

CFP (International Conference)

« Writing the Self / Writing the English-Speaking Worlds: Life Writing and Politics (20th-21st Centuries) »

University of Lille (CECILLE)

12-13 October 2023

Deadline for proposals: 1 June 2023

This multidisciplinary international conference will mainly focus on the autobiographical genre which, for a long time, celebrated the idea of a sovereign self, traditionally the prerogative of white, heterosexual, middle- or upper-class males (making it a traditionally androcentric, even ethnocentric genre that promotes a universality based on specific exclusive criteria). Traditional autobiographies are therefore often characterized by linearity, narrative coherence and the depiction of a stable self (Anderson). These elements are challenged by some writers from the so-called periphery (Canada, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Nigeria...), for whom the writing of the self constitutes a form of “resistance literature” (Harlow). For Harlow, the writing of the self is intrinsically linked to politics. One can argue it is particularly the case for the “wretched of the Earth” (Fanon). The autobiographical genre therefore embodies a means to put to the fore lives that have been denied, marginalized, what Judith Butler calls “precarious lives”. It is also a way for (formerly) colonized people to construct their own identity and, in so doing, to demonstrate “willfulness” (Ahmed), to refuse and reject the (exclusive) universality extolled in/by the autobiographical genre in its traditional form, and which has been perceived by some as “violent” (Adorno, Balibar). Some authors therefore put in place a “living appropriation” of the normative narrative of the self through their (re)working on form, on literary genres (diaries, letters, etc.), by proposing (hybrid) (re)writings that can be deemed “experimental” (Novak). In these very cases, the experimental aspect is emphasized “for the purposes of enhancing, reinforcing or drawing attention to the referential level” (Novak). One can also argue that these (re)writings of the self enable a passage from invisibility to (a form of) visibility, from voicelessness to (aiming at) making one’s voice heard.

The object to study is diverse: (fictional) autobiography, autoethnography, autobiographical comics, autofiction, blogs, documentaries, essays, diaries, memoirs, (insta)poetry... The intimate link between life writing and social experiments and/or political stances reveals the intricate crossovers between poetics, aesthetics, and politics. We thus wish to examine how some authors in the English-speaking worlds have sought to engage creatively by refusing and dismantling preset universal models. The committee welcomes proposals related, but not limited, to life writing and trauma/vulnerability, life writing and gender, life writing and disability, life writing and human rights, life writing and postcoloniality/decoloniality...

We will be attentive to the way life writing fosters “dissensus” (or not), and to the proximity between the power to collect your own life into a story, the power to say and the power to act (Rancière). For Michel Foucault, “to write is thus to ‘show oneself’, to project oneself into view, to make one’s own face appear in the other’s presence”, which implies a close link between ethics, poetics and politics – the relation of “reciprocal and necessary implication” that Henri Meschonnic posits. Life writing can become transformative, and shift the boundaries of the world, thereby going beyond the limits of poetics to embrace *poiesis*.

The conference welcomes contributions from researchers working in the field of literature, history, sociology, cultural studies, philosophy, anthropology...

Confirmed keynote speaker: Unoma Azuah.

Please submit abstracts of up to 300 words in English. Your abstract must be accompanied by a short bio-bibliographical note (no more than 150 words), to lifewriting.politics2023@gmail.com. Participants will be notified by 15 June 2023.

The conference is organised by Cédric Courtois and Claire Dubois, two members of the Centre d'Études en Civilisations, Langues et Lettres Étrangères (CECILLE — ULR 4074) of the Université de Lille. It will take place on the Campus Pont-de-Bois in Villeneuve-d'Ascq.

Scientific committee: Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding, Vanessa Guignery, Jean-Michel Ganteau, Andrée-Anne Kekeh-Dika, Fiona McCann, Fabrice Mourlon.

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