gestures, or in Shiva's willing objectification of self, which is made explicit through commentary. Again, Anita's body, in embodying these figures, itself becomes a liminal space accommodating and allowing for the fluidity and hybridity which characterises all aspects of this performance.

It must also be noted that, despite (or perhaps due to) its inimitable complexity, the performed narrative is comprehensible without a knowledge of the lexicon of gestures and figures employed in Bharatanatyam.

The performance treats the goddesses as the anthropomorphisation of attributes desirable in the abstract: knowledge, aesthetic sensibility, prosperity, etc. In so doing, it treats the act of

anthropomorphisation and female embodiment almost as an act of symbolic violence. It simultaneously makes the current iterations and continuums of these abstracts on the female body look nearly profane and distortive, referring back to the violence inherent in this gendered anthropomorphisation.

As befits a performance that speaks to the delimitation of agency and representation through constraint and idolisation, hybridity marks every aspect of the dance. The performer conforms through her iterations of the norm even as she transforms it and herself in ways that puritans may find distortive. The performance alludes to a purity assumed present but absent in truth, whether in her form of Bharatanatyam classical dance or the protagonists of the stories she is telling with her body: whether that of the goddesses or the women in her family. The performance invites as it disrupts gaze, and is pluriversal.

One must also note the impeccable timing and coordination with the light and sound crew, which aided the perfect gesturing, and morphing from the more classical forms to emotive acting in smooth graceful transitions so it is never abrupt or jarring. This practised smoothness reaffirms to the audience that the transitions of the people shown have never been jarring, and that their contradictions only appear so at first glance.

Dr. Ratnam has been known for propounding her unique dance form of the Neo-Bharata: that which both draws from, and distinguishes itself from conventional Bharatanatyam. We have no training in dance, and can follow Bharatanatyam recitals mostly because of my familiarity with the stories they narrate. Whether one chooses to treat *Ma3ka* as an experiment of Neo-Bharata departure from Bharatanatyam, or a distinctly modern hybrid form of musical theatre—the claim of feminist authorship, in both form and content, rings true and clear.

Women's life writing, whether one looks at a nineteenth-century text like Binodini Dasi's *Amar Katha* [usually translated as My Story, but as plausibly My Words] or Kamala Das' *Ente Katha* [also translated as My Story, but perhaps subject to a similar polysemy] or even the fragmented narratives of search-engine-optimized cooking blogs, are often community- and collective-oriented. While this is not a trait exclusive to women writers—Dalit, queer and POC male writers are also relatively more collective in their life-writing—it is certainly characteristic. Women's life-writing is intersubjective, and often intertextual, sampling and braiding other lives and narratives into one's own. *Ma3ka* is especially interesting when read in this light, in sofar as one sees a doubling whereby it is necessary to interweave her grandmother's experiences with those of the eponymous goddess in order to best narrate either, and examining a possible modern iteration is crucial to Ratnam's interpretation of the goddesses. The interspersal of Ratnam's diary entries in the orature accompanying dances that are in some way portrayals of her grandmother, mother and daughter further emphasises this entanglement. Ratnam dances out not one life or several distinct ones, but instead an inter subjective lineage and inter textual tradition.

Anxiety of influence and anxiety of authorship manifest in life writings in deeply particular, localized, and often gendered ways, and Dr. Ratnam counters it with her play of inter subjective performativity. She reiterates the conventional story of a particular female archetype, but in the process, both transforms and links it to not only the contemporary associations—Lakshmi with modern accessories—but also to particular iterations: her grandmother Saraswati. *Ma3ka* can be read as a play of stereotypes: disadvantaged, systematically exploited women protagonists are a familiar subject of Indian social realist fiction and drama, while mythology and melodrama greatly extend both trope and associated sufferings. Ratnam's treatment of these over-used tropes, however, is interesting: *Ma3ka* reiterates, disrupts and resists norms

shared between performer(s) and presumed audience. Thus, Laxmi walks the ramp to the accompaniment of the Laxmi *stotram* overlaid by "Sheela ki Jawani" and "Bad Romance," while Meenakshi's gendered excess takes an androgynous form: itself both a reiteration and disruption of the expected *ardhanariswara*. Ratnam resists the anxiety of authorship through the embodied narration of mythological and familial lives, claiming authorship in the act of destabilizing/disrupting the meaning-making structures she reiterates. Her body itself becomes a liminal, productive space that lends itself not simply to repetitions of stabilized meanings, but new conflations of differences. The performance creates disruptive points of incomprehension and incoherence within established frameworks—an illiterate Saraswati, an overtly-sexualised Laxmi—by exploring the hybrid plurality of familiar motifs.

Gilbert and Gubar's anxiety of authorship is in many ways opposed to Bloom's concept of the anxiety of influence: rather than fearing stepping on an over trodden path, women creators fear trudging into what appears to be terra incognita because of the systemic destruction of previous inhabitants and explorers. Ratnam's deliberate use of the tool of autobiographical storytelling in her performance allows her to resolve this anxiety through identification of and with revered and reviled, mortal and immortal, ancestresses: in *Ma3ka*, she not only narrates but represents them on her hybrid body.

