

## Some readings 2008- April 2009

### Autobiography

**Eissler, K.R. Goethe. (A Psychoanalytic Study), 1775 to 1786, Detroit, Mich. Wayne State University Press, 1963, 2 vols.** A scientific biography positioned within classical psychoanalytical theory. It has been recommended to me as a “prime example of intellectual honesty”. It is expected to arrive in Lahore by mid December 2008. It finally arrived and reading it is a daunting prospect, by first week of January 2009 I’ve barely begun.

**Foucault, Michel, The Order of Things, (An Archaeology of the Human Sciences) translation of *Les Mots et les choses*, April 1994, Vintage Books Edition, April 1994.** A consideration of the position of *Man* as the subject of scientific culture within an historical context. I see this in tandem with my reading of Anna Parvord’s, *The Naming of names*.

**Eakin, Paul John, How Our Lives Become Stories (Making Ourselves), Cornell Univ. Press, 1999.** A consideration of the nature of the autobiographical from the perspective of recent research in the field of cognitive sciences. “There are many stories of the self to tell, and more than one self to tell them.” By first week of January 2009 I’m well into this book, and I consider it the most useful for autobiography as yet. Perhaps this is because it follows upon a lot of other readings.

**Eakin, Paul John, Ed. The Ethics of Life Writing, Cornell Univ. Press, 2004.** A wide survey of traditional and modern works in the genre of the autobiographical that I intend to use as an initial grounding in the broad issues of this subject.

**Eakin, Paul John, Living Autobiographically, (How We Create Identity in Narrative), Cornell Univ. Press, 2008.** Through the incorporation of findings within the fields of neuroscience and anthropology Eakin argues that autobiography is an integral adaptive part of our lived experience and key to our construction of a future.

**Okely J. and Callaway H., Eds., Anthropology and Autobiography, Routledge, 2004.** Taking on the argument that the Anthropological should actually be the Autobiographical, the book sets out to counter-argue the position of the anthropologist relative to their subject. Contributing to the current debate on issues of reflexivity and political responsibility within the field of anthropology.

**Olney, James. Memory and Narrative, (The Weave of Life-Writing.) Univ. of Chicago press, 1998.** An historical account of the evolution of life-writing over the past seventeen centuries of world literature.

**Couser, Thomas G. and Fichtelberg, Joseph, Eds. True Relations (Essays on Autobiography and the Post-modern). Hofstra Univ. 1998.** A diverse collection of essays on the broader consideration of the autobiographical, covering issues of gender, suicide survivorship, and Pierre Manzoni’s autobiographical use of his own body.

**Smith, Sidonie, and Watson, Julia, Eds. Reading Autobiography (A guide for interpreting Life Narratives.) Univ. of Minnesota press, 2001.** A textbook for the

introduction and teaching of Life-Writing at graduate level, part retrospective survey of the genre, plus a comprehensive critical introduction.

**Smith, Robert. Derrida and autobiography. Cambridge Univ. Press. 1996.** A reading of Derrida in relation to autobiographical theory. The premise being that autobiographical thought is not so much about subjective self-revelation as relation to the *other*.

**Anderson, Linda. Autobiography, (The new cultural idiom). Routledge. 2004.** A wide ranging survey of theory and practice in the field of the autobiographical, including a consideration of the ideological assumptions about the nature of the self that underlie autobiographical texts.

**Miller, Nancy, K. But Enough about Me. (why we read other people's lives). Columbia Univ. Press. 2002.** A passionately argued defence of the art of autobiography set within the life narrative of the author herself. She argues that it is not a solipsistic act but a communal relational practice.

**Colebrook, Claire. Giles Deleuze. Routledge, 2007.** Part of the Routledge critical thinkers series, the book provides a concise over-view of Deleuze's thought, particularly in relation to literary analysis. I have found the sections on cinema particularly relevant.

**Homer, Sean. Jaques Lacan. Routledge. 2006.** Part of the Routledge critical thinkers series, the book provides an introduction to Lacan's thinking on diverse subjects including, literature, film, gender and the imaginary and symbolic.

