Life Mapping as Cultural Legacy

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Edited by

I-Chun Wang and Mary Theis

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: LIFE MAPPING AS CULTURAL LEGACIES

I-CHUN WANG AND MARY THEIS

The Humanities quintessentially are those disciplines that affirm human dignity and values, advance our thinking, and record and sustain the study of our cultures' legacies. These legacies enrich our lives by situating our memories in socio-cultural significance and by affording connections to meaningful records of the past. Responses to these connections are preserved in part by life writing, a form of discourse that serves "to represent a life, to portray the self, and to decode an aesthetic of consciousness that involves personal or human values, addressing issues of memories, affect, and cultural aspects of identity formation."[1] This volume is a study on life writing with a focus on life mapping as cultural legacies. This collection about narratives explores a variety of individual aspirations and multifaceted experiences responding in diverse ways to the psychological and cultural needs for self-affirmation and connection. Contributed by scholars from various universities the texts unveil the status of the self at past socio-historical moments. Some of these narratives recount social conflicts, some speak of experiences of alienation and repressed emotions; others try to decode historically significant geographical identity while still others strive to reconstruct a failed past. By disclosing the literary paths in the lives of diverse narrative subjects from around the world, these "texts" cover a range of experiences and observations in testimonies, diaries, letters, and journals that cross borders and call into question how individuals are equipped to challenge their human limits. In a sense, by delving into their experiences and memories, this book tries to explore the relationships of these subjects to the outside world, more specifically, the sources of their

[1] I-Chun Wang and Jonathan Locke Hart, "Introduction to Voices of Life, Illness and Disabilities in Life Writing and Medical Narratives," *CLCWEB* 20, no. 5 (2018): 2. https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3481. Accessed December 20, 2019.

pain and suffering as well as their joys and discoveries. Examining these texts, we find out how the narrators have negotiated daily experiences, contextualized their life paths, and have communicated important information and aesthetic beauty needed to prolong troubled lives due to social anxiety or mental illness. We also discover how while reaching inside themselves they have enlarged their spheres of concern to encompass the environment, racial discrimination and persecution in order to live in turbulent times.

A non-fictional genre of writing, life writing engages various kinds of evidence and self-reflection. According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, this genre encompasses a range of non-fiction about personal or collective memories, traumatic experiences and mental illnesses, observations and adaptations as well as hybrid identities. The self-representation central to this genre is supplemented by the subject's private geography, personal insight, and "the possibilities of wisdom gained." [2] While most life narratives convey individual recollections of daily life experiences or trajectories of life with the description of personal passions, dreams and quests, these narratives situated in social systems also encompass the subject's weaknesses or—in terms of social structure and cultural significance—the subject's strengths in mapping their paths through life and or migration. Life writing that configures objects, spaces, the expressible or blurred memories is also a part of life mapping. No matter what this subject's movement is—a journey, a pilgrimage, an exile or an exploration—when the subject crosses boundaries, their mental landscape illuminates the physical challenges with critiques or contemplation that serve as a map or guidance paving the way for collective memories.

Writers of life experiences tend to incorporate personal insights into narratives concerning collective identities. For instance, John Leo Africanus (c. 1485–c. 1554) was a scholar, ambassador and traveller until he was kidnapped and sold into slavery and served Pope Leo X (1475–1521). Born in Granada, he was educated in Fez and while traveling in Africa witnessed ruined cities and deserted villages. His life accounts, as translated by John Pory, uncover the intercultural relationships between Europe, Africa and the Middle East, along with geopolitical factors on the borders and disasters affecting Africans. [3] Another account concerns an exploratory mission

[2] Sidonie Ann Smith and Julia Abbe Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 18.
[3] This important account of Africa covers descriptions of cultures, religions, various kingdoms and his cultural experiences as well. Robert Brown, "Introduction," in *The History and Descriptions of Africa and Of the Notable Things Contained, Written by Al-Hassan ibn-Muhammed al-Wezaz Al-Fasi*, *A Moor, Baptized as Giovanni Leone, But Better Known As Leo Africanus.* Translated by John Pory (New York:

designed by Walter Raleigh to Roanoke Island, the "lost colony" in the age of expansion, this one provided by John White (c. 1540–c. 1593), a British artist, explorer, and cartographer. Consider also other cross-cultural encounters from maritime history in *From Far Formosa,* the autobiographical missionary writing of George Leslie Mackay (1844–1901), an educator and a medical practitioner who assimilated himself into Taiwanese culture. Between the place of departure and destination, metaphoric border crossings are always accompanied by modification of positionality and the wisdom learned in liminal states of being.

These are a particular feature of life mapping, a discourse that redefines the emotional, cultural and psychic landscape. W. G. Sebald in his *Rings of Saturn* employs a nameless narrator to record his observations on his walking journeys on the coast of Suffolk. This casual journey and fractured life path turn out to be his meditation on the problems of Western civilization. In Mark O'Connell's words, it is Sebald's "moral magnitude" that transcends the literary meanings.[4] Christabel Mary Bielenberg (1909–2003), an Irish woman who married a German lawyer, reveals that her husband, Peter Bielenberg, participated in anti-Nazi activities during World War II.[5] In these and other texts the integrity of the narrators becomes more salient as they modify their cognitive and affective responses to their connections with the outside world.

