

Introduction to Life Writing and the Trauma of War

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Recommended Citation

Vasvári, Louise O.; and Wang, I-Chun. "Introduction to Life Writing and the Trauma of War." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 17.3 (2015): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2915>>

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Volume 17 Issue 3 (September 2015) Editorial 1
Louise O. Vasvári and I-Chun Wang
"Introduction to *Life Writing and the Trauma of War*"
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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 17.3 (2015)**
Thematic Issue ***Life Writing and the Trauma of War***. Ed. Louise O. Vasvári and I-Chun Wang
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/>>

Louise O. VASVÁRI and I-Chun WANG

Introduction to *Life Writing and the Trauma of War*

In *Life Writing and the Trauma of War* our aim is to orient readers to the central theoretical issues that recur in the over twenty wide-ranging articles in this collection, which cover many varieties of life writing both chronologically and geographically relating to both world wars, the Nationalist Northern Expedition, the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Civil War, the pre-State and other Israeli wars, the Korean War, the Algerian War of Independence, the Vietnam War, the Colombian Conflict, South Europe's Wars, 9/11, and the traumatic aftermath of these struggles and catastrophes.

Life writing, a genre designation applied initially in feminist and gender studies, is an inclusive term that encompasses many forms of narrative and calls into question and blends generic boundaries between history, fiction, documentary, and including (auto)biography, oral testimony, diaries, letters, and journals. This inclusive term also covers personally inflected storytelling and fictional texts such as the autobiographical novel (or autofiction), some forms of the *Bildungsroman*, and many other textual forms and genres including non-professional and non-literary ones (see, e.g., Bolaki; Rak, "Are Memoirs"; Smith and Watson, *Getting*; Vasvári, "Introduction"). In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Writing*, the most comprehensive and up-to-date critical introduction, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson define life writing as "an overarching term used for a variety of nonfictional modes of writing that claim to engage the shaping of someone's life" (17). By expanding generic boundaries life writing can also move outside of the canonical constraints of traditional autobiography, eliding value-laden judgments on the literary merits of individual works and avoiding what Smith and Watson call the "ideologically fraught category of autobiography ... in which masculinist ideology has often dictated formal and epistemological terms of the genres" ("New Genres" 18). Further, while autobiography is retrospective, the term life writing is broader as it underlines also the continuity of life and hence of survivors' stories after trauma.

Marlene Kadar discusses the changes in how we perceive forms of autobiographical writing as political and literary movements evolve. On the exploration of the entire history of Western autobiography/life writing and how it changed over time to arrive at its present form, James Olney, although he discusses primarily canonized male autobiographers, prefers the term (peri)autobiography and he defines the concept as writing about or around the self with a lack of generic rigor rather than writing about the life *per se*. Further, Olney proposes that the autobiographical imperative is a deep and universal impulse in humankind for which memory and narrative are the two major phenomena of consciousness, the dual defining conditions of being a human. Similarly to Olney, Paul John Eakin prefers the terms I-narrative, self-experience, and identity narrative, which he considers not solely as literary genres, but as part of a lifelong process of identity formation one performs continuously through stories one tells to oneself and others. In his *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity* reiterating some of his previous work in his earlier *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Eakin stresses the universality and the adaptive value of "living autobiography," that is, the ongoing creation of a narrative identity as an art that helps anchor our shifting selves in time. Eakin cites among other examples of such everyday I-narratives as in *The New York Times* post 9/11 "Portraits of Grief" obituaries of ordinary people who perished, Facebook posts, and online dating sites. Smith and Watson also explore everyday uses of autobiography, which they call "backyard ethnography" ranging from talk shows, to DNA, personal ads, the medical file, the professional *curriculum vitae*, to losing one's wallet and the whole identity it contains, as well as blogs, auto-ethnography film and video (*Getting a Life*, "New Genres," *Reading Autobiography*). With the proliferation of many forms of digital life writing, digital [self-]publishing and sales of memoirs to online self-expression in virtual social networking forums more people than ever engage in some form of autobiographical activity (see Smith and Watson, "Virtually Me"; Guðmundsdóttir; Thumin).

