

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.**

Philipp Reisner, University of Düsseldorf & University of Mainz

DOI: [10.47060/jaaas.v2i1.130](https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v2i1.130)

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.

In her introduction, Marcus presents useful distinctions between the vast array of terms introduced by “autobiography,” including “autography,” “autothanatography,” and “autobiografiction,” all of which have become important fields in their own right. She argues that “life-writing” and “personal writing,” taken together, cover a broad range of texts, such as letters, journals, diaries, and (family) memoirs (1). She considers autobiography an important window into how particular societies, cultures, and historical periods understood self, identity, and subjectivity (2).

In her survey, Marcus touches on a host of important topics and sub-genres: the rise of literary autobiography (the “literary life”) in the nineteenth century (2), spiritual autobiography and conversion narratives (12–14), confession and testimony in the modern age (21–23), testimony and trauma (23–28), and narrative identity (41–43), each chapter focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She surveys autobiographers of diverse writers, including Augustine, John Bunyan, Benjamin Franklin, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau, Charles Darwin, Walt Whitman, Simone de Beauvoir, A.J. Ayer, Patrick Leigh Fermor, Paul Auster, and Maxine Hong Kingston.

Along the way, Marcus stresses that, unlike Philippe Lejeune’s definition of autobiography as (a retrospective linear prose) narrative,<sup>2</sup> there are many forms of poetic memoirs that put this very definition of “autobiography” into question (for example, Li-Young Lee’s *The Winged Seed: A Remembrance* [2013]). Lejeune’s work becomes one of the theoretical cornerstones against which Marcus unfolds her own reflections on autobiography (3–4, 98, 117).

Overall, Marcus’s book is an excellent overview of autobiographical writing from diverse literatures and genres, paying particular attention to women writers and philosophical questions. Her innovative fifth chapter, “Family Histories and the Autobiography of Childhood,” proves particularly insightful. It is striking, however, that she makes reference to Philippe Ariès’s theory of the birth of childhood without addressing the critique Ariès has faced in recent decades (66–67). Furthermore, her initial terminological observations could have gone into greater (historical) detail, specifically about the origin and (intended) readership of testimonies. The fact that the terms “life-writing” (2) and “autobiography” both originate in the eighteenth century suggest that the history of the genre actually started prior to the nineteenth century, the purportedly “most autobiographical century.”<sup>3</sup> This is significant for the field of American studies since the eighteenth century has not traditionally been at the center of scholarship, especially in European American studies. Future research on the rise of the memoir will have to take this aspect into consideration.

Like all volumes in the series, Marcus’s study contains a list of illustrations (xix) and references by chapter at the end of the volume (123–35), a short bibliography for further reading (which lacks a commentary, 137), and a useful index (141–48). I rec-

commend this book to anyone interested in autobiography, life writing, and literature. Marcus's "short introduction" is best read alongside works the author suggests in her list of further readings and Hermione Lee's *Biography: A Very Short Introduction* in the same series (Oxford University Press, 2009), as this growing and fascinating field becomes ever more challenging and difficult to survey.

## Notes

- 1 Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice in the 1990s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).
- 2 Philippe Lejeune, *Moi aussi* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986).
- 3 Marion Montgomery, *The Reflective Journey Toward Order: Essays on Dante, Wordsworth, Eliot, and Others* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 285.

### ***Power and Truth in Political Discourse: Language and Ideological Narratives.* By Vassil Hristov Anastassov (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), 107pp.**

Steffi Wiggins, University of Vienna

DOI: [10.47060/jaaas.v2i1.128](https://doi.org/10.47060/jaaas.v2i1.128)

The title of Anastassov's book evokes two concepts that are key to this study: language is power and it is political. And where there is power, there is a dominant speaker who, by using certain strategies, gains and maintains that power over others.

The major claim of this book is that speakers engaged in any kind of discourse impose political power on each other. An agent manipulates a target by concealing the "(political) truth" (1). Anastassov investigates the role of "actors-manipulators" and the language used between "the state" and the average citizen (xiv). As a result, political discourse is neither equal nor mutual since speakers and hearers are in binary opposition.

The author uses this framework to create a linguistic model of the power of political discourse in relation to the philosophy of politics and the philosophy of language. He claims that the manipulative force of language itself, when applied in political rhetoric, steers the average citizen away from real knowledge of the political truth by creating the "myths-narratives" that suit the narratives of the rulers (1).

Anastassov determines that the imposition of political power is a linguistic capacity of humans and applies this idea to the political governance of communal life. The author describes the state of an institution in relation to how it maintains governmental power and imposes it on average members of the community. The conclusion posits that power imbalance in the linguistic interaction of humans is historically inseparable from the imbalance of power in their communal life. Communal life