LIFE WRITING, MAPPING AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

Life writing involves geographical reality, representation of emotional landscapes and sense of self, which include fear, anger, sadness or empathetic states. Gerri Reaves in her spatial discourse as found in life narratives compares human life to a journey. Reaves notes that whereas we as people "conceive of a psychic geography before we place ourselves spatially," she affirms "the practice of self-representation requires one to define the emotional, cultural and psychic landscape in which one conceives

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Burt Franklin, 1896), ii-iii.

[4] Mark O'Connell, "Why You Should Read W. G. Sebald," *The New Yorker*, December 14, 2011, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/why-you-should-read-w-g-sebald.

[5] Christabel Mary Bielenberg, *The Past is Myself and the Road Ahead* (London: Corgi Books, 1993), 85-90, 248-52. See also Francis R. Nicosia, and Lawrence D. Stokes, *Germans against Nazism: Nonconformity, Opposition, and Resistance in the Third Reich: Essays in Honor of Peter Hoffmann* (New York: Berghahn Books), 5-6.

that self to exist."[6] In this sense, when individuals meander through physical spaces and mental landscapes, they not only encounter, but also challenge or become subjugated to cultural codes exemplified by socio-political relationships and systems.

Concerns about space and human geography began with Richard Hartshorne (1899–1992) and Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991). Hartshorne looked into territorial integrity and the spatial issues related to domination and resistance; Lefebvre tackled everyday existence in terms of spatial practice and cartography, although he observed that in real everyday life, "there are many mediations between need and desire,"[7] since society, culture, the past and history, the hierarchy of values, norms and preferences are elements that contribute to one's "immense journey, fraught with obstacles and pitfalls."[8] Although life mapping involves the sociological workings of interpersonal relationships, cognitive conceptions of space help shape the identities of the subjects. According to James R. Barkley, "the lived experience of place" together with our memories is shared through "processes of telling and/or retelling,"[9] which is the basis for the formation of cultural memories.

A proliferating genre, life writing is cross-disciplinary. In quite a few texts, this genre appears closely connected to geography and mapmaking. As Stephen Daniels and Catherine Nash claim, life histories are also life geographies, since most individuals either strive to manage or are forced to situate themselves in hardship. They note that biographies represent movement and settlement, quest or pursuit, and signify beyond just their "topographic maps"; hence "the arts of geography and biography appear closely connected; life histories are also, to coin a phrase, life geographies."[10]

This book, as a collection of articles stimulating human values along life paths, approaches texts in the genre of life writing that unveil the literary and social connections that inspire their subjects and perhaps some readers to have fuller, more productive lives, and provide much needed information about the world we live in as a species among species. This book, therefore,

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[6] Gerri Reaves, *Mapping the Private Geography: Autobiography, Identity and America* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2001), 1-2.

[7] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday*, Volume 2, Translated by John Moore (London: Verso, 2002), 8.

[8] Lefebvre, 98-9.

[9] James R. Barkley, "Making Sense of Place According to Lived Experience," http://parklab.uiuc.edu/abstracts/Barkley.pdf, accessed November 10, 2019.

[10] Stephen Daniels and Catherine Nash indicate the arts of geography and biography are connected. See "Lifepaths: Geography and Biography," *Journal of Historical Geography* 30, no. 3 (2004): 449-550.

not only plays on the common activity of "texting," but it also communicates information and the aesthetic beauty needed to prolong troubled lives due to social anxiety, mental illness, seclusion, and concern about the environment, human rights, and other vital issues.

As an inclusive term, life writing encompasses themes that involve the shaping of lives of people in a variety of environments and calls into question the meaning of self-mapping in different periods of personal or collective history. This collection has four sections: life-sustaining mental paths to aesthetic beauty, life philosophies affirming connections to nonhuman beings, roads to freedom and human rights, and negotiations of identity and post-war memories. With each chapter complementing others in the same section and broadening the context for other sections, this book discusses texts that address real problems encountered by human beings who are dealing with significant mental, social, political and other multidimensional issues. In sum, these articles are interrelated in ways that ensure its overall coherence and integrity.

John Aubrey, the father of English biography, reminds us that biography carries significance in accounts of matters besides personal details. Virginia Woolf tends to be conscious of emotions and of the self-reflexive quality of biography that looks at texts reconfiguring writers in regard to their past. In life writing, however, writers take into account the things to remember or to let fade away and things to live for as these accounts constitute reveries and memories of the past. Sidonie Smith regards the subject as a "site of dialogue with the outside world, others, memory, experience and the unconscious."[11] In this sense, a subject becomes someone whose cognitive capacity strives to engage more fully in that sorting process throughout the journey of life.

Representing the essential core of life writing, this collection of life mapping portrays the personal and collective experiences of subjects in the interplay of the present and past in socio-cultural contexts. Through documents, accounts and autobiographical writings, life mapping functions, therefore, not merely as recordings of personal experiences that have provided meaning, healing and solace for their subjects, it can serve to inspire future generations to recall these landmarks as they face the challenges of their own social historical moments and keep the Humanities alive and well.

