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Establishing Narrative Voice and Encountering the ‘I’ Through Identity Creation in Life Writing

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ABSTRACT

American biographer and scholar, Carl Rollyson, maintains that ‘the focus of biography is on the subject, not the biographer, yet half the story of a biography is, of course, who is telling the story’ [Rollyson, C. 2020. *The Last Days of Sylvia Plath*. New York: Blackstone, xi]. This article maintains that the writing process facilitates identity development by writing ourselves into existence. This experience is conveyed while focusing on issues of self-reflexivity and writer agency, alongside identity formation through writing our ‘own’ stories from unique perspectives. This process is explored through a discussion of the ways in which I have grappled with establishing a narrative voice while forging a personal sense of identity while writing my doctoral thesis, which is a practice-based project comprising a life-writing artefact presented alongside a critical exegesis. This article explores the ways in which writers occupy central roles within life writing, while underscoring the process in ascertaining issues pertaining to identity. Finally, this discussion concludes with the consideration of the ways in which the ‘I’ in life writing can be established, arguing for the personal experience that is inevitably embodied by the genre.

KEYWORDS

Narrative voice; identity; agency; vignettes

Introduction

In life writing, the writer’s positionality in relation to the narrative under construction proves critical. Writers play a central role in the texts they write and arguably serve as narrative focalisers, who are responsible for the story’s development. As such, the proximity between writer and the writing subject itself exerts pressure on the text in equal measure. This article maintains that the writing process facilitates the experience of writing ourselves into existence resulting in identity formation through narrative construction.

American biographer and scholar, Carl Rollyson, argues that ‘the focus of biography is on the subject, not the biographer, yet half the story of a biography is, of course, who is telling the story’ (Rollyson 2020, xi). While Rollyson’s emphasis on the subject’s role in

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writing is relevant, he also clearly acknowledges the writer's positioning as being central to the narrative. This perspective directly addresses the proximity between writer and subject in the life-writing genre. Taking my lead from Rollyson, this article will argue for the ways in which narrators of non-fiction writing occupy central roles in relation to the narratives constructed. These narrators frequently occupy the dual role of writer in this genre. Rollyson's discussion emphasises the presence of the biographer within the written text (2020). In this way, he underscores the process of developing identity and agency. These issues result from the writing process while proving pivotal in facilitating the writer's discovery and establishment of the 'I' within life-writing narratives.

While life-writing scholars turn attention to the 'eye' of the narrator, the discussion presented in this article focuses more prominently on the role of the narrator's (and sometimes, writer's) identity in relation to the text being constructed. The 'eye' in this case is characterised by the perspective from which the narrative is constructed, as suggested by scholars such as Elizabeth Bruss (1980). This position refers to the perceptions of experiences and occurrences that are written about, while constructing the voice of the narrator in life writing. The influences of self-reflexivity, identity, and agency of writers will be explored while drawing from my own life-writing experiences. This discussion will also consider the ways in which writers' identities are formed through the writing of our 'own' stories from unique perspectives; ultimately foregrounding the ways we write ourselves into existence through the process. Finally, this article concludes with the consideration of ways in which the 'I' in life writing can be established, arguing for the personal experience that is inevitably embodied by the genre.

The project

The ideas proposed in this article are explored through a discussion of the ways in which I have grappled with establishing a narrative voice while forging a personal sense of identity throughout the writing of my doctoral thesis. My PhD in English Studies comprises two parts: a critical exegesis (serving as the dissertation or thesis) presented alongside a creative artefact. The creative artefact is structured into a biographical memoir about my late father, who was a prominent figure in the South African film industry from 1964 until his death in 2019. He is referred to throughout the remainder of this article as 'the subject' for ease of reference. This article's contents draw from my experiences of constructing this biographical memoir.

