UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHSS)
Homepage: https://ukrpublisher.com/ukrjahss/
Email: submit.ukrpublisher@gmail.com
Volume 1, Issue 10, 2025
ISSN: 3107-359X (Online)

Narrating a Life, Claiming a Voice: Autobiography and the Question of Agency in Biographical Writing

Mutlu Dursun

PhD in Political Science and International Relations, Independent Researcher. *ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0492-1864*

***Corresponding Author**: Mutlu Dursun

DOI: *https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18110590*

Article History

Original Research Article

Received: 12-12-2025

Accepted: 28-12-2025

Published: 31-12-2025

Citation: Mutlu Dursun. (2025). Narrating a Life, Claiming a Voice: Autobiography and the Question of Agency in Biographical Writing. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHSS), Volume 1(10), 266-273.

Abstract

This article critically examines the influence of autobiographical material on biographical narratives and proposes the approach of life writing as a methodological and conceptual alternative. Autobiographies, due to their ideological, selective, and narrative nature, often impose a coherent and persuasive framework on the biographer, thereby blurring the boundaries between historical analysis and autobiographical fiction. This tension complicates the interplay between identity construction and historical context. Life writing, by incorporating a broad array of ego-documents, offers a multidimensional and interdisciplinary perspective that reconfigures biography as a critical, pluralistic, and reflexive practice. It emphasizes not only what is narrated but also how it is narrated—focusing on narrative strategies, silences, linguistic choices, and the subject's social positions. In this framework, the article reconsiders the nature of biographical subjects and seeks a renewed answer to the central question: "Whose story is being told?"

Keywords: *Autobiography, Life Writing, Narrative, Historiography, Ego-documents.*

Introduction

In modern Turkish history, biography emerged as a popular genre with Namık Kemal's (1840–1888)—an Ottoman intellectual with a romantic sensibility who articulated a Muslim moral universe while foregrounding the Turkish element and embracing modern ideals of liberty and civilization—elevation of heroes who sacrificed themselves for the homeland. Kemal's aim was to inspire the Turkish/Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire with an idea that would move them beyond a posture of mere defense and toward renewed initiative, through biographies he composed under the inspiration of Ottoman chronicles and epics—bringing to life, in the figures of frontier raiders distinguished by their aristocratic virtues, as well as historical characters such as Mehmed II (the Conqueror), Selim I (the Grim), Jalal al-Din Khwarazmshah, and Tiryaki Hasan Paşa, exemplary embodiments of this spirit (Pala, 1989).

The path opened by Kemal continued to exert its influence in the Republican era. Far-right nationalist Hüseyin Nihâl Atsız (1905–1975)—a prominent ideologue of Turkish ethnic nationalism and a prolific writer of historical fiction—became one of the figures about whom the greatest number of biographies have been written in Turkey, likewise sought, through the heroes of his historical novels, to show a nation that had not yet completed its "spiritual revolution" the path toward a national ideal. Indeed, in Atsız's view, history is a field consisting essentially of the biographies of great personalities (Dursun, 2024: 347–379). Yet the approach articulated by Namık Kemal and Hüseyin Nihâl Atsız cannot be understood as merely an individual stance or the historical imagination of a narrow circle. On the contrary, it reflects a broader social tendency in the perception of history in Turkey. Although it is often associated with currents of extreme nationalism, similar attitudes have at times also found resonance within leftist milieus. This suggests that the underlying historical sensibility transcends ideological boundaries and points instead to a wider and more encompassing cultural orientation. The influence of this understanding extends into academia, yet its impact outside the academy is more immediate and direct. Biographical narratives, often consciously or unconsciously, reproduce narrative patterns embedded in tradition; they enable readers to empathize, to grasp historical contexts through personal experiences, and

to apprehend the significance of individual agency. For this reason, biography functions not merely as a vehicle for transmitting personal life stories, but also as a cultural instrument that shapes historical understanding. It is precisely this feature that renders biography so popular.

