

The self she creates is fluid and nomadic. It is a self in a non-stop process of becoming (p. 178).

So did the book deliver on its promises? In some sense, yes but also, no. It certainly gives us an insight into Foucauldian scholarship and the kind of theorizing that lies behind doing history from a genealogical perspective. It also offers us an interesting insight into the lives of a range of women educators who were feminist innovators and activists of their time, and whose influence is still with us today. But, while I enjoyed to some extent the theoretical bits, my interest was much more engaged with the more conventional historical employment and discussion of the autobiographical texts, particularly inevitably perhaps, concerning their loves and obsessions. I became not a little irritated sometimes with the continual reference to what Foucault might have thought in the context of the specific study, and the implication that there is a right way to think about and 'read' the texts. In this regard, the book goes against the principles of Foucault's work, one might think, which is to open up rather than close down interpretation. There are also minor editorial irritations, such as a tendency towards repetition (e.g., Foucault's failure to engage with women in his work), and generalization (e.g., 'it is well known that ...'), overuse of italics as emphasis, and editorial omissions (e.g., absence of reference to Noddings in the index).

However, this is a very rich source, and the limitations of a short review have not allowed me to pick up on a number of other issues and ideas that were stimulated for me by the book. For this, I am most grateful to the author and this must also stand as a testimony to the book's value and quality.

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#### **AUTONOMY, BENEFICENCE AND JUSTICE IN LIFE WRITING**

*Vulnerable subjects, ethics and life writing.* G. Thomas Couser, 2004. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press; ISBN 08148863X, 256 pp., £10.95 paper.

The vulnerable subjects, who are the focus of this work, are vulnerable to harm through the writings of others. Their vulnerability to misrepresentation often arises through specific internal impairments that render them unaware of how they are being represented and incapable of either consent or protest. An example of such a vulnerable subject would be the novelist Iris Murdoch, and the portrayal of her in the books (and film) by her husband John Bayley.

Other subjects may be vulnerable through external circumstance or situation, and the ethical issue centres on betrayal of trust. The underlying

issues invariably concern competing values and interests. At the heart of many ethical dilemmas are the competing values of truth and respect. The author is at pains to point out that he has no agenda to 'police' life writing in order to ensure protection and respect for vulnerable subjects. Nevertheless his argument leads to a more balanced position, where the interests of such subjects need to be considered more carefully and to influence subsequent decisions about what to exclude and what to include in published texts.

Although, in his own words, this is not a book about bioethics, the author draws upon key concepts of this contemporary approach, such as the principles of autonomy, beneficence and justice. By careful analysis of a range of different examples, he demonstrates the complexity of the issues at stake, and how these principles might come into conflict. The wide range of his examples is drawn mainly from North America, but the author provides detailed contextual information so that a reader unfamiliar with them can appreciate the ethical issues at stake. The unusual and atypical nature of his examples might suggest that the ethical issues are themselves atypical. On the contrary, the issues are pervasive and insofar as vulnerability is considered a matter of degree rather than kind, then for that reason alone the book is to be thoroughly commended as an essential text in *any* consideration of ethics and life writing.

I found this to be a challenging book in two senses. First, it makes intellectual demands upon the reader, and secondly it challenges practice. Although never strident, the author makes his case persuasively and insistently, and the integrity he displays commands respect. He has, in a sense, made himself vulnerable in making his own text public.

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#### A VIVID SENSE OF A PARTICULAR SOCIETY

*Twentieth-century autobiography: writing Wales in English.* Barbara Prys-Williams, 2004. Cardiff: University of Wales Press; ISBN 0708318916, 224 pp., £14.99 paper.

This study is part of the CREW (Centre for Research into the English Literature and Language of Wales, University of Wales Swansea) Series that explores the English language literature of modern Wales. It is an examination of the autobiographical work of seven (all deceased) writers of autobiography including the well-known academic and literary critic Lorna Sage, the miner-writer B.L. Coombes and the distinguished poet R.S. Thomas. Except for Coombes (born 1883) the subjects were all born