The biographical memoir uses vignettes to establish a temporally fragmented narrative capturing the subject's life. In this project, this narrative technique is applied as a mechanism to further progress the content through the sustained oscillation between vignettes. The project comprises 71 vignettes: 26 'memoir vignettes' and 45 'biography vignettes'. These terms are my own and are included to refer to the different vignette styles used throughout the narrative. The fragmented structure is representative of the subject's complex identity while attempting to portray the experiences of estranged familial relationships for the reader. These vignettes, in turn, blur the boundaries between fact and fiction in that much of the material, which is centred around factual encounters, has been reimagined to confront the reader with a 'storyworld'. In this way, the 'biography vignettes' present what scholar Saidiya Hartman terms 'critical

fabulations', while the 'memoir vignettes' explore more intimate, 'memoir-esque' accounts accessed through memory (2021, 11). Temporal fragmentation and vignettes are well-established styles observed frequently in fictional works including Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), and Ivan Vladislavić's *Portrait with Keys* (2014). Such narrative fragmentation supports the fragmentation and later reconstitution of characters while facilitating 'the reader's *mobility* of movement across spacio-temporal divides' (Tavener-Smith 2023). This type of temporal fragmentation occurs less frequently in life-writing genres, with more linearly structured, 'cradle-to-grave' accounts being favoured, particularly in South African life writing. This poses a gap for further research to be undertaken within the genre, which my project aims to address.

By employing a combination of literary criticism alongside real-life memoirs viewed through the lenses of cultural and liminal theory, this project aims to present an experimental approach to establishing life-writing narratives. Finally, this article serves as a case study demonstrating my experiences of the writing process while establishing a narrative voice and encountering the *T* through identity creation in life writing. This discussion will demonstrate how my life-writing experiences both align with and depart from the theories presented in relation to such issues as self-reflexivity, identity formation, and agency.

Self-reflexivity, agency, and identity

Self-reflexivity in life writing is central to the writing process. Self-reflexivity means the ways in which writers take ownership over our research and writing. Writers' ownership includes acknowledging bias and self-perceptions influencing the text being written (Bunkers [1988] 2014). This consideration underscores the influence writers have on the narratives created. Bias and self-perceptions about subjects are an inevitable presence in life writing and an aspect I experienced throughout the writing of the creative artefact. Life-writing projects possess inherent subjectivities alongside the potential for bias. As such, life writers have a responsibility to tell the truth, while acknowledging the 'balancing act' involved with measuring 'the benefits against the costs' (Eakin 2004, 9). It is important to acknowledge here that my creative artefact does not attempt to position itself as a 'singular' voice or indeed, a 'true', entirely objective or unbiased representation of the subject, his life, and works. However, I am suggesting that the narrative will, at the very least, present factually accurate information about the subject's life while providing further insights into an under-explored sub-genre of life writing within the South African context. Ultimately, this project grapples with scholar Paul Eakin's earlier suggested 'balancing act' to portray a life from a unique perspective and in close proximity to the subject (2004, 9).

Scholar Shelley Roche-Jacques, maintains that narrative requires the presence of at least one 'event' or 'action' (2024, 2). Moreover, Roche-Jacques argues that in narratives 'something needs to happen, or perhaps more importantly, that *a context needs to be created* in which there is the *possibility* of something happening' (2024, 2). Roche-Jacques' argument is relevant to my work in that the narrative created centres around the subject's life. This narrative is constructed to a considerable extent in that it is presented alongside several significant life events (of the subject). The inclusion of such

events progresses the narrative's development. This is also achieved by establishing a narrative that incorporates several forms of evidence through interviews with the subject's peers, archival evidence, online sources written about him, as well as personally sourced materials.

Acknowledging the presence of self-reflexivity during my writing practice became apparent early on during the writing process. This realisation surfaced once I understood, whether I wished for it or not, I was entangled with the subject matter under study. Ultimately my impact on, and interconnectivity with, the text I was writing was unavoidable. Scholar Rebecca Styler, maintains the significance of this close engagement between writer and subject, proffering that writers' identities are often forged through the life-writing process while writing about a subject's life (2017). This developmental process of self-construction is particularly poignant for writers who write about those close to them. Self-reflexivity challenges writers' boundaries in relation to the text being written. It does so by repudiating the temptation to separate writers' perceptions, thoughts, and emotions from the text. Moreover, self-reflexivity facilitates the process associated with recalling painful memories, requiring revisiting, throughout the writing process.