**Mills, Sarah. Michel Foucault. Routledge. 2004.** Part of the Routledge critical thinkers series. I am particularly interested in Foucault's thinking on the subjects of power, literary theory and anthropology. The book provides an initial introduction to Foucault's work.

**Royle, Nicholas. Jaques Derrida. Routledge. 2008.** Besides an introductory overview of Derrida's thinking, I am particularly interested in the coverage of his work on literary and cultural studies.

**Rice, Anne. Christ The Lord, out of Egypt. Ballantine. NYC. 2005.** The twenty-page authors note at the end of this controversial historical fiction is pure autobiography and provided me with a profoundly new insight into Rice's oeuvre.

**Harberd, Nicholas. "Seed to Seed" (The Secret Life of Plants), Bloomsbury 2006.** The lowly *Thale-Cress* is the main protagonist of this book. An autobiographical mix of diary and science, fairly obscure science at that. I found it odd that despite a fair amount of personal trivia the author's wife didn't feature at all, though his children prominently did so. Perhaps she refused to share the pages with her husband's weed obsession. I feel I was misled by the exciting excerpt on the back cover, where the plant was almost devoured by a rampaging slug. The glimpses of the life revealed here, heavily edited (perhaps with editorial direction to sustain the reader's interest?) seemed extremely dull, the ups and downs of scientific enquiry seemed forced and the references to music an attempt to reveal that a scientist can actually be a whole human

too. If nothing else this book awakens in me the dread of attempting to work autobiographically.

**Parvord, Anna. The Naming of names, (The search for order in the world of Plants), Bloomsbury, 2005.** Although not a work of an autobiographical nature, I feel there is a correlation that I cannot adequately place at present. Perhaps it lies in the ambition to immortality that under-pins the naming of so many plants. This book is a detailed and copiously illustrated history of horticultural enquiry, philosophy and literature. A book that has substantially extended my understanding of the origins of plant taxonomy. I have found the numerous failed attempts at creating a holistic system of classification of particular interest, in the context of my ongoing enquiry into the nature of the archive. A wonderful book, written with enormous empathy and engagement, the most inspiring book overall, for me in this year of readings.

**Alice Albina. Empires of the Indus. (The story of a river). John Murray. 2008.** History, anecdote, travelogue and contemporary Pakistani culture colloid in an entertaining diaristic format. Her depth of local history alone is a must read.

**John Brockman. Science at the Edge. (Conversations with the leading scientific thinkers of today.) Union Square Press. 2008.**

*Autobiographical texts:*

**Thomas Bernhard, Gathering Evidence. (A memoir.) Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1985.** The story of a difficult life set between the world wars in Austria and Germany, written without excessive sentiment or self-pity. In fact written with great restraint, though often repetitive as our memories themselves are I found it deeply compelling. A fantastic work. I read it alongside a second reading of Damien Hirst's "On my way to work".

**Musharraf, Pervez. In the line of Fire. (A Memoir). Free Press. 2006.** The recent president of Pakistan's autobiography. His huge fee for this work plus his position as supreme commander of Pakistan's armed forces, whilst this was published has been extremely controversial in Pakistan.

**Bhutto, Benazir. Benazir Bhutto. Simon and Schuster. 2008.** Having lived through the rise and fall of Benazir's leadership and her recent return to the country after years in exile, which ended in the tragic loss of her life along with the many unsung in the crowds about her. (Both here at her ending and in her initial re-entry to Pakistan, where she narrowly escaped with her life). This is a story that I am in a privileged position to evaluate.

**Castro, Fidel. (with Ignacio Ramond). Fidel Castro. Penguin. 2008.** Having lived through the Cuban missile crisis as a young child, I was aware for the first time of the innate fragility of life in a post-nuclear world. This I understood through the tension within my family at that time. Castro has held great significance for me since then.

**Cameron, James. Point of Departure. Granta Publications. 2006.** I grew up within the nuclear age, whether it was the government's line of clean, cheap energy for all or the CND marchers on television drawing the ire of my father. Cameron's life traversed so many of the key moments in the world history of this epoch.