At the same time, biographical narratives carry within themselves a questioning "surplus" vis-à-vis the theses constructed through official history—in other words, a claim to originality (Aydın, 2005: 160–161). Indeed, the authors of these texts are "hybrid being, at the intersection (Kreuzungspunkt) of different historical groups. Although formed right to the core by social experiences, he or she can never be reduced to just one of them: one is never entirely devoted to a single thing, not even to the family, the matrix of all other forms of social life. " (Loriga, 2016: 34). Yet when guided by positivist historiography, biography becomes a reductionist text. A biography that fails to move beyond document fetishism and is not written in a critical mode inevitably presents history not as a multidimensional analysis of social processes, but rather as a kind of theatrical performance whose nature and course are determined by historical heroes.

This romantic tendency—strongly associated with nationalism as in Turkey and else whrere and, at times, racism—has been transformed, especially among circles that take certain normative values and identity definitions as their point of departure rather than engaging in a concrete analysis of the period under study, into a historiographical practice whose methodological foundation is idealism. In this respect, it has also been intertwined with widely circulating forms of representation that are effective in the formation of social memory and in the construction, legitimation, and reproduction of social order. At the heart of this understanding of biographical writing—which instills in its readers both a sense of belonging and admiration (epic biography)—lies the assumption of an absolute harmony between state and citizen, or more generally, between society and the individual (Klein, 2024: 151–158).

Although, since the 1990s, biographies offering a critical perspective and positioning themselves against this mainstream have been produced, these alternative examples have largely remained insufficient to alter the overall picture. One of the most important reasons for this situation is the tradition of individual (hero)-centered historical narration mentioned above; another is that autobiographical material—one of the principal sources of biographical writing—is often not subjected to a sufficiently critical reading, either because of document fetishism or because of the ease afforded by tradition. In other words, strategies capable of properly guiding or neutralizing the effects produced on the narrative by the relationship established with the "source" are not employed. Put differently, instead of analyzing the states of mind through which the autobiographical subject positions itself and the ways in which it perceives events, one falls into the manipulative traps constructed by that subject. The most significant consequence of this is the progressive blurring of the boundary lines between autobiographical narrative and historical analysis, and the detachment of historical phenomena from their social, political, and cultural contexts.

In this respect, "life writing" constitutes one of the most effective ways of overcoming this difficulty, which is almost inherent in biography and often regarded as a kind of "defect." By scrutinizing the permeability between autobiography and biography, by treating autobiography as a fictional text and seeking to unravel it through an interdisciplinary narrative that incorporates literary strategies, and by diversifying sources as much as possible in order to understand the different dimensions of the construction of the subject, life writing has opened up new possibilities for the practice of qualified biographical writing. Departing from this conceptual framework, the present study aims to discuss the relationships that biographical writing establishes with autobiographical tendencies, to explore the possibilities offered by a life writing perspective in biography, and ultimately to center its inquiry on the question: "Whose story is being told?"

The Ideological Function of Autobiographical Sources

One of the most striking features of autobiographies is that they are inherently "ideological" texts. Autobiography enables the subject to position themselves within a particular political and moral stance and to construct their identity within the narrative; in this sense, it may ultimately be interpreted as a message sent into the future. The author's desire—whether conscious or not—to vindicate their own life or to entrench in social memory the values they associate with that life renders autobiography a source that must be handled with particular care (Gusdorf, 1980). In this respect, it is especially important to note that biography, which is based on a fictional mode of narration, can never fully free itself from the guiding or manipulative influence of autobiography. Autobiographical narrative often seeks to impose upon the biographer a world that is internally coherent, intelligible, and clearly bounded, thereby shaping both the construction and the rhythm of the narrative. Accordingly, autobiographical accounts are, by their very nature, fictional, selective, and strategic.