Self-reflexivity's role in life writing becomes evident when reflecting on my initial intentions for the direction I anticipated for my project. At the outset, I was determined to present a dissociated and objective account of the subject. I fixed my sights on creating a methodically written account, devoid of any personal perspectives infiltrating the narrative. Ultimately, my plan was to present an academic argument about my subject in a chronologically structured order. Despite these early musings, it became clear that this approach would yield a detached narrative incapable of engaging the reader. This outcome would result in the subject's life remaining fragmented in a dispassionate portrayal proving counterproductive. According to life-writing scholar Bill Roorbach, 'the writer is also the protagonist' (2008, 13). This realisation clarifies the reasons for the limited value such an objective narrative would present. Owing to the fact that memoir may be considered 'a true story' the narrative itself is frequently 'built directly from the memory of its writer', which further demonstrates the limitations of attempting to undertake an objective narrative (Roorbach 2008, 13).

Life-writing scholars, Sally Cline and Carole Angier, maintain that life writers may be considered as 're-creative artists' in that they 'recreate the past' (2010, 7; 121). Unlike fiction writers, life writers recreate representations of both the 'living and the dead' to capture the experiences of real people (Cline and Angier 2010, 7). It is in this way, argue Cline and Angier, that as life writers, we find ourselves caught in between reality and our own imaginations (Cline and Angier 2010, 7). Moreover, Cline and Angier (2010) maintain that owing to the re-creative nature of life writing, that memoirs frequently avoid chronological narrative structures. Rather, these narratives are told according to the overall story's context (Cline and Angier 2010, 90). A similar approach was applied during my writing process in that rather than a chronologically structured biographical memoir, a thematically arranged narrative was prioritised. The outcome of this writing approach is a biographical memoir, consisting of a temporally fragmented narrative style that mimics the functioning of memory. This mimicry of memory was explored through fleeting recollections that force themselves to the surface of the recaller's mind; like flashes from a frenetic film sequence designed to

establish both a sense of unease and uncertainty. I endeavoured to apply a narrative structure that would evoke similar feelings in the reader to those that I experienced throughout the writing process, in terms of learning about my subject in unconventional, fragmented ways.

Writers' emotional engagement with the narrative is commonplace in life writing (Lamb 2021). Scholar Karen Lamb argues that this gained intimacy, despite being initially avoided, demonstrates the intriguing nature of the written work (2021). Moreover, Lamb suggests that these detached intentions frequently prove unsuccessful as the writer's presence leaves an undoubted marker on the work being written (2021). For these reasons, I deemed it essential to the project's authenticity to firmly orientate myself within the narrative I was constructing. In an effort to conceptualise this perceived unavoidable entanglement with the subject's story, I draw from scholars, Sarah Nuttall (2009) and Maria Tamboukou (2011), who may both be considered relevant inclusions in the discussion on the entanglement between writer and narrative. In the first instance, Nuttall argues for the process of entanglement, necessitating a closeness or 'condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with' (2009, 1). She argues for the inevitability of the intimacy gained even in instances where 'it was resisted, or ignored or uninvited' (Nuttall 2009, 1). While Nuttall's theory of entanglement is predominantly applied in literary and cultural studies, her argument possesses relevance when applied to the life-writing genre in relation to writers' narratives. This shared intimacy, fostered between writers and narratives, proved central to my experience throughout the writing process. As discussed earlier, I had initially anticipated the development of an objective narrative, from which I would be carefully removed. However, despite my best efforts, such an outcome was impossible as I undoubtedly became closely entangled with both the narrative and its subject.

Similarly, scholar Maria Tamboukou, grapples with what she refers to as the 'coherence and sequence' in relation to narrative construction (2011, 4). Tamboukou's argument maintains the impossibility of obtaining either autonomy or independence by writers in relation to constructed narratives. She argues not only for the interconnectedness of the narratives we write but also for the paradox of writers' inevitable entanglement with the 'storyworlds' we create (Tamboukou 2011, 4). These storyworlds comprising 'the story, the teller, the interviewer, the writer, the plot, the narrative, content and its form' are entangled with one another in that these components cannot be separated (Tamboukou 2011, 4). Both scholars' suggestions regarding the unavoidable interconnectivity between writer (who often serves dually as the narrator) and narrative possess an inescapable intimacy. Simply put, prime life writing strikes a fine balance between intimacy that is void of self-absorption (Krauth 2002). Undeniably then, writer and subject are closely intertwined.

