

animation and other media, it also successfully demonstrates the increment value of cognitive narratology and conceptual blending for the study of the paradoxes of metalepsis.

***Paul Austers autobiographische Werke: Stationen einer Schriftstellerkarriere.* By Christian Eilers (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2019), 326pp.**

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Christian Eilers's book *Paul Austers autobiographische Werke: Stationen einer Schriftstellerkarriere* turns to an understudied part of Paul Auster's work: his autobiographical writing. Although the writer's oeuvre has been the subject of academic debate for decades, the majority of scholarship has dealt with Auster's novels, sometimes in conjunction with, but more rarely with an explicit focus on, his memoirs. In its attempt to fill this gap, Eilers's book, a comparative analysis of texts identified as "immediate" ("unmittelbare" [4, 307, 314]) autobiographical works, will be of interest to scholars looking for a biographical lens on Auster and readers eager to learn more about the writer's life.

Framed by an introduction and a conclusion, the four thematic chapters of the book, which is based on Eilers's dissertation, consider four texts written by Auster over a period of more than 30 years: *White Spaces* (1980), *The Invention of Solitude* (1982), *Hand to Mouth* (1997), and *Winter Journal* (2012). In these, Eilers identifies dominant motifs that will be familiar to readers of Auster's fiction, such as the quest for truth, the failures of language, defeat, hermetic space, or solitude, which Eilers links to the author's biography. Methodologically, the study proposes to combine a text-based analysis of its selection of autobiographical texts with a biographical approach (6). Explicitly set against poststructuralist and deconstructivist methods (6), Eilers's readings rely on a traditional focus on the author that takes the selected texts as evidencing Auster's gradual approximation of himself (304), and as fragments of a bigger picture of the man. The study addresses Auster's autobiographical work as a growing whole ("sich stets erweiterndes autobiographisches Gesamtbild" [201]), a notion also conveyed through the images of stages or a mosaic (194, 201, 209) that suggest a hermeneutic approach to Auster's writing that seeks root causes for the texts' motifs in the author's life (3, 12).

The biographical events Eilers reads as formative for Auster's motivic world range from the deaths of his parents and the divorce from his first wife, Lydia Davis, to Auster's years in Paris and his existential crisis in the late 1970s. The latter figures prominently in the first two thematic chapters, which examine the eight-page *White*

Spaces and the best known of Auster's autobiographical texts, *The Invention of Solitude*. Chapter two interprets *White Spaces*, written under the impression of a ballet performance in December 1978, as both "therapeutic" (19) and an early manifestation of familiar Auster topics such as causality and chance, defeat, and the writing subject's relation to space. The following chapter expands on this idea by reading Auster's first prose text, *The Invention of Solitude*, produced in the aftermath of Sam Auster's unexpected death in 1979, as an autobiographical response to, and search for a way out of, the writer's crisis. Much of chapter three focuses on Paul Auster's relation to his (often absent) father Sam, in particular through the text's first part, "Portrait of an Invisible Man," which introduces one of Eilers's central theses: that of a traumatic, guilt-ridden father-son constellation, in which Sam Auster emerges as an "other," a representative of antagonistic values ("wertebezogenen Gegenspieler" [151]).

This constellation, later extended to Auster's mother Queenie, becomes a dominant element of Eilers's biographical explanation of the writer's motifs and recurs not only in this chapter's reading of the multi-perspectival second part of *The Invention of Solitude* ("The Book of Memory") but throughout the remainder of the book. Chapter four addresses *Hand to Mouth* as a new form of Auster's dealing with his past, one that leaves a postmodernist aesthetic framework behind and implements a retrospective and unfragmented mode of representation (210–12). Following an extensive amount of biographical information presented through *Hand to Mouth* (161–91), Eilers discusses motivic parallels to the earlier works (197–208). In the 1997 text, he suggests, the dominant motifs, while remaining connected to Auster's underlying unresolved conflict with the dead father (200, 309), become the writer's means of expressing social and political critique (159, 161–75). Chapter five completes the main part by reading the second-person narrative *Winter Journal* as a combination of earlier perspectives and techniques (278). Eilers views the text as an autobiography of the body that returns to a postmodernist style and premises physical finitude (257). Here, by now well-known motifs recur to function as retrospective lenses rather than self-therapeutic means to change a state of crisis (247).

How readers will perceive the book will depend largely on how well its author-focused approach will suit them. Even those who favor a more traditional methodological lens, however, may wonder whether certain kinds of theory could have been dealt with more rigorously to buttress and refine the study's claims. One may wish, for example, for a more exhaustive engagement with more recent autobiography theory (beyond regular references to Philippe Lejeune), trauma theory (since trauma seems to be essential to Eilers's take on the father-son relationship), or potentially fruitful ideas from narratology such as the "implied author" (given the proposal of a text-based approach). Furthermore, there is the more general question why post-structuralist thought is rejected out of hand when subjectivity is so central to the

study and when such thought, even if not involved in a methodological framework, seems important as a thematic context for a writer such as Auster.