As Paul Thompson **(1988: 120)** observes, autobiographies are one-way communicative texts shaped according to the expectations of their readers. "If it is intimate, it is more in the self-conscious, controlled manner of an actor on the stage ot in a film. As a public confession, it rarely includes

anything which the author feels really discreditable." (Thompson, 1988: 121). Even in the most ostensibly neutral accounts, one should not lose sight of the fact that psychological, biological, and even sociological factors may undermine claims to objective neutrality. Indeed, studies on the functioning of memory have shown that individuals recall more readily those memories that align with their aims and agendas, and in this context attention has been drawn to the role of autobiographical memory in ensuring the "continuity of self-perception" (self-function). This self-continuity has been associated with the individual's desire to render their identity coherent and stable over the flow of time (self-continuity) (Öner, 2018: 73).

The theoretical framework that Pierre Bourdieu terms the "biographical illusion" is crucial for understanding this potential for manipulation. According to Bourdieu, the greatest danger confronting the biographer is to fall under the spell of the illusion produced by the narrative of the biographical subject. It is through this illusion that biography comes to ascribe an implicit teleology to the subject's life, so that life appears as a journey progressing toward ever more meaningful and morally elevated ends. The ambiguity of the relationship established between the biographer and the biographical subject is also noteworthy in this regard. For the biographer, by virtue of the information they possess about the subject's life, may cease to be a merely external narrator and, in an effort to confer overall coherence upon the narrative, may be tempted to forge forced connections between unrelated events. In doing so, the biographer effectively becomes an ideologue of the biographical subject (Bourdieu, 2004: 297–303).

For Bourdieu, attempting to understand a life solely as a sequence of events narrated in sources is as illogical as trying to explain a metro journey without taking into account the underground network of tunnels that makes it possible. The individual, he argues, is a multilayered agent who simultaneously occupies multiple social positions and intervenes in the fields in which they are embedded. It is for this reason that biographical writing must take into account, separately and in detail, all the social positions occupied by a person at a given moment, as well as all the attributes that make those positions possible (Bourdieu, 1995: 234–239).

Although the reservations voiced by Bourdieu and Thompson regarding the ideological function of autobiography are both intelligible and significant, it would be difficult to claim that they provide us with an exhaustive conceptual framework. Even though autobiography is a text produced through the selective perception of memory, researchers can nonetheless approach such narratives with full awareness of the deliberate obscurations and distortions motivated by personal الحسابs, of temporal displacements and factual errors, as well as of the emphatically asserted agency that they contain. At the same time, autobiography remains the most immediate narrator of the subject's lived experience and intentions. In this respect, it cannot be replaced by any other narrative or source.

As W. E. B. Du Bois (1968: 12) subtly points out, the desire to tell one's own story is not merely a form of personal expression but also a demand for visibility within a historical and social context. The autobiographies of individuals who have been marginalized or whose existence has in one way or another been suppressed may, rather than offering only an individual narrative, also pave the way for the construction of an alternative and collective memory and for challenging existing relations of power at both macro and micro levels. From this perspective, instead of viewing autobiography as an elitist imposition of truth whose ideological function operates solely from the top down by reinforcing established opinions and privileging conformity, we should also take into account its capacity to transgress—and even transform—existing boundaries.

In this sense, autobiographies are indispensable not only because they offer information and perspectives on events that cannot be found elsewhere, but also because they illuminate how identity itself is constructed. They reflect a multilayered subjectivity encompassing the author's state of mind, social milieu (habitus), institutional affiliations (field), past experiences, and responses to the developments of the period. The personal perspective adopted in the narrative may assign alternative meanings to lived events and thus encourage readers to think critically. Yet all these subjective stances do not preclude the narrator from sincerely recounting what they believe they have experienced, for the language and narrative form through which individuals tell their own stories ultimately shape their perception of identity as well (Aydın, 2005: 260–262). From this vantage point, autobiographies bear the traces of identity construction shaped through the interaction between personal experiences and socio-historical conditions. This dynamic relationship established between narrative and identity offers important clues as to how and with what motivations the subject constructs themselves. In other words, the distance between narrative and narrator is not as clear-cut or absolute as is often assumed; at times the two coincide, while at others the tension between them deepens the layers of meaning within the text (Ricœur, 1995: 73–74).