The mass market distribution of popular forms of life writing has in recent decades proliferated due to non-fiction in general being much more published and read today than fiction, as well as due to the rapid commodification and consumption of popular trauma culture through confessional life writing, a narrative form that is the fastest genre of today's published literature. Anne Rothe in *Popular Trauma Culture: Selling the Pain of Others* claims that misery and fake misery memoirs, which she dubs trauma kitsch and trauma camp, are built on paradigms provided by clichéd and melodramatic victim/perpetrator Holocaust discourse (see also Mendelsohn). Smith and Watson, on the other hand, point out that as many kinds of testimonial life writing make an appeal for response on behalf of both single and multiple victims of political repression and genocide, it is not surprising that the urgency that drives testimonial writing is vulnerable to exploitation (*Getting a Life* 134). Paula S. Fass, writing specifically about the democratization of the memoir, considers it as an essential form of writing for our time, which can provide insight into how history is experienced today through the contemporary urge to examine, define, and explain the self through its forms of expression. In her *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives* Nancy K. Miller posits that the memoir boom is due to confessional spectacle or narcissism and proposes instead that the memoir functions "as the record of an experience in search of a community" and that just as it takes two to perform an autobiographical act so we read about other people's lives for what they reveal about our own (507). Further she argues that memoirs do important cultural work because personal narratives are always implicated in larger history and thus can serve as a contact point between individual and collective stories of cultural memory (Miller 507). Similarly to Miller's exploration of the ties between individual lives and their socio-cultural contexts, Julie Rak, examining the popular genre in Anglophone North America, argues

that the boom in personal stories of all types is becoming a way for readers to try to understand major events in terms of individual experiences and a way to articulate balance between the public or political and the private spheres. The role traumatic human experience plays in modern mass-media culture and what it reveals ethically about trauma and its narrative representation is indeed a central question raised directly and indirectly also by the articles in this collection.

Kadar also draws attention to the dual nature of the term life writing as both genre and critical practice and finds the latter particularly useful in analyzing the ambiguous boundaries between fact and fiction in autobiographical writing such as diaries, letters, and memoirs. G. Thomas Couser, in contrast to Kadar, emphasizes the difference between literary memoir and fiction in terms of the ethics of each, explaining that while novelists are relatively free from legal and ethical constraints, in memoirs the genre's fidelity to truth may conflict with its aspirations as art (79). In this context he discusses ethically dubious fake and hoax memoirs like Benjamin Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood* and ambiguous cases like Rigoberta Menchu. Essentially, every study in this collection addresses this problem, namely, to what degree some of the texts examined range from testimony to testimonial fiction to fictional testimonies. See especially Jane E. Evans's contribution "The Soldier as 'I'-Witness in Novels by Barbusse and Ehni"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/18>> on the reliability of the novelized first person soldier-narrator's accounts of World War I based on an author's personal frontline journals, Tamar S. Drukker's study "Documentation and Fiction in Hameiri's Accounts of the Great War"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/16>> in which she compares the surviving Hebrew-language war-diaries of the Great War of an author with his memoir and literary short stories, Agatha Schwartz's article "Narrating Wartime Rapes and Trauma in a *Woman in Berlin*"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/11>> on the diary of an anonymous German woman about rapes by Soviet soldiers in Berlin, which elicited a controversy when it was subsequently discovered she was a journalist who had written in minor nazi periodicals and that she had revised her diary after the war, and Ilana Rosen's article "The War Memoirs of Rachel Maccabi"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/9>> in which she discusses the five-volume life writing of Maccabi, a Zionist who left the Diaspora to build and defend Palestine/Israel, where she herself worked as an officer of the Israel Defense Forces and lost both her first husband and a son in two different wars. As Rosen discusses elsewhere, "war was no less a war of women and children than of men, [but] the experience and memories of women and children have yet to receive their due attention" (2). Also relevant are, albeit for different reasons, questions about the reliability of memoirs by young child survivors of the Holocaust in Dana Mihăilescu's study "Holocaust Child Survivors' Memoirs as Reflected in Appelfeld's *The Story of a Life*"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/12>> versus the perception of the Hungarian Holocaust in the diary of an adolescent girl with anti-Semitic tendencies in Gergely Kunt's article "A Female Adolescent Bystander's Diary and the Jewish Hungarian Holocaust"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/14>> and in María Mercedes Andrade's "Women Writing for Other Women in Colombia's Armed Conflict"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/3>> who raises questions raised about the reliability of oral testimonies from women political prisoners turned into writing and mixed with fictional accounts as well by other, literate women.