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[11] Sidonie Smith refers a free self to an agent capable of self-presentation. See "Self, Subject, and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 15.

SECTION ONE: PATHS TO THE ART OF WRITING

In her illuminating chapter, "Revolving Door, a Bipolar Passage to Aesthetic Beauty," Mary Theis discusses a special subgenre of acesography—narratives of struggle for well-being—in the life writing of a bipolar author, Marcos McPeek Villatoro, who journeys into the tension between episodes of profound paranoia and periods of aesthetic joy. On the way, Villatoro attempts both to erase the stigma of mental illness and to confront the diseases of contemporary American society, such as xenophobic reactions to immigration (*Home Killings*), homophobia, homelessness, and right-wing religious groups (*A Venom Beneath the Skin*), and the sex trade (*Blood Daughters*) among others. Unlike acesography per se, healing is not the expected destination of this form of writing; life is. Healing is just an illusion, for the affliction and the trauma have taken up psychic residence. Those who heroically endure this condition meet it between the partitions of a revolving door that occasionally gets stuck. Their compulsion to respond by pushing their revolving door forward converts that darker energy into organically aesthetic oeuvre that create order from chaos and are intense affirmations of life.

Francis K. H. So's chapter, entitled "A Life Spent in Solitary Writing," discusses the life story of William Chester Minor, a former American military surgeon in the nineteenth century. Because of his mental instability and his accidental killing of a man, Minor was put into Broadmoor criminal Lunatic Asylum; nevertheless, in addition to his correspondence materials, Minor left behind enormous contributions to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. So traces Minor's life experience, incorporating geographical and cultural perspectives along with Simon Winchester's psychiatric diagnosis and treatment of Minor.

According to So, Minor was arrested for manslaughter in London. By pleading insanity at the time of the crime, he was sentenced to be confined indefinitely in a lunatic asylum. By 1881, that is, several years later, he had an opportunity to volunteer his services in drafting entries for the *New English Dictionary*, later known as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. For some thirty isolated years he did the work wonderfully well, so much so that the editor of the dictionary wanted to meet with him to show his appreciation. Minor was in fact diagnosed to have monomania with occasional bursts of depression. However, the assigned literary task of reading, selecting, quoting and compiling lexicographical entries as well as writing letters to the dictionary staff gave him delightful breaks. These efforts seem to have been effective therapy. Over the years of his imprisonment this special kind of writing experience—not as his autobiography or memoir but as some

form of literary practice connecting his traumatic past with a hopeful future—enabled him to reach out, to assert himself in the exterior world, and to not be neglected by society. Through those years of devoted writing, he reassumed some measure of his subjectivity and his own worth. As So stresses, Minor's lexicographical contributions, distinguish his work from that of other kinds of prison life writing and gave him the privilege of placing his name in history.

SECTION TWO: APPROACHES TO NATURE AND NONHUMAN BEINGS

Li-Ru Lu explores the life of Cuthbert Collingwood through his writings on marine animals around the Shores and Waters of the China Sea. According to Lu, before the mid-nineteenth century, Formosa (now Taiwan) was largely unknown and uncharted territory for European and American travelers. To explore this terra incognita, plenty of Western visitors—including specialists in natural history, diplomats, and legitimate traders—visited Formosa after the opening in 1860 of Ta-kau Port and Keelung Port for trade. These travelers made observations and documented the unknown landscapes and species in Formosa and its neighboring islands. Mostly written in the form of travel journals and natural histories, the works of these Western visitors are pioneering multispecies ethnographies that delineate nineteenth-century Formosa's flora, birds, land animals and marine animals. Lu's chapter focuses on the life accounts including records of natural history of an English traveler in this period—Cuthbert Collingwood (1826–1908). It explores the ways Collingwood's *Rambles of a Naturalist* represents Formosan marine animals and their habitats. It addresses the following questions: How did Collingwood report his scientific observations on the lives of Formosa's nonhuman inhabitants and how did he introduce his readers to an understanding of the marine animals in mid-nineteenth-century Formosa? Did Collingwood evince his appreciation for nature or express an environmentalist tone? How might Collingwood's delineation of Formosa's marine animals reveal an environmental consciousness and proto-ecological sensibilities?

In Chapter Five, Shu-hua Chung, probes into Emily Dickinson's private life and discusses human-dog Affinity. As a writer living a secluded life, Emily Elizabeth Dickinson (1830–1886) often tackles the meanings of time and space. Her poetic landscape, as Bobby Seal notes, is constructed on her landscape of the mind, since "she travelled without any limits, visiting Etna

and Vesuvius and feeling the hot breath of Sangay upon her cheek."[12]