At the same time, autobiographical narratives provide a distinctive ground for discussion in terms of how they construct "truth." In such texts, "truth" acquires a dialogical character shaped through a kind of negotiation between the author and the prospective reader, involving an intersubjective sharing. Autobiography therefore ultimately

produces not a fixed and singular reality, but an open-ended, polyphonic indeterminacy. The text comes into being only through the reader's participation; it is a formation dependent on interpretation (Aydın, 2005: 161). As **Carlo Ginzburg** (1996: 11) emphasizes, the fact that a source is not "objective" does not render it worthless; on the contrary, such sources expand the possibilities of interpretation and thus constitute an essential component of historical meaning-making.

Life Writing and Transcending the Limits of Biography

Life writing is an approach that seeks to render visible individuals and social groups long neglected in academic research. Within this approach, the sources examined are by no means confined to biography or autobiography alone; rather, they also encompass a wide range of personal narrative forms—letters, diaries, memoirs, reminiscences, oral history, and digital postings—that is, ego documents. Through these sources, life writing examines individual experiences within their social and historical contexts (Renders, 2004a: 134). As stated on the website of the Oxford Centre for Life Writing (OCLW), life writing does not merely include biography but goes beyond it. According to the Centre, life writing embraces everything from a complete life story to the story of a single day, from fiction to fact. It encompasses not only the lives of individuals, families, and groups, but also those of objects and institutions (De Haan, 2004: 180).

By taking into account the ideological functions, multilayered structures, and fictional dimensions of all the documents employed in biographical writing—above all autobiography—life writing offers a functional theoretical framework for grappling with the structural problems inherent in such texts. Issues such as the tension between fictionality and reality, which manifests itself explicitly or implicitly in ego documents, and the ways in which individuals represent themselves can thus be re-signified through the lens of life writing. In this way, life writing not only seeks to unravel the "mystery" of narrative, but also contributes to the development of new narrative forms that are literarily rich, multilayered, and marked by critical depth (Smith and Watson, 2010).

Bourdieu, through the metaphor of an "underground tunnel network" with its strong structural resonances, seeks to explain individuals' movements in the social field within the confines of pre-established structures. While this approach undoubtedly offers a powerful framework for understanding the processes and possibilities of agency within one's social milieu and the institutional structures to which one belongs, it may remain limited in capturing the individual singularities embedded in biographical narrative, the dynamism of structure, and sudden shifts in direction. Similarly, group-biographical studies (prosopography) that focus on multiple persons belonging to the same social environment do not always provide a fully satisfactory explanation of why a particular individual comes to stand out within that milieu, or why they accrue narrative value. Microhistory, grounded in the principle of intensive engagement with all available sources on the subject under investigation, for all its depth, does not possess a fully distinctive and systematic literary tradition or narrative aesthetic. Put differently, the methodological rigor it offers does not invariably reach the same level of aesthetic or fictional depth at the level of narration.

In this context, the increasingly prominent genre of auto-fiction also deserves critical assessment. In this form—where reality and fiction are deliberately interwoven—the subject articulates itself through more formally liberated narrative modes. Yet precisely for this reason, the boundaries drawn between fiction and document become blurred. Auto-fiction, which renders the reliability and historical referential value of autobiographical narrative uncertain, may offer a productive terrain in terms of narrative aesthetics and plot construction, but by the same token it becomes less capable of serving as a dependable basis for historical and sociological analysis. Hence, in order to grasp the individual's complex inner world, their interaction with social structures, and the subjective stances assumed within narrative, more flexible, interdisciplinary, and multilayered approaches are needed. Each of these methods—each of which life writing can, where necessary, incorporate and transcend—may illuminate certain dimensions of lived experience; and the multidimensional nature of a life becomes narratable only to the extent that these partial approaches critically complement one another. This, at the same time, outlines the trajectory that biography itself ought to follow.