Scholarly interest in life writing burgeoned in the last decades of the twentieth century owing to the impetus of feminist studies and to the interdisciplinary turn in literature and cultural studies and the concomitant interest in postmodern issues of subjectivity and identity, memory, and the representation of the past, the real and the fictive, advances in trauma studies, and the uneasy relationship between ethical positions and the aesthetic of literary works, among other theoretical issues; as well as due to the growing interest in therapeutically-inflected life writing, intergenerational life writing, and class, race, and ethnicity, especially in relation to Holocaust survivors, immigrant and other transcultural and postcolonial subjects. In their expanded 2010 edition of *On Autobiography* Smith and Watson propose sixty (to the former fifty-two) sub-genres of life writing, including, among others, autofiction, bildungsroman, diary, genealogical stories, journal, letters, prison narrative, war memoir, captivity narrative, witnessing and more, but even this expanded list is in need of expansion.

In our opinion the most important subgenre of life writing consists of works which can be grouped under the rubric of transnational life writing, including im-/emigrant, expatriate, refugee, migrant, exile, as well as of second-generation ethnic life writing. As Susan R. Suleiman discusses, exile, the major historical phenomenon of the last century, and now apparently of the new century as well, provides the focal point for theoretical reflections about individual and cultural identity. Modern Western culture is in large part the work of such transnational subjects, who had to integrate a culture of memory with the new culture to which they have migrated. Also relevant is Madelaine Hron's *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* on counter-narratives of immigration that challenge myths of successful immigration and instead present the pain of dislocation and relocation of immigrants affected by past traumas and who "survive always in the ghostly shadow of their former selves, their source cultural language of home" (39-40).

In *Life Writing and the Trauma of War* there are several studies on transnational life writing: Won-Chung Kim's "The Korean War, Memory, and Nostalgia"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/7>> on first-generation migrants in inter-Korean migration and Tsu-Ching Su's "'Being Singular Plural' in Chi's 巨流河 (The Great-Flowing River)"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/8>> about a female Chinese memoir of multiple migration and relocation from North to South and, after two wars, ultimately to Taiwan and Louise O. Vasvári's study "En-gendering Memory through Holocaust Alimentary Life Writing"

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/10>> in which she addresses the burgeoning subgenre of alimentary life writing (or food memoirs), centered on how food, cooking and nourishing others offers a means of shaping the self and conserving one's cultural heritage addresses the burgeoning subgenre of alimentary life writing (or food memoirs), centered on how food, cooking, and nourishing others offers a means of shaping the self and conserving one's cultural heritage. While such writing may sometimes have only a private matrilineal or ethnic family focus, often it grows out of traumas of immigration and war. Vasvári's work is about Holocaust life writing, but it can also be classified as dealing with traumatic transnational life writing, with first, second, and even the third generation, which is supplemented by her companion article "Introduction to and Bibliography for the Study of Alimentary Life Writing and Recipe Writing as War Literature" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/22>>.