Introspection facilitates the adoption of a different stance towards personal rediscovery and proves central to life writing. Author T.S. Eliot goes so far as to suggest that self-reflexivity in writing unavoidable (1998). Writers cannot write about lives without first reflecting inward on our own. Such absorption in writing occurred early on and was an additional motivation for orienting myself within the text I was creating in an effort to provide, as scholar Antonio Damasio argues, 'clear insight into the inner workings of the mind, which in turn, facilitates an underlying prerequisite for creating great art' (2001). These early phases in the writing process are best

characterised in terms of the connection between the writing process and the writer's state of mind (2001). In this way, Damasio foregrounds the benefits of careful engagement with a text being written as he maintains that 'when we lose ourselves in the process of writing – [so] does the process [of writing] begin in earnest (2001)'.

Identity formation and agency

Throughout the writing process, it became apparent to me that while I was learning about my subject, I was also in the process of forming my own identity, while asserting a sense of agency. Scholarship indicates that writers engage with self-reflexivity as a means of introspection. Interestingly, life writers frequently lean on the theoretical footing offered by neurosurgeon, Oliver Sacks, when it comes to defining identity. Sacks writes that 'each of us constructs and lives a "narrative" and that this narrative is us, our identities' (1985). Knowing our subjects, by extension, means knowing ourselves, too. If we fail to grasp tangible memories or experiences (whether positive or negative) we find ourselves devoid of identity; and ultimately, exist in the world without a palpable sense of self, which poses a challenge when attempting to construct the identity of another.

For example, in her poem *The Colossus*, Sylvia Plath, argues the following about her subject: 'I shall never get you put together entirely / pieced, glued, and properly jointed' (2008). Plath's desperate yearning to grasp her subject's identity, to conceptualise her own, is a notion shared by countless life writers and proves a recurrent theme in the genre. This consideration resonated with my own writing experiences as I continued to grapple with the realisation of self-identity formation alongside my subject's. Scholar Margaret McMullan considers the variation of personal experience that exists within the realm of familial relationships (2015). To this end, she maintains the enduring need experienced by writers for fully grasping the subject; while underscoring our persistence in 'always *trying* to know' them, thereby reinforcing the consideration that writers' identities remain closely intertwined with our subjects'.

Australian writer and academic, Germaine Greer examines her subject in relation to her own identity while undergoing a process of self-discovery alongside the lifting of the 'curtain of silence' her subject drew tightly around himself (1990). In her writing, Greer attempts to uncover aspects about her subject's identity to learn more about her own, while using the opportunity to reconnect both with him and her own genealogical roots (1990). While these authors provide only a handful of examples of writers eulogising subjects' lives, it is evident that all acknowledge the entanglement that exists between subjects' identities alongside our own.

This realisation regarding identity is evidenced in works of authors such as Bliss Broyard, who acknowledges her subject's role in relation to the establishment of her own identity (2015). She argues: 'I keep hoping to find the line where he stops and I begin' (2015, 28). Broyard's inclusion serves to reinforce the all-encompassing impact that her subject's presence, or indeed absence, can have on a writer's life, while highlighting the bond that perseveres between them throughout the writing process. Similarly, in her chapter entitled *No Regrets*, writer Jane Smiley acknowledges the far-reaching impact of what she terms her subject's 'gift of absence' in her life (2015). Smiley's realisation

serves to demonstrate the weighty influence and indeed interpersonal dialectic, which arguably exists between writer and subject, while furthering the suggestion of subjects' impacts on writer identity (2015). Another resonant example of an identity forged through the engagement with the subject being written about is observed in the works of novelist Mako Yoshikawa (2015). Yoshikawa began playing the role of 'psychological detective' in 2010, following her subject's death, when she began researching his life and works (2015, 51). She does so under the premise that knowing more about him will, in turn, help her to know more about herself, thereby establishing a clearer grasp on her own identity, in relation to his. Throughout her writing, Yoshikawa comes to acknowledge the nuances of her subject's character, while uncovering his impact on the formation of her own identity alongside it (2015).