Ego documents render visible different dimensions of how the subject is constructed. Accordingly, rather than focusing on a fixed subject, life writing turns toward examining the subject's multiple, shifting, and often fragmented representations. In this respect, life writing does not merely recount an individual's life; it also generates questions concerning memory, time, narrative, and the very act of writing itself. Thus, the narrated life ceases to be a record belonging to the past and becomes a process of construction—reconstituted, interpreted, and endowed with meaning in the living present (Eakin, 1999: 142–186). Possessing a functional toolkit capable of serving this aim, life writing brings together disciplines and approaches such as literary theory, linguistics, memory studies, psychology, cultural anthropology, gender studies, postcolonial studies, and critical theory. By attending to the identity constructed through narrative, the language employed, silences, unconscious choices, and strategic selections, it subjects to

multidimensional analysis the ways in which the person whose story is told sees and constructs themselves.

It is precisely through this multidimensionality—one that does not escape notice—that life writing invites specialists to reflect on the boundaries of biography. As Binne de Haan (2004: 189) explicitly indicates, life writing has ultimately developed in a way that eclipses biography. The point that must be underscored here is that, somewhat ironically, life writing emerged in the 1980s as the outcome of a series of theoretical studies undertaken with the intention of contributing to biographical writing. This very fact, moreover, demonstrates just how necessary a more intense interaction between these two genres is. In this way, expanding and transforming the methods employed in biography becomes not only possible but also necessary from the standpoint of today's critical understanding of history.

By focusing on ego documents, life writing accords particular importance to the manner in which a text is presented—its form and mode of delivery. The mode of presentation displayed within a source signals how the narrative ought to be read. Through such documents, it also becomes possible to identify how an individual perceives themselves, how they wish to be remembered in the future, and how they transmit their experiences. The effects of narrative upon memory constitute another of the issues that life writing examines with particular care. For instance, a diary entry or a letter may carry a more intimate and personal voice, reflecting emotions as they are lived in the moment, whereas memoirs written many years later may represent a mode of narration in which the past is reconstructed and certain details are brought to the fore—deliberately or unwittingly. From this vantage point, such texts indicate how a person constructs their identity through narrative, how they express themselves, and how these forms of narration shape memory. In this sense, the form of a text is crucial for analyzing the relationship between narrative and person; indeed, the contribution of narrative form to understanding both the narrator's position and the text's function is unique. Put differently, by developing narrative strategies that render visible the experiences of individuals excluded from or ignored by social memory, life writing makes a significant contribution to biography. This is a contribution from below—one shaped by microhistory and comparable to microhistory's own interventions.

To give an example: life writing, which constructs a narrative from the perspectives of persons/agents neglected under the shadow of grand narratives, may draw on the concept that microhistorians describe as the "normal exception" in order to reveal the relations these individuals establish with their social environments. As an approach that seeks to make the voice of the silent majority audible, life writing has the capacity to disclose the social normalities that lie behind experiences deemed extraordinary, and it is primarily concerned with such figures. In this context, the concept of the "normal exception" is compatible with the theoretical foundations of life writing (Loriga, 2024: 78). Life writing re-signifies these individuals through the forms of relationship they establish with their environments. In this way, a life that appears exceptional can, within a specific social context, become a different expression of the "normal."

Although life writing is sometimes criticized as an approach that overlooks historical context on the grounds that it focuses on the individual, it is equally possible to argue the opposite. By scrutinizing even the smallest details of an individual's life, it renders visible that person's position within social structures and the strategies they develop in relation to those structures. In institutionalized fields such as family, working life, and academia, the individual appears in life writing not as a passive being but, on the contrary, as the subject of their own life—an agent who actively engages in negotiation through the relationships they forge within these structures. This also demonstrates the inadequacy of treating historical context as an entirely external structure, wholly independent of narrative. For the relationship between the individual and historical context—although the latter is more determining—is not a one-way interaction, but a reciprocal process of shaping. Such processes enable individuals both to shape their own lives and to leave, in their own measure, an imprint upon historical context (Giddens, 1996: 9–96).

