

Call for Papers

Conference *Auto/Biography and Reputation Politics*

February 6 and 7, 2020 at the University of Vienna

Collaboration of Character Assassination and Reputation Politics (CARP) Research Laboratory, George Mason University, Virginia, and Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna

In the earliest documents of the genre transmitted from antiquity, biography and its reception are already associated with the creation of positive or negative personal reputations of politicians, artists, scientists or military leaders. Autobiography, in turn, whether spiritual since late antiquity or generally secular since the Enlightenment, has also been used to publicly create and negotiate reputations of its narrators and protagonists. The relation of such reputations created in biography and autobiography to the author figures and historical persons has produced long-standing scholarly and popular debates in terms of fictionality or nonfictionality, semiotic constructedness, and reliability. In the past decades, however, life writings – including biography and autobiography as much as diaries or letters and, more contemporarily, life narratives and egodocuments in media such as painting, cinema, graphic novels, digital formats and photography, for example – have been critically discussed in terms of cultural and national significations, affective patterns, psychologically and legally coded constructions – relating to trauma studies, witnessing and testimonials – or narratological conventions including perspectives, temporalities or individual and collective memory. The discussion of life narratives and their genre conventions, patterns and protocols as established means of creating and destroying reputations appears to have met with only minor interest in the field.

At this juncture, Auto/Biography Studies and Reputation Politics Studies might benefit mutually and strongly from an interdisciplinary collaboration. For a range of studies of reputation politics and reputation management in psychology, communication studies, political sciences and historical science, contemporary methodologies and theories of life writing and life narrative in literary, cultural and media studies provide refined terminologies and tested approaches in respect of the determining effects of generic and narrative conventions, semiotic materiality and medial intransparency, as well as questions of agency, relationality and network structures; and, reversely, for the study of auto/biography, the recently developed categories and critical methods in the study of reputation politics provide new ways for ethical consideration of life narratives by addressing the creation or destruction of life stories in public.

Through reputation politics studies, as an emerging field that is revitalizing interests of rhetorical studies and political sciences since antiquity, human-rights approaches or memory studies in life writing research, for example, may be further detailed by address to the evaluative strategies behind the creation of specific structures of personalities and narrated characters and lives and, for example, the seemingly returning attraction in these days of isolating identity images and discourses long considered defunct. The critical discussion of the textually produced

relations between the individual and the communal or collective in the age of populist revival and resurging nationalism benefits from the joint address to life narratives and reputation politics. Conceivable for discussion, among others, are the following questions:

- Has the term reputation lost relevance in the contemporary age of intense and deep mediatization and rapid globalization of life stories and their ever-changing, elusive evaluative reception?
- If processuality and relationality of agencies in production and reception of works of culture as well as the intransparency of the medium have become of guiding interest in contemporary auto/biography studies, how might the medial production of a reputation be systematically considered in processual terms?
- What is the benefit of the continuing address to the ancient category of character in discussions of ‘character assassination’? Who or what is a character in relation to personality, self, individual, protagonist, narrator, author?
- Has the term reputation become part of an elitist discourse that collides with precepts of the race-class-gender and further categories of cultural-studies critiques? If there is an intersectionality of reputation, is there a transversality, as well?
- When politicians write autobiographies, how do the self-images created in these autobiographies relate to historiography and biography?
- How are fiction and non-fiction in auto/biography and autofiction as well as their discussion related to reputation constructions and their criticism?
- What are the relations of private and public practices of life writing with reputation building?
- How is the discussion of the mediality of works of auto/biography freshly challenged by consideration of the multimodality of the medial channels and materialities through which reputations are generated and put to political use?
- How does historiography as a genre that is still often determined by descriptions of individual lives and personalities rather than relational perspectives, and as such still committed to its derivation from protocols of biography in antiquity, benefit from the critical combination of methods and theories of Auto/Biography and Reputation Politics Studies?

For a principal orientation regarding the two fields, respectively, and as a common ground for initiation of methodological discussion, we suggest *Routledge Handbook of Character Assassination and Reputation Management*, ed. Sergei Samoilenko, Martijn Icks, Jennifer Keohane and Eric Shirayev (Routledge, in print, fall 2019), or Samoilenko, Shirayev, Keohane and Icks, “Character Assassination (general)” in *The Global Encyclopedia of Informality*, ed. Alena Ledeneva (UCL Press 2018) 441–445, and *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (De Gruyter 2019). Please also see the websites of IABA, the International Auto/Biography Association, and of CARP Research Lab, <https://sites.google.com/uAlberta.ca/iaba/home> and <https://carplab.wordpress.com>.

We welcome interdisciplinary and methodologically explicit papers that address critical questions across an international variety of works, genres, media and practices, with attention to theoretical premises of both Auto/Biography Studies and Reputation Politics Studies. Conference language will be English. Several publishers, including Macmillan, Sage, Routledge, and Taylor

& Francis, have expressed interest in the publication of a volume comprising the results of the conference. Please send proposals (600 words maximum exclusive of references) plus a short academic biography to nadja.gernalzick@univie.ac.at and eshiraev@gmu.edu by October 15, 2019. Notice of acceptance will be given by October 30, 2019.

The conference is co-organized by Nadja Gernalzick, Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies, University of Vienna, and Eric Shiraev, George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A, with the assistance of Edwina Hagen, VU Amsterdam; Martijn Icks, University of Amsterdam; Jennifer Keohane, University of Baltimore, and Sergei Samoilenko, George Mason University.