As Chung indicates, Dickinson has a talent for writing both poems and letters. While her poems are like riddles, paradoxically concealing and revealing her mysterious life, her letters help the reader locate the writer in a specific sociocultural milieu and are very revealing in terms of both her enclosed life in Amherst, Massachusetts and the nature of her mysterious poetry. Dickinson took a fancy to dramatic self-presentation and mystery in her letters to Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823–1911). In her life writing, she emphasizes her solitary nature, mentioning her harmonious relationship with natural scenes and natural creatures. Living in reclusive isolation, Dickinson had an affinity with her dog Carlo, a gift from her father. For Dickinson, Carlo was not merely a companion but a source of inspiration for her poetry for 16 years (1850–1866). With Carlo, she could integrate whatever occurred in life into her works. For Dickinson, probably because of illness, suffering is the most universal feeling inevitably related to life, separation and death in her poems. In many poems written in 1863 and 1864, she wrote about the natural beauties of the Amherst terrain. During the years with Carlo as a supportive friend, Emily explored the woods and hills near her home where Carlo served as a stimulus for her writing. Carlo's death in 1866 was an agony for the poet. From then on, she almost stopped creating and viewed the rest of her life as a homeward journey. In terms of life writing and affect theory, Chung's chapter discusses the affinity between Dickinson and her dog. This perspective highlights the affective resonance in Dickinson's creative literary approach to herself, to the natural world and to the outside world in general.

SECTION THREE: PATHS TO FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Chapter Six by Michaela Keck is entitled "Prophesy and Racial Trauma in the Black Freedom Struggle: Anne Moody's *Coming of Age in Mississippi*." Anne Moody's life writing (1968) is among the few autobiographical legacies of African-American women written and published during the 1960s. Her writing vacillates between insights into black women's civil rights activism and bearing witness to the traumatic life experiences during

[12] Bobby Seal, "Emily Dickinson's Geography," (n. pag.) *Psychogeographic Review*, November 9, 2013, http://psychogeographicreview.com/emily-dickinsons-geography/. Patrick O'Donnell also notes Dickinson's use of locations and topographical images in her poetry. See "Zones of the Soul: Emily Dickinson's Geographical Imagery," *CLA Journal* 21, no. 1 (1977): 62.

the long struggle of blacks for freedom in the United States. According to Margo V. Perkins (2000), black autobiographies extend their political practice into writing as they aim to expose systemic oppression, counter dominant national and historical narratives, and revise the denigrating images of African-Americans circulated by the popular press. Furthermore, black women's autobiographies link the experience of slavery with the physical and psychological trauma experienced in the Jim-Crow South. The aspect of the trauma suffered by black women activists during the civil rights movement has come into focus in the late 2000s and engendered deeper explorations of the strained relations between public and private, exterior and interior aspects of the life experiences and activism of African American women in the long black struggle for freedom.[13]

This chapter examines how Moody represents herself as a black female civil rights activist in relationship to the movement's black leadership and larger black civil rights struggles in the United States while also bearing witness to the trauma involved in black protests. While Moody exposes the systemic oppression of blacks alongside a harsh critique of black male leadership, her autobiography reflects the characteristic dilemma of trauma narratives to lose the precision and force of the traumatic experience when translating it into a comprehensible narrative. This dilemma is reflected in her preoccupation with bodily self-possession and disintegration. Moody's representation of "the corporeal" and the affects, as well as strategies for healing are a particular concern. This chapter thus seeks to contribute to the still underexplored traumatic experiences of black women veterans of civil-rights activism.

Both Chapter Six and Chapter Seven are concerned with the topic of fighting for freedom. I-Chun Wang discusses four significant life narratives in her chapter entitled "Personal Geography, Collective Resistance and the Underground Railroad for Freedom." As Wang indicates, among the literary works about slavery, slave narratives as well as the life writing of abolitionists are subgenres that formulate the discourse of freedom in nineteenth-century America. Frederick Douglass (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*), Harriet Jacobs (*A True Tale of Slavery and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*), Solomon Northup (*Twelve Years a Slave*), and William and Ellen Craft (*Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*) were the

[13] Allison Berg, "Trauma and Testimony in Black Women's Civil Rights Memoirs: The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It, Warriors Don't Cry, and From the Mississippi Delta," *Journal of Women's History* 21, no. 3 (2009): 84-107. Laura Dubek calls responses of civil rights movements "living legacies" in human history. See "Introduction," in *Living Legacies: Literary Responses to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Francis & Taylor, 2018), 2.

most representative escaped slaves whose passages for freedom from the fierce system of enslavement were won with the symbolic North Star, the efforts of persistent abolitionists and the Underground Railroad. A reference to the Great Dipper, the North Star was a beacon for direction, while abolitionists who may or may not be a part of the Underground Railroad helped escaped slaves on their pathways to freedom. The Discourse of freedom in quite a few slave narratives and life writings reveals not merely the power structure of the society, subjugated identity, pain and suffering but also those courageous individuals or abolitionists who had helped them in their displacement and eventual mapping of their personal geographies. This chapter discusses individual rescuers and the collective aspiration for freedom exemplified in the Underground Railroad, a network of African American and white people, who provided shelter and supplies for those who escaped through secret routes to Northern states. In addition to Northup's memoir (1853), *Twelve Years a Slave*, a narrative by Francis Fedric, and the autobiography of the abolitionist Harriet Tubman, it includes a court report by Anthony Burns.

SECTION FOUR: ETHNIC IDENTITY AND POSTWAR MEMORIES

Heui-Yung Park's chapter discusses the fascinating life story of No-Yong Park who fabricates a part of his autobiography. For example, he narrates that he was born in Manchuria and that his family fled from Korea upon the Japanese invasion, but he was actually born in Namhaedo, South Korea. He recounts the story of his schooling, his identity as a foreigner in the US, and his experience of being hunted by the Japanese for political reasons, but these elements actually find their source in a difficult period of Korean history.