Moreover, these formations are not always coherent and frictionless. Cracks that emerge within a social structure worn down over time, along with the residues deposited by culture and history, may open new spaces of life and maneuver for individuals. Normative systems—sets of rules inherited from the past and still in the process of being shaped in the present—often contain gaps within which individuals or groups can develop strategies of their own. This clearly shows that a single, rigid social norm cannot encompass all experiences; on the contrary, multiple and often contradictory norms frequently coexist. In this respect, life writing offers a flexible and pluralistic perspective that underscores personal initiative and the power of negotiation.

In this context, the primary aim of biography is not to assemble fragmentary information obtained from different sources into an artificial unity. On the contrary, the ambiguities and contradictions that manifest themselves in ego documents are indispensable for understanding the subject's distinctive and complex constitution. The growing interest among historians in the "personal" in recent years indicates that the indeterminacies frequently encountered in

life narratives are directly related to their multilayered worlds of meaning. If, however, these ambiguities can be brought to light through comparative readings of personal narratives and through the careful juxtaposition of diverse sources within a historical and cultural context—one that also incorporates residues that can be associated with tradition—then the examination of individual experiences and their place within history becomes unavoidable (Loriga, 2024: 96–97). At the same time, such indeterminacies reveal both how history evolves and how multiple interactions emerge—in other words, how complex historical processes truly are. In this sense, biography makes it possible to discern historical patterns through personal histories.

As De Haan (2024: 119) notes, the central task of biography is "to dismantle political, cultural, and social myths on the basis of historical interpretations." In doing so, the aim is to come as close as possible to the subject's reality by bringing into view—without smoothing over—their inner conflicts and inconsistencies. The aspiration is not to manufacture a spurious coherence but to produce a portrait that is deep, pluralistic, attentive to detail, and thus as close to reality as possible. For history to be reconstructed more accurately, there is a need for a greater number of such qualified studies. In this respect, life writing—focused as it is on people's emotions, thoughts, and modes of expression—possesses a particularly strong hand. It is precisely at this point that life writing's emphasis on narrative strategies becomes decisive.

At the same time, the importance accorded to narrative and fiction has led to life writing being regarded as a literary genre. Whereas, in biography, concrete facts identified in sources generally determine form, in life writing the reality of the text's producer is more prominent (Renders, 2004a: 138). Yet one should not fall into the error of treating biography as a purely objective account and life writing as an entirely subjective life story; for biography, like other narratives, is ultimately a text filtered through its author, reflecting their interpretations and choices. Hayden White (1973: 22), in *Metahistory*, argues that historical narratives are textual constructions structured by a particular plot, which historians compose by drawing on literary narrative techniques. This indicates that the author's perspective—namely their ideology, the details they select, and their mode of narration—directly shapes the structure of the narrative. Biography, therefore, is not merely a compilation of transmitted facts; it is a narrative shaped by the author's selections, interpreted, and indeed constructed. This applies not only to historians but also to biographers who place a historical personality at the center of their work, for the biographer likewise makes narrative choices, selects events, arranges them, interprets them, and casts them into narrative form. Indeed, what often renders a biography distinctive and compelling is not only the information it provides, but also how the author positions themselves within the narrative and the kind of narrative method they confer upon the text.

Hermeneutics' leading representatives, Hans-Georg Gadamer (2006) argues that anyone who seeks to understand the past must, above all, attempt to transport themselves into the world of the biographical subject; yet even then, it remains difficult to disclose the subject's horizon of meaning, since one's prejudices—arising from one's own historicity—stand in the way. At the same time, those very prejudices also constitute the preconditions of historical understanding. If every effort to understand is rooted in particular historical and cultural origins, we cannot claim that a biographer is an impartial observer independent of ideology. The context bequeathed by the past inevitably bears ideological traces. This makes it necessary to reassess the criticism so often directed at life writing for being "ideological." For life writing is precisely an approach that interrogates how life is represented, through which narrative strategies such representation is fashioned, and how the author's own position shapes that representation.

