

Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography



Traditional autobiography tends to originate in some form of crisis and to develop some form of resolution. In contrast, much contemporary autobiography deals with unresolved crises and cannot even assume authoritative, first-person narration. Susanna Egan finds such autobiographies dialogic in form, involving the reader in generic experimentation in their pursuit of shifting, uncertain meanings. After tracing the literary experimentation of contemporary genres to the inventiveness of modernism, she explores the generic contributions of drama, film, quilting, comics, and blended literary forms to changing genres of autobiography. Egan identifies lived crises--such as diaspora, genocide, and terminal illness--as the forces behind generic experimentation, suggesting dynamic intersections between trauma and cultural expression. *Mirror Talk* examines work by a wide range of autobiographers, including Primo Levi, Maxine Hong Kingston, Audre Lorde, Michael Ondaatje, Tom Joslin, Clark Blaise and Bharati Mukherjee, Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum, Breyten Breytenbach, Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell, Ernest Hemingway, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, Mary Meigs, Dennis Potter, and Trinh T. Minh-ha.

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