In his influential essay, "The Autobiographical Pact," Philippe Lejeune notes a few important characteristics of autobiography, one of which includes that "the autobiographical genre is a contractual genre" between the author and the reader. For they both enter into an implicit "contract which determines the modes of reading of the text and engenders the effects which, attributed to the text, seem to us to define it autobiography."[14] Accordingly, this contract requires the author's truthful representation to the reader, although these truths may not be always agreed upon by those involved. However, the first-generation Korean-American author No-Yong

[14] Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 29.

Park's autobiographical work, *Chinaman's Chance: An Autobiography* (1940) breaks the autobiographical pact by untruthfully representing himself as a Chinese when he was, in fact, born to Korean parents in Korea and raised there until his early twenties.

Rather than dismissing *Chinaman's Chance* as simply a fake autobiography due to its lack of veracity—a very crucial element in life writing—this chapter on his ethnic identity explains how and why he passed for Chinese and explores the political, anti-Japanese implications of these actions. By doing so, it points out the hybrid form of life writing. Incorporating fictional elements to some extent, *Chinaman's Chance* addresses how life writing has served as a conduit for an under-privileged and colonial subject such as Park to speak for his subjugated country and people. Heui-Yung Park's chapter first identifies erroneous information circulating about his subject's biographical background, presents some other materials that help us better understand the context in which he forged his Chinese identity, and then examines how he represented himself as Chinese in his published works. At first glance, No-Yong Park's identification as Chinese—an act rarely successful or even attempted by Korean nationals in the United States or elsewhere—may seem to be opportunistic, or even a betrayal of his fellow Koreans during its colonial period. However, Park's self-identification as Chinese, Heui-Yung Park argues, was part of a political action that saw defying subjection to Japan as more important than retaining his Korean identity. Examining how he represented Korea and its people in some of his works—including *Making a New China* (1929), *An Oriental View of American Civilization* (1934), and *Chinaman's Chance: Autobiography* (1940)—reveals his loyalty to them. By doing so, this chapter sheds light on Park's resistance to Japan's colonial discourse and power in Korea, revealing that his partial, fictional autobiography and identifying as Chinese for Western readers were part of his anti-Japanese activity, rather than his refusal to belong to the Korean community, or to acknowledge being Korean.

Among contemporary women writers, Han Suyin (1917–2012), a Chinese-British writer, is known for her autobiographical fiction based on experiences in countries in Asia. In her best-selling novels, *A Many-Splendoured Thing* (1952) and *The Crippled Tree* (1965), Han reconstructs the life and socio-political situations of her parents and reveals her experiences of negotiating cultural identities through the diasporic and spatial existence of her characters.[15] Chapter Nine by Tee Kim Tong

[15] Helen Grice explores quite a few women writers and their perspectives about roles of culture, the meanings of space, home and body as well, See Helen Grice,

interprets Han Suyin's *And the Rain My Drink* as a text of life writing in which Han and her characters live dangerously in a space that is an allusion to Dante's *Inferno*. Han's narrative, which concerns how Malayans lived in the state of Emergency during the Post-War years, examines how the protagonists in the text manage to maintain a relational link with place and history through (re)memory. Han is both the author and the narratee; hence by telling other people's life stories, she is at the same time expressing her own position and opinion about the coming period of postcolonial Malaya and the situation of the ethnic communities there.

As the chapters of this collection illustrate, scholars and writers are drawn to the genre of life mapping as a form of life writing, for life writing explores the strength and the failings of an individual or a collective aspiration,[16] yet it also illuminates aspects of the wider world, signifying shared concerns and the cultural heritage of periods in human history. Being inscribed in time, space and cultural memories, the self-reflection of life mapping must reflect the constraints and disruptions thrust upon the narrating subjects by the outside world, shaping not only their personal memories but also cultural legacies in human histories.

Toward the realization of the *raison d'etre* of this collection, scholars from around the world analyze here a variety of key encounters that have shaped bicultural identities, formed in part philosophies of life, sustained connections of writers with nonhumans and their environment, and illustrated epic moments of decision-making in the course of their subjects' lives. Containing each subject writer's space of self-exploration, the narratives not only reveal in their chosen paths the spatial projection of physical and psychological self-mapping but also cultural legacies in their own right.

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Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 30, 199-212. See also Han Suyin's *A Many-Splendoured Thing* (New York: Harper Collins, 1972) and *The Crippled Tree* (London: Vintage, 1965).

[16] Barbara Caine. *Biography and History* (London: Springer Nature, 2019), 1, 57, 111.

