

Annotated Bibliography of the Necessity of Fiction in Autobiography

One of the intense debates pertaining to many pieces of autobiographical writing concerns whether all of the event details and interpretations made in autobiography are true. In presenting his life, it may appear that an author would desire to utilize complete honesty with no embellishment, but if that author's goal is to present his life as candidly as possible, a certain degree of invention is actually necessary and a welcome story-telling tool. Specifically, an author may aspire to share an idea that was exceedingly significant in his life, but he does not have a precise event that would effectively convey that idea. In this case, creating an episode out of his many life experiences that would properly present the idea is a required task. The second case of necessary embellishment involves truthfully presenting an event, but desiring to present the discovery of the importance of that event as occurring at the same time that the event transpired when in reality the revelation may have come significantly later. This reordering of events allows readers to more easily comprehend how various episodes in the author's life impacted future events in his life and is an essential fabrication in autobiography. Since the progression of one's life and the interaction of thought and action are much more evident retrospectively, all autobiography must contain some fiction in order to present a compelling and coherent life chronicle.

Barrington, Judith. "True to Life." *The Writer* 114.7 (2001): 22-25.

Barrington discusses how she utilized various types of embellishments in her autobiographical writing and how the writing benefited. Most intriguingly, she speaks of how recreating the essence of an event is the duty of autobiography and that any liberties taken with falsification to accomplish this goal are necessary and acceptable. The task corresponding to the goal amounts to reordering and expanding or compressing events in order to replicate the feelings produced by them and relates to aspiring to convey specific ideas.

Chapple, Gerald. "Will the Real Barbara Frischmuth Please Stand Up? On Autobiography and Literary Creation." *The Fiction of the I*. Ed. Nicholas J. Meyerhofer. Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1999. 10-33.

Chapple's essay spotlights the importance of imparting on readers the ability to detect the unique personality of an autobiography's author. To accomplish this, he states, interpretation is an essential process in which the writer becomes a processor, not merely a recorder, of external events. It is the inner states that are of significance in learning about the author, and the embellishment that develops as a result of processing and an intentional goal to present one's character as distinctly as possible is a natural product.

Cooke, Nathalie. "Reading Reflections: The Autobiographical Illusion in *Cat's Eye*." *Essays on Life Writing*. Ed. Marlene Kadar. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992. 162-170.

Cooke examines the connection between autobiography and fiction and reveals how they interact in Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye*. Cooke supports the notion that in order to tell

an effective story a combination of truth and fiction is required since truth alone, without fictional episodes or details to highlight main ideas, would not present an exceedingly convincing narrative. Cooke also discusses how readers often desire to classify a piece of writing as either fiction or nonfiction and do not recognize that fictional portions of autobiography may be more important than true events substituted into those same locations would be.

Dow, William. "Paul Auster's *The Invention of Solitude*: Glimmers in a Reach to Authenticity." *Critique* 39 (1998): 272-81.

Dow utilizes Paul Auster's book as an example of an autobiography that requires interpretation for its existence since Auster believes that he does not have a reliable self that existed in the past, only a self that arises from interpretations of past events and their interactions. Dow asserts that if Auster had written about events without giving them meaning, his completed work would not be a reflection of himself, while inserting meaning and finding relationships between experiences allows him to translate his vision of himself onto the printed page. Presenting the subjectivity of what the events of Auster's life mean at the same time that the episodes are being elaborated is absolutely necessary for him to reveal the impact that the events had in shaping his future existence.

Hoy, Helen. "'And Use the Words That Were Hers': Constructions of Subjectivity in Beverly Hungry Wolf's *The Ways of My Grandmothers*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 60 (1996): 32-58.

Hoy presents an example of how subjectivity is employed to accomplish an author's mission. In her autobiography, *Hungry Wolf* desires not to present an active self, but a passive self whose main function is to assimilate the events of the world around her. To exhibit her perspective of herself, she must describe events that she witnessed, but did not directly participate in, and what she deduced and learned from those events. Interpretation is an exceedingly vital factor here, though not for evaluating her life, but for investigating the purpose and meaning of various events for the individuals who did participate in them. The reader can then glean how *Hungry Wolf's* interpretations of other people affected her own development and life experiences. Although *Hungry Wolf's* interpretations may not have been correct, she believed in them, allowed them to shape her, and thus they constitute a necessary component of her autobiography.

Hudgins, Andrew. "An Autobiographer's Lies." *The American Scholar* 65 (1996): 541-53.

Hudgins' essay discusses eight types of lies in autobiography that he has elucidated through his own autobiographical writing and explicates how they function to produce clarity and captivate readers. While presenting examples from his writing and from autobiographies written throughout history, he displays how some types of fabrications are essential while others are simply convenient. Hudgins corroborates the notion that the lie of interpretation and the lie of extended consciousness are essential.

Kadar, Marlene. "Whose Life Is It Anyway? Out of the Bathtub and into the Narrative."

Essays on Life Writing. Ed. Marlene Kadar. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
152-161.

Kadar's essay examines the idea that in the past it was generally thought that objectivity and reasoned thinking were essential features of autobiography and refutes that notion by arguing that to fully tell a story through life writing, some subjectivity is necessary. In order to become familiar with the human behind the events, she asserts, the person's thoughts and feelings, interpretations, about the events must be included since they alone define the person; impersonal events can apply to anyone. This process of inclusion connects to the imperative of sharing ideas and personal meanings of events in order to present the whole of one's life, even if the task requires embellishment.

Mason, Bobbie Ann. "Stranger than Fiction." *The Writer* 112.9 (1999): 16-17.

In this article, Mason discusses her experience with writing autobiography, placing emphasis on the surprise she experienced when at the completion of writing she discovered that what she had placed on the pages did not match with precision the contents of her memory. Her essay demonstrates that in an author's mind, the majority of her life can be recalled and the progression of one event to another visualized, but when conveying that life to the world, only select events can be included and connections that are implicitly accepted must be accented. As a result, both the events and connections receive greater importance than they do in the everyday life of the author's mind, but since they are the fundamental principles and motivations of the author's life, they portray a complete and honest person. Thus the highlighting of the fundamentals allows readers to become acquainted with the author's nature, an opportunity that only mild fabrication can bestow.

Reed, Matt. "Homo lepidopterist: Nabokov and the Pursuit of Memory." *Clio* 29 (2000): 271-

Reed writes about how invention is necessary for the purpose of displaying aesthetics in Nabokov's autobiography. The essay reveals that when Nabokov reminisces, his recalling mechanism decorates his memories and the recalled events become a celebration of life. Since depicting events alone, without intricate details to make the episodes as vivid as possible, would indicate that they have faded because of insignificance, including numerous details, even if they must be fabricated, contributes to the experiences' importance and indicates how much pleasure Nabokov derived from living; he reveled in his experiences with such bliss that he encoded his memories with astounding precision. Nabokov's goal of conveying the splendor of life could only be accomplished by concocting intricacies that dramatized his true past.

Walker, Ellen and Seaman, Gerda. "Where is the Voice Coming From?' Eudora Welty's Life in Fiction." *Southern Quarterly* 38.4 (2000): 27-37.

Walker and Seaman describe how in desiring to present the vital revelations and introspections of her life, Welty must employ embellishment to demonstrate the indestructible interactions between various events. Even though the events may have transpired at distant durations temporally, in Welty's mind the first event was called up when the second event was occurring and the two became irreversibly affiliated with each other. Objectively, the two events may have no relation with each other, but since they are connected in Welty's mind and affect her intensely enough to warrant sharing, there is a demand to present them together in autobiography in order to present the essence of herself.