Writing our 'own' stories

Writing a subject's life is just as much about the subject, as it is about the writer (Rollyson 2020). While life writing endeavours to narrate the stories of subjects, these narratives unveil detail about writers' identities as well. Eakin maintains that 'when we write about our lives, the complex work of constructing the story is intertwined with all that constitutes the process of identity formation' (2019, ix). Eakin maintains that identity has to do with the conscious recognition of the presence of an "I" and "me" (2011, 9). In this way, Eakin maintains: 'I write my story; I say who I am; I create my self' (Eakin 2019, 43). This consideration is partly owing to the content writers choose to write about as well as because of the perceptions uncovered through writing, which ultimately, serve to tell our side of the subject's story. For example, in Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, which addresses several complexities encountered throughout her own writing process (1995), Lamott argues that we are the owners of our personal experiences. By extension, we have the undeniable right to tell and write these stories in spite of their complexities (Lamott 1995). Writing our 'own' stories is crucial when making sense of experiences while learning about others during the life-writing process. Life-writing scholar, Bill Roorbach, raises a similar argument, clarifying that 'memoir is written from the territory of the writer, of the self, of an I' (2008, 14). Thus, writing about a subject, while uncovering our identity, is considered an equally central practice in life writing.

During the early phases of writing the biographical memoir component of my project, I struggled to frame the text in a meaningful way that would engage readers' interest. This difficulty was partly attributed to the distanced approach I had undertaken, addressed earlier, but this also had to do with the need to attempt to write my own story alongside that of the subject; while attempting to avoid that need. Life-writing scholar, Philip Neilsen, acknowledges the significance of the discovery process when writing about a subject's life (2021). He maintains that this process can be either 'painful or restorative, but always a dynamic process of seeking and remaking. It both unifies and fragments experience. It locates us as agents within our own lives, which inevitably can be perceived as a story' (Neilsen 2021, 133).

Life writing is frequently used as a means to assert agency by writers (Mulvihill and Swaminathan 2017, 93). This action in itself implies the 'ability to make the laws according to which we act and that we ourselves consider correct' (Roessler 2021, 82). Asserting

agency is central for the process of identity formation to result, which is a focal concern in this article. This sense of agency has proven a central concern throughout the writing of this project and is one frequently returned to by life writers, who concern themselves with conveying narratives, in which they invariably occupy the centre. Biographical memoir may be considered a relational narrative that occupies the space between fact and fiction (Cline and Angier 2010). This oscillation between fact and fiction positions biographical memoir in an interesting locale within the genre. In this way, scholar Eakin argues for the notion of 'relational identities', which purports that identities are created in 'its relations with others' (2019, 43). Furthermore, Eakin acknowledges the existence of 'relational environments' present between writer/narrator and the subject being written about (2019, 68).

Grappling with these narrative complexities and unavoidable silences can be uncomfortable for writers. For this reason, it may be tempting to depart from the truth in the effort of self-preservation. While unsettling, these silences frequently inform the narrative through the inclusion of narrative point of view, the tone of voice applied, descriptive inclusions presented throughout the text, and language use adopted by the writer to further progress these silences. However, this inclination to disregard incompatible views held by people about a subject (particularly one in the public eye) needs to be challenged if we are to write our own stories, from our own perspectives—and do so truthfully. This consideration is one which I prioritised throughout the writing of my project, while acknowledging the importance of shifting from silent observer to vocal writer regarding my subject's life.

Writing ourselves into existence

From the writer's perspective, the issue of identity is just as poignant as the identity of the subject being written about, particularly in relation to how identity is established based on the presence (or absence) of these figures. Such instances of character development through trials in a writer's life are frequently explored subjects. Dani Shapiro's memoir, *Inheritance: A Memoir of Genealogy, Paternity and Love* serves as one such example of identity formation and discovery through her writing (2019). Shapiro reflects on the results following the completion of a genealogical DNA test taken voluntarily. She learns she is not biologically related to her father (Shapiro 2019). The most notable hurdle Shapiro encounters throughout her self-rediscovery exists predominantly in relation to her identity. This regressive fragmentation and reconstitution of a sense of self is a notable and recurring feature in life writing. Ultimately, it is these origin stories that 'shape people's identities and anchor them—to a culture, a place and other people' (Marcus 2019).