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SECTION ONE:

PATHS TO THE ART OF WRITING

CHAPTER TWO

REVOLVING DOOR, A BIPOLAR PASSAGE TO AESTHETIC BEAUTY

MARY THEIS

The human condition—an expression that covers a plethora of confrontations with inevitable ultimate loss—is a letter often marked as deserving immediate attention when delivered to gifted creators of the fine arts. Its message in this chapter is specifically directed to those with a passionate love of words while coping with a life-threatening severe mental issue that can make writing to live a medical necessity. Working out—with and without a keyboard—could be the best therapy for literary artists dealing with bipolar disorder. Their lives are at risk for being tragically shortened by a decade or more due to manic depression.[1] Given that there are no permanent cures freeing them from treatment and the meticulous recalibration of their medicine, complete healing is an illusion; but as Kay Redfield Jamison nevertheless states in *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (1993): "most people who have the illness, in fact, never become insane."[2]

Aceso, the Greek goddess of healing, however, has at least left them the tools of their profession to face the enemy within, so they can challenge the loss of control in mood swings by rituals of journaling and mastering coherence in their creations. Writing motivates the desire to keep pushing through toward the elusive goal of capturing the organic wholeness of literary beauty. In periods of relative calm, these hyper self-aware writers are cognizant that they may be steps away in their revolving door from the next episode of their illness: the part and the whole are locked in tension between periods of profound paranoia and aesthetic joy, birthing the oeuvre

[1] L.V. Kessing et al., "Life expectancy in bipolar disorder." NCBI Resources. PubMed.gov/US National Library of Medicine National Institute of Health, accessed January 11, 2019. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25846854.

[2] Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 6.

that generations of readers come to cherish. The cycles themselves may inspire: connections in their aesthetic continuum discovered in manic highs can be developed in their seasons of lows and polished when they feel relatively well. The more fortunate among them may have families who serve as the first readers of their works and providers of the guardrails, but it is their own choice to persist despite and because of the extremes of alternating moods. There are, of course, other authors who do not endure the ravages of this condition and do battle with the negative forces of exclusion and exploitation, but in acesography, a special form of hybridography here melding bipolar author and subject, Marcos M. Villatoro (1962–), a Salvadoran American poet, novelist and producer/director, not only exposes the wounds of several of the diseases of contemporary American life but also those caused by his own demons as he attempts to erase the stigma attached to mental illness.[3]

Toward that very goal, Thomas S. Szasz (1920–2012) wrote *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct* (1974) "to reintroduce freedom, choice and responsibility into the conceptual framework and vocabulary of psychiatry"[4] and ultimately to restore respect for the humanity of psychiatric patients. In his view, "psychiatric diagnoses" from the beginning of the profession resulted in "stigmatized labels" whereas medical diagnoses for physical ailments were only assigned names of "genuine diseases."[5] Degraded as being helpless to cope with their "personal problems," psychiatric patients received treatment that disguised the sources of these mental conditions and deflected attention from their causes in contemporary moral and political contexts.[6]

Although so much has improved among professionals in this field of medicine, one need not search too far for examples in the last century of the loss of freedom experienced by homosexuals and gifted yet so-called mentally ill people. Incarcerated in a psychiatric institution, the Master in Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita* (1968) had lots of involuntary predecessors and successors, who questioned the rules of the

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[3] https://thewritingbull.com/2018/06/ix/to-my-fellow-bipolar-bloggers/, accessed June 14, 2018.

[4] Thomas S. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 6.

[5] Szasz, xii.

[6] Szasz, 7. For the controversy between Szasz and his colleagues about "medicalizing morality" and "pathologizing normal human experiences," see Bruce Poulsen's June 17, 2012 article in *Psychology Today*, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/reality-play/201209/revisiting-the-myth-mental-illness-and-thomas-szasz.

rigged game still playing out in Russia today and, according to Franklin Foer, splashing its brand of poison over its borders:[7] Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922) and Boris Pasternak (1890–1960) spent time in psychiatric hospitals. Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938), Maksim Gorky (1868–1936), Nikolai Gumiliev (1886–1921) and probably other Russian writers attempted suicide. The poet and playwright, Vladimir Maiakovskii (1893–1930) committed suicide. The poet, Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941), may have committed suicide to avoid having to inform on and betray still other writers to what today has been dubbed Russia's *sistema* of hope-extinguishing kleptocracy. The nineteenth century in Russia could add to this list still more names among its own most stellar cannon of writers, who, according to Jamison, probably suffered from cyclothymia, major depression, or manic depression: Aleksandr Pushkin (1799–1837), Mikhail Lermontov (1814–1841), Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852), Ivan Turgenev (1818 –1883), and Lev Tolstoy (1828–1910), to name a few.[8] The "case" of this last author affords particularly fine points of comparison below.

Anger issues, righteous and otherwise, appear throughout the detective novels of Villatoro, whose bicultural double vision accurately reveals the societal fault lines in the United States today. There is also a double reason for that prevalence. In addition to "feelings of hopelessness, sadness, and a lack of motivation or concentration," some in the medical community find that "irritability aligns with depression" according to Nell Greenfieldboyce's recent report, "If You're Often Angry or Irritable You May Be Depressed," which aired on National Public Radio.[9] Although the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* does not include anger in adults as a core symptom for major depression, he reports that it does so among those symptoms for anger in children according to Maurizio Fava, a psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital and a professor at Harvard Medical School. As Daniel Rancour-Laferriere will also show in Tolstoy's case, moreover, psychopathology in adults resonates with the one found in them when they were children. Jamison concurs, also stating that manic patients "are depressed and irritable as often as they are euphoric; the highs

[7] Franklin Foer, "The Russian-Style Kleptocracy is Infiltrating America," *The Atlantic,* Mar. 2019.