**Philby, Kim. My silent war. (The Autobiography of a spy). Arrow Books. 2002.** Philby's defection to Moscow rocked the grown-up's English world of my childhood. I consider this book significant in the context of my extensive readings on the Manhattan project.

**Sadiq, Zeeba. 38 Bahadurabad. Faber and Faber. 2006.** Set within an area of Karachi I have known extremely well over the past twenty years, Zeeba's memoir is located in the nineteen-sixties, a period immediately prior to the islamization of the country. I hope this will provide further insight into my chosen home

**Priest, Christopher. The Affirmation. Faber and Faber. 2006.** Although a work of fiction I find its treatment of the autobiographical as a failed enterprise particularly intriguing in the light of my project.

**Franklin, Benjamin. The autobiography and other writings. Signet Classic. 1961.** A wide selection of Benjamin's writings including the autobiographical. This edition provides an interesting overview of his life and some insights into the inner man in respect of his actual relationship to his wife and family. I found it much more insightful than the Bantam edition.

**Franklin, Benjamin. The autobiography and other writings. Bantam. 1989.** Although much of the same material is provided in this later Bantam edition I found my own reading of Franklin significantly altered in this text.

**Satre. Jean-Paul. Les Mots. Penguin. 2000.** Reputed to be a profound work of self-analysis, it has direct bearing on my project. I am intrigued to re-examine Satre's degree of reflexivity in this work.

**Poitier, Sidney. The Measure of a Man. (A spiritual autobiography.) Harper Collins. 2002.** As an actor I have admired, and whom I consider being a significant figure of our times. I am intrigued to see how he handles this part.

**Darwin. Charles. The Autobiography. Icon Books. 2003.** The closest perhaps one can come to an autobiography of this pivotal thinker, who has done as much as any other if not more in shaping the worldview of the period in which we live. Compiled by his son, Sir Francis Darwin and first published in 1929.

**Branson. Richard. Losing My Virginity. Three Rivers press. 2004.** The charismatic millionaire entrepreneur, who opened his first Virgin Megastore in Notting Hill Gate, High-Street, at about the time that was cramming for my A-levels round the corner. Needless to say I spent far too much time on the beanbags there, with earphones on in and immersed in a completely new form on consumer experience. I just didn't realize it at the time.

**Hitler, Adolph. Mein Kampf. Embassy Books, 2005.** My father had a pocket copy of this, lifted from a German POW in the second-world war, in the Egyptian theatre of operations. Here my father served as an officer sapper and a "Desert-Rat". His own story completely driven awry, as were all of those of his peers by the impingement of the war on this generation. There I have been studying in Linz, Hitler's adopted home. This is a work I now need to read, to better understand the context of my parent's lives.

**Allen, Charles. Kipling Sahib. Abacus. 2008.** From the perspective of Anglo-Indian society Allen writes about making of Kipling, the upstart and breaker of taboos in the strictly conservative society of colonial India. Kipling's life has particular pertinence in the city of Lahore, where I now reside.

**Gandhi, M. K. An Autobiography. Penguin. 2001.** Not only a key figure in world history, Gandhi and Jinnah were amongst the key players in the demise of British colonial rule, in the land that I have now lived in for the past twenty years. His story is pertinent to my deeper understanding of my own context. I am also intrigued to see how one ostensibly so humble speaks of his own life.

**Versey, Farzana. A journey interrupted. (Being Indian in Pakistan.) Harper Collins. 2008.** An account of the journey of a single Indian woman through Pakistan and her reflections on her own identity in this "land of the pure." A subject that runs parallel to my own experience as the *gora* in Pakistan.

**Langworth, Richard M. Churchill by Himself. Ebury Press. 2008.** Not only do I remember Churchill's death and state funeral in my childhood, his political will persisted well into 1960's post-war Britain. Another figure that was significant to my parent's generation and present within my childhood. Someone whose life I feel great empathy for and someone whom I wish to know more of.

**Hirst, Damien. Burn, Gordon. On my way to Work.** Hirst and Burn's indulgent, confessional, frequently dull attempt at the autobiographical. I intend to revisit this book in the light of autobiographical theory readings in the near future. Much enjoyed on subsequent rereadings.