Narrative voice and encountering the 'I' in life writing

Life-writing scholar, Catriona Ní Dhúill, challenges conventional perceptions held about life writing (2012). This article explores the ways in which my project departs from convention in life writing to challenge conventional narratives in the genre. This aim is achieved through the inclusion of vignettes as a narrative technique. 'Vignette' derives from the French word, '*vigne*', meaning 'small vine' (Bloom-Christen and Grunow

2022). Historically, the term has been used to describe etchings on tangible objects, including printed works and even pieces of furniture. From a literary perspective, ‘vignette’ has come to refer to a ‘short, descriptive literary sketch’. In *What’s (in) a Vignette? History, Functions, and Development of an Elusive Ethnographic Sub-genre* scholars, Bloom-Christen and Grunow (2022), argue for the in-between status of this style of ethnographic writing in that these scene sketches arise ‘uncomfortably between protocol and prose’. Bloom-Christen and Grunow argue for the oscillation between the realism of material deriving in part from empirical research, while also being written in an ‘evocative, theatrical, impressionistic, suggestive fashion’. In this way, vignettes are capable of conveying ‘fragments of story’ while also eliciting emotion from the reader (Riedl 2008). In this project, I applied a fragmented narrative as a mechanism to further progress the content through the oscillation between what I have termed ‘biography vignettes’ and ‘memoir vignettes’. These vignettes, in turn, blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. This blurring between fact and fiction arises based on the application of what scholar Saidiya Hartman terms ‘critical fabulation’ (2021, 11). This approach centres material on factual events and encounters, which are reimagined by the writer to establish a storyworld (Hartman 2021). This experimentation with narrative form proves the value fragmented structures contribute in the life-writing genre.

In addition, it underscores the importance of using the form for the purpose of furthering narratives about living subjects, particularly in cases where linear, cradle-to-grave narratives prove impossible owing to gaps in the knowledge base about a subject, which was an obstacle encountered during my writing process. This writing process emphasises the continually blurred lines between fact and fiction underscoring the opportunities writers have available to ‘blend, contort, and challenge the conventional distinctions of form’ within life writing (LABRC, 2024). This strategy served to present a suggested approach for future life writing, while leaning on existing literature as inspiration to experiment with narrative form. These views position the genre as being historically concerned with ‘spare’ subjects portrayed using unimaginative methods and forms. In support of this approach, Ní Dhúill argues that biography’s complexity remains in the authentic construction of subjects’ lives in both engaging and authentic ways while providing a space for writers’ own identity formation. Life-writing narratives have continued to grow in popularity as an approach for capturing subjects’ lives while providing a platform for writers to engage both with the subject as well as with the reader. This triangulation (also called relationality) presents a unique opportunity for invoking the ‘missing body’ through the ‘mediation of otherness’ (Ní Dhúill 2012, 279).

Memoirist Meredith Maran considers some of our motivations for life writing (and consequently, reading these life stories). She maintains that our primary reason for engaging with these written reflections is ultimately, to ‘learn something from how other people live, in order to live better ourselves’ (Maran 2016, xii). In this way, Maran acknowledges the value of both reading others’ stories and writing our own, while acknowledging the complexities experienced by those who choose to do so; for some, Maran explains, the act of life writing is the equivalent of conveying true-life experiences using a medium, which she considers reminiscent of the ‘incantations of oral history’ from an earlier time (Maran 2016, xii). For those with reservations about life writing, the activity is perceived as self-serving, indulgent, and even sensationalist. Notably, such contradictory views are held by writers themselves and are often arduous to

unpick. These reflections about knowing ourselves through the experiences of others arguably also ring true for writers piecing together our own identities by unpicking our subjects' characters (often posthumously). It is as though, to know ourselves, we need to know *them*, too.

Conclusion

While differences exist in terms of subjects and their lives, which writers attempt to capture through life writing, one element of these varying accounts remains similar: each writer endeavours to get to know the subject from a unique perspective through writing. Arguably, each manages to write her own story by writing her subject's (Maran 2016). As such, an exploration of self-discovery, which facilitates the establishment of agency alongside the presence of the *T* ensues. Thus, issues such as self-reflexivity, narrative, agency, and identity all serve to provide further insights into writing and grappling with these threads of narrative while writing a life, to establish the *T* in the process. It is in this way that writers exist 'in tight partnership with their chosen subject and there is often during the research and writing an equivalent reflective personal journey' (Lamb 2021, 25).

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Notes on contributor

Taryn Tavener-Smith is a fourth-year, part-time student reading towards a practice-based PhD in English Studies with the University of Stirling. She is also a Visiting Doctoral Student at the Oxford Centre for Life Writing, University of Oxford. Taryn is also an avid contributor to the University of Stellenbosch's scholarly archive, *Encyclopaedia of South African Theatre, Film, Media, and Performance* (ESAT). Her research explores the boundaries of liminal identities in non-fiction life writing.

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