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BARBIN'S MEMORY OF DISPLACEMENT: MEMOIRS OF A 19TH CENTURY HERMAPHRODITE

Achu John

"May you hear my feeble voice! It will tell you that here below there is a heart full of the memory of you."-Barbin

We all like to keep things in remembrance, the pleasant things, the joyous moments and great experiences, but when it comes to trauma, hardships, exclusions and discrimination, memory can be deceptive. We hoard and procure incidents and when these incidents are that of trauma, it can be overwhelming. Such is the story of Herculine Barbin, a person who had an ordinary life until she was reclassified as a male and was asked to live the rest of her life as a newly found male. Many of her memories were joyous until a major change in her life. Herculine Barbin was one of the earliest known hermaphrodites who wrote a memoir before she committed suicide. This paper would focus on the life and writings of Herculine Barbin, who was one of the early-identified intersex person, who lived for more than twenty years. These identities have a strictly girlish atmosphere and were then reclassified as a male. In one of this, Barbin was happy and found home and the second was much more like a rehabilitation, which she could not cope with and hence had committed suicide. Barbin wrote her memoir at the last stage of her life when she was facing an identity crisis in her life. Her memory of living as a girl initially and as a boy afterwards, incorporates emotional, nostalgic and self-reflexive imagery. The memory of her life presents a struggle that she went through and in its minutest details tell us an extremely personal story. Her lived experience is more connected to trauma and its detailed

depiction questions the so-called well-knitted social order. The work, which is very relevant in today's society and can be juxtaposed with the current gender relations, especially to that of transgender and the homosexual community. The story of Barbin remains a perfect example of a displaced person. Her memoir takes us through the questions of identity, choice, belongingness, and trauma.

Hermaphroditism is a biological condition of having both male and female reproductive organs, although in the case of human beings the term intersex is more common. The term was previously used to describe a person who did not fit into both male and female characteristics. In today's society, we see a lot of improvement in attitude and perception towards these kinds of people and most consider them as normal beings. We do still follow those strict gender rules but that was not the case some hundred years ago. Even in today's society gender norms are still not on the right path.

One's gender determines a major part of one's identity. Until some time before, it was just men and women that we knew or rather, it was just men and women that we accepted and considered normal. Nothing beyond this was accepted. Barbin was an intersex person but could not live as an intersex person as society did not consider it normal. She was forced to take an identity offered by society after medical procedures and judicial interventions and was denied the identity that she was familiar with for years. This forced displacement is what Barbin recollects in her memoirs.

We are being classified and trained according to the identity that is rather given than chosen. We live with that identity for a long time and usually throughout life. A displacement in identity is one of the hardest to accept, it's just like being uprooted from where you were and planting in a new place. Born on November 8th, 1838, in the French village of Saint

Jean d'Angely, Herculine Barbin was a nineteenth-century intersex person who was reclassified as male when Barbin was twenty-two years old. Her family called her Alexina. She was born in a poor family and her father died sometime after her birth. Barbin's mother thus found it very difficult to meet two ends and Barbin was moved to an orphanage. As she was good with her studies she was accepted into a Christian boarding school and she stayed in the convent. Her life and activities were mostly in and around the convent and she was quite loved by everyone there. This can be considered a major reason for her excellence in studies and her strong belief in Christian values. Her physical attributes, as a girl, were not the same as with other girls in the convent. She did not menstruate, remained flat-chested and developed hairs on her upper lips. Despite all these, she gained erotic attention from other pupils and was attracted to a friend in school. At the age of seventeen, she was sent to become an educator. The situation was much the same in the Catholic teacher's college. By the time he began teaching; Herculine had frequent encounters with other young women and was deeply in love with a woman named Sara. Herculine and Sara were involved emotionally and physically, and lived happily, albeit clandestinely, as partners. It was in this period that Barbin experienced severe pains and physical difficulties. Further, a doctor examined her, discovered her uncertain and ambiguous sexual identity, and asked her to leave the convent. Barbin was then reclassified as a male after medical examinations. She had to leave her familiar surroundings. She left her job, lover, and family. She was renamed Abel Barbin and moved to Paris to find a dwelling there. It was in this period that she wrote her memoirs. Here, she lived in abject poverty and despair. In 1868 she was found dead in her house as she inhaled gas from her coal gas stove; her memoirs were found near her body.

It is fascinating to note that Barbin's memoirs used female pronouns to refer to her life. This itself shows that she was indeed more female and is suddenly left to live the life of a male. It would be enough to

say that Barbin lived her life through both these extents and throughout her life, she experienced a metamorphosis, which truly made her transform into another being. The identity that was provided was not acceptable for her but that was the norm and she had to follow it. When she fails to identify as a male there is nothing much left to her. Compared to the life she led earlier, the new life was not at all acceptable.

In Barbin's memoirs, we go through many intimate relationships, which are very directly explained. We can see that she enjoyed what she did. She enjoyed the identity of being a girl and being among those situations, which were reserved for girls. Even though she noticed that her body was not similar to that of other girls, she always wanted to be one among them. After being decided as a male, she never talked about any kind of sexual or erotic moments that happened. She preferred the sexual identity of being a girl despite all the qualities that she lacked. The new identity of a young man was simply very difficult to accept. Her initial life was protected by the highly religious and closed society where she belonged. The religious institution, which was only meant for a particular gender was no longer open to her, even though she wanted to be one among them.