In some respects, the cultural memory and language shifts of second-generation ethnics can be just as convoluted as those of the first generation, sometimes creating a hybrid, double-voice form of autobiography in which collective ethnic memory and individual memory are linked in dialogue (see, e.g., Browdy; Wong). Double-voiced life writing, which Bella Brodzki refers to as the intergeneration and intercultural transmission of imperiled narratives, is conceived as an act of translation, wherein the child tells the story that the parent cannot. To this term might be added that of "salvaged life writing," wherein a parent's writing is literally salvaged, as in Sharon D. Raynor's article "African American Masculinity in the Wartime Diaries of Two Vietnam Soldiers" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/4>> about the unpublished Vietnam War diary of her father, Louis J. Raynor. Mary Goodwin's article "Mapping Memory in Tran's *Vietnamerica*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/5>>, is about a mixed-media memoir by the US-American son of wartime Vietnamese refugees who came to the U.S. in 1975 after the fall of Saigon and it also belongs to the category of the transnational memoir, but at the same time it can also be classified with another of the most important and innovative forms of life writing, the graphic memoir or graphic narrative, now also dubbed "autographics" by Gillian Whitlock (1976). The graphic narrative is a hybrid or mixed media form, which first become famous with Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986, 1991), a double-voiced Holocaust and second-generation memoir about the author's troubled relationship with his father, a survivor of Auschwitz, and the latter's life story. Inverting intentionally a traditionally low genre of the comic strip or book for a serious subject, the graphic narrative has specialized in telling complex stories of traumatic gender, sexual, and family relationships, often combined with the broader traumas of geographic displacement and of war, including its intergenerational impact as narrated from the point of view of the vulnerable child, and with the majority of those bearing witness increasingly being women (see, e.g., Cvetkovich, El Rifaie; Rocio; Watson) and see especially Hillary L. Chute's *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, a study of the prolific yet little studied production of contemporary comics by women with emphasis on the innovative representation of the female body by feminist women cartoonist-memoirists, which, as Chute comments, "puts the body on the page" (26).

If the graphic memoir is intertwined with the broader category of transnational memoir, both are in turn also part of the still broader category of post-colonial life writing, including the study of life narrative in an age of migration, globalization and terror, which are, as Bart Moore-Gilbert (*Postcolonial Life Writing*) and Philip Holden discuss (*Autobiography and Decolonization*), a necessary corrective to the Eurocentrism of autobiographical studies, which have failed to appreciate sufficiently the importance of ethnicity and of the of new "national autobiography," wherein text construction is related to the reformation of identities in the formerly colonial world. Of special relevance is Whitlock's *Soft Weapons*, whose oeuvre, a mixture of post-colonial theory and third-wave feminism, underscores how life narratives have become "more implicated in history, politics, and the conduct of war than had seemed possible in previous ways of thinking about autobiography in the world" (76). In *Soft Weapons* Whitlock concentrates on life narratives in relation to the War on Terror, from Iraq to Afghanistan, in multiple kinds of texts, many of which can be considered popular, ranging from narratives of refugees, auto-ethnographies bearing witness to the agency of inadequately represented third-world women such as Afghani women, and journalists' war memoirs. Relevant to the latter aspect, *Life Writing and the Trauma of War* includes Li Guo's "Women's Wartime Life Writing in Early Twentieth-century China" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/15>> on the agency of military women in China during the Nationalist Northern Expedition and in other military conflicts, Maria Mercedes Andrade's "Women Writing for Other Women in Colombia's Armed Conflict" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/3>> on women's prison testimonies from the Colombian armed conflicts, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's "Kafka's (1880-1918) Life Writing and Objection to World War I" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/19>> about the Hungarian modernist and proto-feminist author's diaries and poems and her objection to the war when as-of-yet (in August 1914) no one in the circles of writers and intellectuals objected, and Simon C. Estok's "Post 9/11 and Narratives of Life Writing, Conflict, and Environmental Crisis" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/20>>.

Kim's and Estok's studies also exemplify the newly evolving form of ecological life writing that examines the interrelation between eco-globalist concerns about the future of the biosphere and personal forms of writing (see Glotfelty; Hornung and Biasheng), and Christopher Kocela's "Negotiating War and Peace in Chân Không's *Learning True Love* and Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/6>> on the transBuddhist life writing of two women writers in the wake of the Vietnam War falls into the classical category of spiritual autobiography, historically often gendered female and defined as a lifelong search for an ultimate reality that gives meaning to one's life in the face of evil, suffering and death (see Ibsen; Leigh). Finally, although Steven Jobbitt's study "Fodor's Field Diary and the Writing of the Hungarian Imperial Self during World

War I" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/17>> about Ferenc Fodor's field diary from a 1917 geo-botanical expedition is an example of life writing, it does so from a postcolonial theoretical stance showing the project to be part of a much broader Austro-Hungarian masculinist and imperialist fantasy of mapping the Balkans as an ethnic and geopolitical space. As Smith and Watson, among others, have pointed out, life writing strongly intersects with gendered positionalities and relations ("New Genres" 13). Last but not least, note that *Life Writing and the Trauma of War* includes a "Selected Bibliography for the Study of Life Writing" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss3/22>> compiled by Vasvári and I-Chun Wang.