[8] This list of artists suffering from these conditions does not aspire to being comprehensive: it does not include the names of artists and musicians, Russian or otherwise; nor does it begin to name writers from France, England and other countries that belong on it—not to mention the names of visionaries in other fields. For more on this subject, see Redfield Jamison's *Touched with Fire*, 267-70.

[9] Nell Greenfieldboyce, "If You're Often Angry or Irritable, You May Be Depressed," National Public Radio, Feb. 4, 2019.

associated with mania" being "generally only pleasant and productive during the earlier, milder stages."[10]

Greenfieldboyce says that Fava believes anger should appear among those symptoms for depression, having found that one in three depressed people get angry, yell, scream and slam the door, but subsequently are filled with remorse. This reduced control over one's temper expressed in angry outbursts, in Fava's professional opinion, is "an emotional and physical feeling that makes people want to warn, intimidate, or attack a person who is perceived as threatening." Fava adds that "a depressed adult with lots of anger is often assumed to have bipolar disorder or a personality disorder," but formerly, during his medical training, he was taught that "in depression, anger is projected inward: depressed people are angry at themselves but not at others." Nevertheless, like other professionals today, he thinks "anger attacks" may be a phenomenon similar to panic attacks," and notes that "this kind of anger subsided in the majority of patients treated with antidepressants."[11]

Greenfieldboyce also states in the same report that a registered nurse, Ebony Monroe "came to realize that traumatic events from her childhood had left her depressed and full of unresolved anger...With nowhere for that anger to go, she was lashing out at loved ones."[12] She now works with Families for Depression Awareness, which lists symptoms of depression families should watch for in their children: picking fights, being irritable, critical or mean according to Greenfieldboyce. She made a choice to transform her anger into making this a healthier, less violent world.

That same life-affirming direction has been chosen by Villatoro, whose series of crime fiction leaves exposed the depths of human depravity in the angry wake of Romilia Chacón, a Latina detective and single mother, who in *Home Killings* (2001) is out to revenge the gruesome murder of her sister. Channeling the author's own anger due to trauma experienced in his early childhood, hers is righteous, but her anger could malfunction and break down the "tracking devices" in her brain, "ones that usually kept" her "in touch with clues and danger signals," such as inadvertently revealing the nickname of a source.[13] Nevertheless, she is convinced of the rectitude of her actions in risk-taking situations, such as disobeying orders and regulations, yet on occasion restrains herself without knowing why, such as her not killing the killer of one of her partners. Some of the corners of her

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[10] Jamison, 47-48.
[11] Greenfieldboyce, (n. pag.)
[12] Greenfieldboyce, (n. pag.)
[13] Marcos McPeek Villatoro, *Home Killings. A Romilia Chacón Mystery* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2001), 99.

thinking are left murky and thus more realistic. The "loose" barrel of her Glock is mostly tethered, however, to its holster by her love for her son, Sergio, and for her mother, who was forced to emigrate from El Salvador ravaged by war and Death Squads. Doña Eva Chacón watches over Sergio, her only grandchild, while Romilia is on the job. Sergio—the reader learns in the fourth novel of the series—has no memory of his father, "the sane" spouse who died from cancer when he was one.[14]

An evolving complex bicultural protagonist, Romilia has much more in common with Villatoro than a certain underlying irritability, that "silent contender hidden in the folds of" her "brain always waiting for the right moment to flick out. Sometimes it was appropriate, though not the easiest beast to ride."[15] Like him, she is ambitious and usually very disciplined about her work-out regimen, which augments her natural good looks that she also uses to solve cases: "The daily exercise was more than ritual; it was a vice. I knew this. But it was a better vice than booze or drugs. It was an addiction that kept me sane, that kept the natural stress—or as my mother said, *los demonios*—at bay."[16] Both the author and protagonist routinely read great literature and naturally are especially fond of prose and poetry in Spanish. Their sensitivity to the nuances and tones in language and Latino culture advance their careers: hers in law enforcement; his as a Salvadoran American author of prose and poetry in a chaired creative writing position at Mount St. Mary's University in Los Angeles. She—despite a few entries about uncontrolled anger in her permanent record—keeps her job because of her gift at profiling perpetrators[17] whose own anger is due to drugs, lust, greed, or a distorted sense of entitlement that in their eyes justify acting above the law—in other words, their choice to dominate the lives of others. It goes without saying that her insights are his as well, effected in his case by a lot of professional research. Both are very devoted to their extended families. Villatoro is most grateful for the strength and devotion of his wife (whom he publicly calls *mi vida*) and of his four children in whose accomplishments he takes great pride. Their nuclear family has also more recently welcomed his elderly mother. Both detective and author need and cherish the anchor of those close to them due to the nature of their health and work.