While (not) taking these paths is obviously a matter of choice, what seems problematic is what not broaching such issues and theory from the start is reflective of, namely the tendency in the book to leave its own methodological premises and limits largely unquestioned. The study proposes a focus on the biographical through the autobiographical but misses the opportunity to reflect on the particular merits and potential shortcomings of this idea. Neither suggesting an opposition to poststructuralist and deconstructivist thought, nor acknowledging that an interview Eilers conducted with Auster in September 2013 cannot be a basis for a scholarly approach, help fully clarify the study's approach in itself. Readers will look in vain for initial definitions of central terms such as "autobiographical" or "motif" against extant scholarship, or take issue with the underlying notion of gaining biographical evidence through an autobiographical text, which, if unexplained, seems to ignore not only postmodern critiques of subjectivity and representation, but also basic theoretical questions of life writing. One might ask, for example, in how far it is logical to translate a problematic father-son relationship (no doubt identifiable in *The Invention of Solitude*) into what seems to become a biographical master-narrative taken as general subtext for all subsequent autobiographical texts, if simultaneously suggesting a text-based analysis. The biographical at such points seems a way to yield to an urge for a teleological reading that risks circumventing fundamental questions of autobiographical representation as textual representation—questions that Auster's texts themselves address by self-reflexively playing with the issue of authorship and consciously sabotaging the authenticity of the autobiographical prism. Auster, in other words, complicates the functioning of what Lejeune calls an "autobiographical pact" that Eilers, on a methodological level and via footnotes at the beginnings of chapters (31, 57, 160, 215), takes for granted.

Despite such methodological question marks, the monograph has its strengths in its familiarity with, and survey of, a set of largely underrepresented texts, and is a useful and timely contribution to Auster scholarship. As pioneering book-length study of Auster's autobiographical texts, it conveys new insights for German-reading Auster scholars and adds to a notable turn to Auster's autobiographies and memoirs in the recent past that may also gain further momentum through the publication of *Groundwork* (2020), a compilation that gathers nine of Auster's autobiographical works. Besides potentially inspiring further research on understudied texts such as *White Spaces* and *Hand to Mouth*, the study should also, as is its author's expressed hope (314), invite more scholarly engagement with the topical interlinkages between Auster's autobiographical texts and his novelistic and essayistic work.

In a broader context, one might add that a study like Eilers's, which reveals motivic and stylistic shifts in Auster's autobiographical writings, could moreover help draw attention to the general role of forms of life writing in contemporary departures from the long realm of postmodernism. With respect to his fiction, scholars are increasingly discussing Auster in relation to what has been labeled (by some) post-postmodernism. With respect to his nonfiction, on the other hand, such an emphasis seems still missing, yet a suggestion like Eilers's to look at Auster's autobiographical texts beyond a postmodernist lens may, by extension, help address the question of how recent and ongoing transformations in life writing represent a facet of a broader turn to newly emerging aesthetic forms. Auster, as a writer who has shaped the literary landscape of the U.S. in the past four decades, his fiction but also his nonfiction, and especially the often fuzzy lines in-between, are certainly worth considering in explorations of whatever it may be that comes "after" or through postmodernism.

***Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction.* By Laura Marcus (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 148pp.**

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The recent surge in the field of life, memoir, and biographical writing illustrates the relevance and timeliness of Laura Marcus's short introduction to the genre of autobiography. Marcus teaches English literature at the University of Oxford and published the monograph *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* in the 1990s (Manchester University Press, 1994). Her earlier work explores autobiography as a genre and as an organizing concept in nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought. In so doing, she shows how autobiography and biography were critical to eugenics and have been key to concepts of the public and the private in feminist theory. In addition, *Auto/biographical Discourses* discusses the "new biography" by Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf and considers then-recent theories of subjectivity, contemporary autobiographical writings, and feminist theories of life-writing.<sup>1</sup>

In the more recent, shorter publication under review here, she takes up these same interests in eight short chapters that discuss confession, conversion, testimony (chapter one), the "Journeying Self" (chapter two), "Autobiographical Consciousness" (chapter three), psychoanalysis (chapter four), family and childhood (chapter five), "Public Selves" (chapter six), different autobiographical media (chapter seven), and the relation between fiction and autobiography (chapter eight). Marcus's account reveals how a broad spectrum of personal writings have been central to the work of literary critics, philosophers, historians, theologians, and psychologists, who have found in autobiographies not only an understanding of the ways in which lives have been lived, but the most fundamental accounts of what it means to be in the world.