Feminist criticism early on perceived traditional definitions of autobiography as masculinist and tried to redefine the canon to fit the different pattern of women's lives and already in 1988 Brodzki and Celeste Schenk in their edited *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* study close to fifty women's life writing in a wide variety of forms. With a similar intent of depicting a variety of diverse experiences of women without resorting to universalizing notions of "women's autobiography" Smith and Watson also produced two important edited collections, *Decolonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (1992) and *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (1998), although a decade later in their "New Genres" they point out that "women's autobiography" now has come to have an antiquated ring (17). Caren Kaplan, writing in *Decolonizing the Subject*, proposed the coinage "out-law genres" as a prototype for life writing by women, and ethnic, and immigrant authors who do not live their lives according to culturally available scripts. Similarly, Leigh Gilmore, stating that the term "autobiography" is not worth recuperating as a genre, proposed "autobiographics" to name women's non-canonical self-representation that transgresses the masculinist definition of autobiography. Linda S. Coleman in her edited *Women's Life-Writing: Finding Voice/Building Community* points out that the same gendered norms that severely marginalized female life experiences also silenced the narrating of women's private lives by historical and critical bias against consideration of private genres like diary, journals and letters (5). And in "Towards a Geography of Women's Life Writing" Cynthia Huff emphasizes the importance of archival and recovery work that feminist scholars have undertaken since the 1960s to resurrect hitherto marginalized or lost women's life writing, which has allowed new voices to emerge. Such voices in turn exposed and challenged the arbitrary construction of the canon and the hierarchy of genres, showing that the overhaul of the term "autobiography" and the works it legitimized was needed. Huff further discusses how in the wake of postcolonial theory and the changing face of feminism(s), race, ethnicity, class, geographical location, ability, and personal history, among other issues, are all assuming increased salience, so that what she calls "a new geography of life writing" is needed to reconstruct the traumatic and political dimensions of the genre (15). Suzette A. Henke, working in a psychoanalytic framework, suggests that life writing can function as "scriptotherapy," i.e., a process of "writing out and writing through traumatic experience" (xii). Perhaps the single most comprehensive such project undertaken has been Richard Freedman's *This Crazy Thing a Life: Australian Jewish Autobiography*, consisting of some three hundred book-length works, mostly by aged survivor amateur authors, the majority female, organized into a corpus related to trauma studies.

Trauma studies itself has been intimately intertwined with gender and life writing since the 1990s. For example, in their Introduction to a Special Issue on Feminism and Cultural Memory Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith reiterate that feminist writing on sexual abuse, violence against women, and Holocaust writing has been intensely preoccupied with memory, trauma, and transmission in the family and in society. In this context they pose the question of how the role of the counter-memory of the female witness or agent of transmission differs from that of her male counterpart in conveying both individual and group history and identity. Similarly, in "Autobiographical Times" Susannah Radstone underlines that women's self writing (as their lives) often do not fit accepted models but have tended to be stylistically more fragmentary, multidimensional, temporally understated, disjunctive, and hence judged as inferior. Radstone proposes to study what she calls marginalized counter-histories that restore forgotten stories to the historical record, such as women's working-class or ethnic autobiography. Citing Estelle Jelinek's groundbreaking feminist critique of autobiographical criticism (*Women's Autobiography*) Radstone also argues that whereas the periods of greatest productivity in male autobiography have been aligned with important events in history, women's lived experiences and hence autobiographies have not conformed to this history. While this may be true of life writing dealing with private trauma, war trauma is not an individual disorder but arises out of a complex interaction of personal, social, cultural, historical and political forces (see Hunt 120; see also Higonnet "Authenticity" on problematic nature of trauma narratives more broadly and their centrality to war narrative). In fact, during and in the aftermath of all the great twentieth-century conflicts women have also probably written as much as men, often in some form of life writing, but their work has not been taken into adequate consideration (see, e.g., Vasvári, "Introduction" <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1422>>) on the predominance of Holocaust life writing by survivor women, but the same pattern is now repeating itself in the wake of more recent catastrophes, such as the Cambodian genocide, as studied most recently by Bunkong Tuon.