While solving cases with Romilia and criticizing the social injustice, she encounters, Villatoro, who moved with his wife to California from his

[14] Marcos M. Villatoro, *Blood Daughters. A Romilia Chacón Novel* (Pasadena, California: Red Hen Press, 2011), 50.
[15] McPeek Villatoro, *Home Killings*, 57.
[16] *Home Killings*, 95.
[17] *Blood Daughters*, 206.

wife's home in Iowa, shares with Romilia their additional Salvadoran perspective on certain disruptive life events and direct prolonged experience of violence.[18] Uprooting her family from a familiar Latino neighbourhood in Atlanta to take a new position on the police force in Nashville, Romilia knew the reason she was hired there—the potential growth of its Latino population. She makes a mental note, however, that speaks to her commitment to social justice: as of yet "there were no drunk migrant workers around here taking the blame" for crimes committed by the residents,[19] foreshadowing the blame game from societal frustration aggression on foreign others that her partner would use to try to derail their investigation. The others in this case are the brutal Death Squads (*Kaibiles*), that have haunted her mother's peace of mind even in the US, whose School of the Americas, provided their very special training.[20] Graduates of that school in this novel include one son of the Guatemalan oligarchy, the drug dealer, Rafael Murillo. Tekún Uman, Murillo's indigenous Indian nickname, was once given to a local hero killed valiantly fighting those exploiting his people. Romilia tried to be "the barrier" between her mother's "violent past and his [her son's] quiet childhood,"[21] but she is nearly killed on more than one occasion in her line of work.

Other psychosocial connections could be noted here: two of the victims, Dr. Larry Hatcher and nurse Pamela Kim, get involved in peddling drugs to the doctor's upscale clients in order to finish financing his Free Health

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[18] Villatoro and his wife also "put their skin in the game" trying to protect the innocent by serving as Witnesses for Peace in Nicaragua and again as lay Maryknoll Missionaries in Guatemala. They both faced life-threatening confrontations with the guerillas. The Kaibiles (Special Operations Force of the Guatemalan Army) stopped her vehicle *en route* home: his wife avoided their kidnapping her by telling them that the local bishop did not permit her to give a ride to people carrying guns (personal interview Mar. 9, 2019). Preparing for such encounters daily, he also buried the dead babies of Guatemalan mothers overcome with grief (personal interview Mar.11, 2019). Many years later at a happier time after the conflict between the guerrillas and the government settled down in his mother's native El Salvador, they returned with their children to the homeland she had to flee, in order to make "Tamale Road" (2011) including the family that remained there. In the process, to his surprise he discovered his relationship to the Reyes family, one of the fifteen ruling families of the country. To learn more about their work in Central America, read Villatoro's memoir, *Walking to La Milpa—Living in Guatemala with Armies, Demons, Abrazos, and Death* (Moyer Bell, 1996).

[19] *Home Killings*, 17.

[20] Bonner, Raymond, "Abrams' Defense of a Massacre," *THE WEEK* Mar.1, 2019, 12.

[21] *Home Killings*, 165.

Clinic; Tecún Uman, a powerful drug dealer, used the moat of such respected philanthropic projects to disguise and protect his drug business. Arrested for the murder of Diego Sáenz, a Latino reporter doing a story on the double murder of the doctor and the nurse, Benny, an innocent bipolar homeless person, hanged himself in prison. Villatoro, the author of *On Tuesday When the Homeless Disappeared* (2004), a collection of poems that treats the homeless with real empathy, has compassion for Benny, who in *Home Killings*, is not disciplined enough about taking the correct dosage of his medicine. Instead, without a family to help him, he drinks heavily as if he were "actually trying to drink himself to death."[22]

Villatoro's second of four Chacón novels is *Minos* (2003), the name given to the killer of Catalina, Romilia's sister. That case was the first of his planned serial killings that went unresolved in Atlanta before Romilia moved to Nashville. The omniscient narrator opens with the perspective of Bobby, whose frankly creepy first-person narration about Romilia is the literary equivalent of shots filmed of someone's back seen walking alone down a street at night:

> Her look, casts shadows like a black net. Still, she's young. Darkness over youth; it does not age her, but rather moves her into a world that is familiar to him [and to Villatoro and others, who have been traumatized by abuse in childhood]. Is little Romilia being shaped right now as she leaves the police department? He thinks so. Will she speak with phantoms too someday, will long soliloquies embroider the quieter moments of her days? Of course. For now, she walks through a forest of chaos, as Bobby once did.[23]

Villatoro, who has been diagnosed as bipolar,[24] may have also ventured at times into that darkness. Yet by surrounding himself with family and maintaining strong family ties, he has chosen clarity with an eye focused on social justice issues in writing. The second of these is child abuse and incest. At the time of the suicide of Maggie, Bobby's sexually abused sister, Bobby was a helpless child and traumatized by the incest, which he overheard on the other side of the wall of his closet. (Resonating perhaps unconsciously, this incident echoes the author's seeing his own father—knife in hand—threatening and arguing with his mother as he led her into their bedroom.) But as an adult and free from that abusive environment, he encounters an

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[22] *Home Killings*, 156.

[23] Marcos M. Villatoro, *Minos. A Romilia Chacón Mystery* (Boston: Kate's Mystery Books/Justin, Charles & Co., 2003), 7.

[24] Villatoro was diagnosed with depression in 1996 and with manic depression three years later in 1999 (personal interview with the author Mar. 11, 2019).