In this sense, the author must also render visible their own perspective, value-world, and ideological orientations. It is evident that the much-criticized condition of being "ideological," when handled consciously and critically, can in fact lend strength to biographical narration. Accordingly, as the biographer endeavors to understand the subject, they must also interrogate their own assumptions and the processes through which those assumptions have been formed. This twofold reflexivity both deepens analysis and ensures that understanding is prioritized before judgment.

Even so, the empathic relationship established with the biographical subject must be managed with care and vigilance. Empathy may serve as an instrument for approaching the subject, but it should not be internalized to the point that the author loses their own stance. Otherwise, we would have to speak not of a "fusion of horizons" but of a collapse of horizons into mere sameness—an outcome that effaces both the polyphony of the narrative and its analytical clarity. For this reason, in order to understand the subject within their historical and social context, the author must not confine themselves to their own conceptual framework; they must also strive to encounter the past's distinctive intellectual and social dynamics. For every historical period possesses its own accumulation, structures of meaning, and practices. To situate an individual life story properly therefore requires oscillating—like a pendulum—between the present and the past, and recognizing the

contexts from which our own questions draw their nourishment.

All of these sensibilities have rendered biography a dynamic genre: one that develops through dialogue with the narratives found in sources, sometimes reconstructing them and sometimes subjecting them to critique, while being shaped by literary and narrational choices. Yet finding ways to represent a subject's life requires not only literary skill but also the activation of imagination. In this respect, Paul Ricœur's emphasis that fictional narrative is richer and more flexible than historical narrative in articulating the experience of time (Ricœur, 1998: 158) is of particular importance. This approach suggests that the fictional techniques deployed in life writing need not conflict with historical research; on the contrary, they can support it. Indeed, many historical figures whose realities remain obscured behind a veil of ideological accretions can be meaningfully interpreted only through texts that shift narrative perspective, deploy fictional elements with mastery, and reconstruct context. In this sense, life writing is not merely a mode of narration; it is also a process of reconstruction and rethinking. At its best, life writing presents readers with an unfamiliar life as a real-time, open-ended experience threaded through uncertainties.

Conclusion

Biography is, by its very nature, an interdisciplinary field. In this respect, it is both exceptionally complex and remarkably rich. If no life is identical to another, each new subject confronts the biographer with entirely new lines of inquiry and demands the use of methods and insights drawn from multiple domains. Just as a dancer must mobilize both technical competence and emotional intuition for each new choreography, so too must the biographer remain equally creative, flexible, and sensitive before each new subject—for every biography finds its path only by groping forward. Put differently, biographical writing is the domain of capable authors whose improvisational capacity is highly developed, whose intuitive sensibilities are refined, and who nonetheless know how to conduct research and how to position themselves in relation to the text.

Yet biography is not a work of art. It therefore has a lifespan. If people frame their questions in accordance with the values of their own time, and if the questions asked of the past shift as time flows, then the stage will, inevitably and always, belong to new biographies.

As we have already suggested, only a well-written biography can disentangle the true story from the sediments of tradition and ideology. Otherwise, biography cannot go beyond following footprints along a narrow path; it will never step off the trail. In that case, those who ought to speak will continue to live within their own silences, and the voice heard while reading the text will not be the voice of truth, but only the voice of its proprietor. And yet every story grows stronger only as new voices are added; it seeks new ears that can generate resonance. In this sense, biography does not merely recount the past; it also possesses the potential to make the present intelligible and to provoke new ways of thinking about the future. Every good biography, therefore, narrates not only a life but also the values, conflicts, and possibilities that life embodies. A narrative may be shaped within the limits of its own era, but it comes into its full meaning only insofar as it finds echoes across different times and different minds. In this sense, the story being told is a shared story: that of the biographical subject—who may inspire and set traps alike, burning with the desire to represent their own life; that of the researcher—who seeks to interpret and convey that life in its most authentic form; and that of the reader—who multiplies the narrative by investing it with new meanings through their own experience.