Victoria Stewart points out that in Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) he excludes women's experience from contributing to cultural memory, reducing World War I to what happened to men on the Western Front (see Tylee). Stewart underlines that focusing on women's experience is not to diminish men's role, but to give a broader definition of what constitutes war experience for individuals and groups whose experience had not been examined. Miriam Cooke and Angela Woolacott in their edited *Gendering War Talk*, and Cooke also in *Women and the War Story*, explore male and female experiences from World War I to the Vietnam War showing that the myth of war upheld throughout history depends on exclusion of the feminine and to reducing women's role to the false dichotomy of pacifists versus patriotic mothers, with the "war story" remaining a genre

reserved/exclusively for men. Already from earlier periods we possess women's writing that show women as active participants in the war effort in a variety of ways, as, for example, in Kimberly Harrison's recent examination of more than one hundred diaries of plantation-class women, showing their contribution to the development of confederate national identity. In the twentieth century, after the Great War, primed by the prewar suffragette movement, the sudden growth of the novel industry included many women modernist novels, such as Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield and H.D. Many of their works, as well as those of women writers emerging from both world wars (Vera Brittain and Charlotte Delbo, among others), have auto/biographical roots, as have memoirs by women Holocaust survivors and their daughters (see Klein; Raitt and Tate; Usandizaga and Kendam; Vasvári, "Emigrée" <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1419>>,).

It is hardly surprising that women in the course of the twentieth century should have taken an increasing role in war writing, given the profound transformations that wars have always entailed for both gender and genre, and that civilians have been increasingly involved in war, with, for example, civilian death rates of about 20% in World War I, while in World War II civilian casualties were perhaps three times that of combatants, and with blurring the lines between combat zones and safe zones and the opposition between home and front, front and hinterland. In women's writing there emerged many issues relating to the redefinition of gender that occurred during and in the aftermath of war concerning women's role and social and political identities, including reconstitution of gender relations during and after the war. New subgenres of life writing that arose from wars include life writing by civilian and military nurses and doctors (from every front, class and national identity, including prisoner doctors), by women journalists in combat zones, as well as by women combatants, prisoners of war, women terrorists, and the many women victims of wartime sexual abuse, from individual to mass rape and forced prostitution, including by the military (see Higonett *Nurses, Authenticity*; Gallagher; Hallett; Fell and Hallett; Lee; Kaplan; Ngunyen; Vasvári "Annak átka"; Ward; Glynn; Moon; Stetz and Oh). Many such original manuscript sources have only been published in the last decades. Carol Acton's studies on life writing by nurses in various geopolitical conflicts provide a particularly eloquent overview of the implications of using gender as an analytical category in examining cultural narratives of loss in wartime. Her work, spanning both World Wars and the Iraq War through women's writing, shows how the subjective experience narrated in a wide range of diaries, poetry, and weblogs has an important place in the individual trauma of women in war, as well as for the collective historical narrative of all these wars. For example, Acton's latest work is the diary of Mary Morris, an Irish nurse whose diary she discovered in the Imperial War Museum and which Acton was able to publish to coincide with the seventieth anniversary of D-Day, as Morris landed in Normandy on the heels of D-Day. Although nurses on active duty were not allowed to keep a diary, Morris kept hers from 1940 to 1946 and it offers important insight into the role of nurses on both the frontline and the home front, as well as about the horrors of war, all balanced by personal details of Morris's romantic life: hence the title given to the diary by Acton as *A Very Private Diary: An Irish Nurse in Wartime*.

In *Life Writing and the Trauma of War* half of the articles deal with women's life writing ranging from wartime rape including rape used as a weapon of war to women's prison *testimonio*, war reportage, and to spiritual life writing emerging from war experience. Nevertheless, two articles deserve special mention regarding woman-gendered life writing as they deal with two examples of life writing which trace the complete lives of two women through wartime losses representing significant segments of twentieth-century history.

We thank the anonymous reviewers of the papers submitted for publication in this thematic issue and Purdue University Press and the editor of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* for the opportunity to publish the studies in *Life Writing and the Trauma of War*.

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