Choice plays an important role here. If she was left with a choice, Barbin would have chosen to be a girl. Her life altogether was not always happy, she had a lot of physical infirmity and identity crisis, but when she lived as a girl she rather accepted it, tried to abide by it, tried to study hard, gained a job; she even had erotic experiences within her bounds of sexual uncertainty. However, the second half of her life was not chosen by her and lacked the very essence that could have helped her survive. In a way we cannot confirm the position in which she writes, whether she is writing as a male, female or hermaphrodite. She mainly writes referring to herself as female, but physically she is a newly certified

male. Now, even if she wants a third identity, that is of a hermaphrodite, she lacked the choice.

Written after being identified as male, her memoirs could be a whole question of the search for a proper identity, reflecting on the good old times as a female, confused about the future in the hands of a new identity as a male. Here, the question of the sexual identity becomes the question of legality; one has to be either male or female to be legally accepted, and there existed no room for hermaphrodites or intersex people, simply because it was not considered natural at that time. It is as if to get a proper identity one will have to fulfill certain norms and conditions laid out by the society. Her inner truths about herself are covered by outer space, which demands certain criteria that have to be fulfilled.

The idea of belongingness is crucial here, Barbin belonged to a feminine world, which she slowly created and inhabited. We all belong somewhere and it is this memory of our belonging, which is a major drive that lets us live. It is Wa basic emotional need. When this is monitored by an outside force, tensions can occur. Often in the case of the third gender, the question "where do you belong" recurs. Then comes categorization to which many people force themselves to belong to achieve social acceptance, no matter what their self needs. Barbin, after her official transformation, wished to belong somewhere. From familiar places, people and relationships, she moves to uncertain experiences that she was not accustomed to and it was in this journey that she could not succeed. Only by broadening the concept of belongingness, we can be more humane by accepting people in the way they want us to take them.

Herculine Barbin's memoirs can be simply said as texts which document the struggle to find and inhabit an identity. Written after being decided as a male the work documents her earlier young and beautiful

life with all her erotic encounters and sexual love and her present and doubtful life in which she struggles to survive and is not too far from her death. The work can also be considered as an extended suicide note. The erotic nature of Barbin's life suggests that he wished to live in that way than what was forced on her. She was identified as male but she identifies herself as a female and wanted to live the life of a female. It is all about the whole desire to belong where she wished to, and when that was taken away, there was nothing left for her. If at all, she was given a choice to choose or to accept a third identity, which is of a hermaphrodite or given the freedom to choose, she might have survived.

From her memory, Barbin recollects what it was to live a life when being called normal and to live a life with an uncertain identity. Even though written a long time back it still holds relevant questions that are related to identity and acceptance. We all live in a society where acceptance is directly linked to identity. Many of us are forced to get into many identities to get acceptance. This memoir holds the memory of Barbin who vividly depicts what her life was. She presents happy memories and her memories of struggle to inhabit an identity. Within these two parts of memories, we can find variations in the tone of narration itself. We feel some kind of emotional attachment to the work. Barbin's memory of displacement is not just a person's account of the experience that lived a hundred years ago. This can be related to the memory of many people who live today unable to inhabit the identity they want to. Many of them are not bold enough to accept these sexual differences and live with the identity they want to, face discrimination and social exclusion. Sexual minorities have had long and deteriorating memories of subjugation and struggle. Barbin can be considered as an early example who wrote down her experience. The memoir of Barbin is not of a happy being rather, as Gilbert Herdt says, as providing a crisis for modern ideology.

In today's times where coming out of the closet is gradually being considered normal and the term gender is a much open platform permitting discussions and accepting differences, Barbin's memory remains as a pain. It is important to go back to people like Barbin to study their lived experience to make today a better world. We are born equal but born different.

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Diotima's: A Journal of New Readings
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The Department of English, Providence Women's College, Kozhikode invites papers for the 2021 issue of its annual journal, *Diotima's: A Journal of New Readings*, on **Culture in the Digital Age**. We welcome well researched and theoretically grounded research papers from academicians and research scholars from departments of English, Media Studies, Gender Studies, Philosophy, Social Sciences and other interdisciplinary areas pertaining to the broad area of **Culture in the Digital Age**.

The contemporary world is one saturated by digital culture and the new media, and this saturation seems most evident today. From working from home to online classes, what some might consider a paradigm shift in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic is only made possible by the fact that we have been living digitally immersed lives all this while. In this context, it is important to note that digital culture is not an alien culture, separate and distinct from offline culture , but rather it encompasses the world that has slowly been built around us, at least for the past 15-20 years.

How does this proliferation and saturation of digital culture impact literary and cultural studies in terms of its objects and methods? Does the anonymity promised by the digital sphere provide outlets for expression from those sections of society that have hitherto been marginalised on the basis of gender, caste, race, and community, or does it merely create breeding grounds for cyber-bullying and attacks

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