References

1. Aydın, S. (2005). Otobiyografi nasıl okunur?: Biteviye tarihçiliğin açmazlarına dair [How should autobiography be read? On the impasses of continuous historicism]. In B. Somay (Ed.), *Tarih, otobiyografi ve hakikat: Yüzbaşı Torosyan tartışması ve Türkiye'de tarihyazımı* (pp. 145–200). İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

2. Bourdieu, P. (1995). The space of possibilities. In P. Bourdieu, *The rules of the art: Genesis and structure of the literary field* (S. Emanuel, Trans., pp. 234–239). Stanford University Press.

3. Bourdieu, P. (2004). The biographical illusion. In P. du Gay, J. Evans, & P. Redman (Eds.), *Identity: A reader* (M. Winkin & W. Leeds-Hurwitz, Trans., pp. 297–303). Sage Publications.

4. De Haan, B. (2004). The eclipse of biography in life writing. In H. Renders & B. de Haan (Eds.), *Theoretical discussions of biography: Approaches from history, microhistory, and life writing* (pp. 177–194). Brill.

5. De Haan, B. (2024). Personalised history: On biofiction, source criticism, and the critical value of biography. In H. Renders, B. de Haan, & J. Vos (Eds.), *The biographical turn: Lives in history* (pp. 53–67). Routledge.

6. Du Bois, W. E. B. (1968). *The autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A soliloquy on viewing my life*

from the last decade of its first century. International Publishers.

7. Dursun, M. (2024). *Türkçü bir ideologun entelektüel biyografisi* [The intellectual biography of a Turkist ideologue]. Beyoğlu Kitabevi.

8. Eakin, P. J. (1999). *How our lives become stories: Making selves* (pp. 142–186). Cornell University Press.

9. Gadamer, H.-G. (2006). *Truth and method* (J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). Continuum.

10. Ginzburg, C. (1980). *Il formaggio e i vermi: Il cosmo di un mugnaio del '500* [The cheese and the worms: The cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller] (J. & A. Tedeschi, Trans.). Johns Hopkins University Press. (Original work published 1976)

11. Gusdorf, G. (1980). Conditions and limits of autobiography. In J. Olney (Ed.), *Autobiography: Essays theoretical and critical* (pp. 28–48). Princeton University Press.

12. Klein, C. (2024). Biography as a concept of thought: On the premises of biographical research and narrative. In H. Renders, B. de Haan, & J. Vos (Eds.), *The biographical turn: Lives in history* (pp. 79–88). Routledge.

13. Loriga, S. (2016). The plurality of the past: Historical time and the rediscovery of biography. In H. Renders, B. de Haan, & J. Vos (Eds.), *The biographical turn: Lives in history* (pp. 31–41). Routledge.

14. Öner, S. (2018). Neden hatırlıyoruz? Neden unutuyoruz? Otobiyografik belleğe işlevsel bir bakış [Why do we remember? Why do we forget? A functional perspective on autobiographical memory]. In S. Gülgöz et al. (Eds.), *Hayatı hatırlamak: Otobiyografik belleğe bilimsel yaklaşımlar*. Koç Üniversitesi Yayınları.

15. Pala, İ. (1989). *Namık Kemal'in tarihi biyografileri* [The historical biographies of Namık Kemal]. Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları.

16. Renders, H. (2004a). The limits of representativeness: Biography, life writing, and microhistory. In H. Renders & B. de Haan (Eds.), *Theoretical discussions of biography: Approaches from history, microhistory, and life writing* (pp. 129–138). Brill.

17. Renders, H. (2004b). Biography in academia and the critical frontier in life writing: Where biography shifts into life writing. In H. Renders & B. de Haan (Eds.), *Theoretical discussions of biography: Approaches from history, microhistory, and life writing* (pp. 169–176). Brill.

18. Ricœur, P. (1995). Narrative identity. *Philosophy Today, 35*(1), 73–81.

19. Ricœur, P. (1998). *Time and narrative* (K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.

20. Smith, S., & Watson, J. (2010). *Reading autobiography: A guide for interpreting life narratives*. University of Minnesota Press.