

Review

Heart Laid Bare: The Role of Authors' Personal Experiences in the Success of Their Books

Rayyan Dabbous

French Protestant College, Beirut, Lebanon. Email: rayyandabbous@hotmail.com.

Accepted 21 September 2015

The growing number of aspiring authors, in parallel with the unbending selective attitude of publishing houses, has invited bestselling writers, editors at literary magazines and even users of online forums to share tips and advice with publishing hopefuls. In this context, this paper sought to guide potential authors with a more scientific method, which relied on an extensive literature review and a dialectical approach to research. The study examined the different variables that contributed to the success of books and found that an author's personal experiences played a pivotal role in writing. Particularly, the main focus of the investigation was the reception of irreconcilable literary movements that have risen throughout time and the paper found that successful books in contemporary history were the offspring of such ancestral influences.

Keywords: autobiography, art for art's sake, literary movements, personal experiences, author's guide

Cite This Article As: Dabbous R (2015). Heart Laid Bare: The Role of Authors' Personal Experiences in the Success of Their Books. *Inter. J. Eng. Lit. Cult.* 3(9): 254-261

INTRODUCTION

The most important ingredient in the creation of a book is inspiration. Mastering the art of the craft is certainly essential, but only a special idea, which dawns on the author like lightning, can put into practice the author's abilities and literary potential. However, this imperative requirement has been the reason behind an internal struggle for authors, who are torn between two worlds that both provide inspiration: the fiction, the imaginary and the strange, which grant the authors ideas that transcend the world as they know it, and the fact, the account of their own experiences, which are fueled by emotions and events worth recounting. The latter option usually takes form in the shape of autobiographies and memoirs, which, according to Gilmore (2001, p. 1), have

"tripled from the 1940s to the 1990s." The ascendancy of the genre brings to the table several questions. Is a book more successful when it is the product of an eventful and personal account of the author's life, or when it is devoid of individual experiences, feelings and thoughts? Generally speaking, should art aspire to reveal the artist, or conceal them? This paper sought to provide answers for these questions, which might ultimately guide authors in their literary careers. Particularly, the study, which relied on a dialectical approach to research and an extensive literature review, examined the influence of personal experiences in books and investigated whether they play a key role in their success.

The success of books influenced by authors' personal experiences

The appeal of the autobiographical genre to prospective readers is understandable. Since some readers are drawn to stories that relate to them situations they haven't personally experienced, the significant level of credibility in a non-fiction book induces them to choose a story with a real and authentic account of an event over a fictitious one that only imagines it. For example, a reader with a keen interest in History will be naturally more interested by the account of a person who actually lived at one point in the past than by the account of their contemporary novelists. Indeed, one of the main advantages of the autobiographical genre is the fact that though it is shelved along other non-fiction books, the simplicity of the style and the compelling storytelling makes it more accessible to readers compared to its non-fiction counterparts such as 'pure' historical or sociological academic books. Readers of autobiographical works are indeed having the best of both worlds as they can enjoy both the events of a story and their accuracy. In short, an autobiography can be a novel – but not vice versa. Mediating in the debate between fiction and nonfiction, Galchen (2013) agreed in the *New York Times* that “nonfiction generally has the lead over fiction in being true: on having a substantial glitter of one-to-one correspondences to verifiable details of what we fairly and efficiently term the “real world.”

The accuracy of the account delivered in autobiographies, however, has been challenged. Some critics and historians endeavor to read autobiographies through a suspicious lens; alert to claims or descriptions by the author that might raise a red flag regarding their credibility. Referring to bestselling memoirist Rigoberta Menchu, who has been accused of relating situations she never personally experienced, Gilmore (2013, p. 4) pointed out that by omitting any acknowledgements of invented or imagined events in her book, Menchu's memoir, along with any other autobiographical work that cannot deliver evidence to validate their facts, are “vulnerable to charges of lying.” Such a cynical view of autobiographies is not the only limit of the genre. Though a memoirist might fabricate imagined events in their book on purpose, sometimes they violate the principle of ethics in memoir-writing unintentionally. Besides the fact that the process of writing a memoir relies uniquely on the author's memory, which is susceptible to deceit, another factor cripples the writer's ability to convey a truthful and trustworthy account of an event: emotions. In his foreword of *Memoirs of a Cold War Son*, the memoir of Gaines Post's high school years during World War II, Stone (2000, p. 11) warned the reader that “even as memoir, the truths autobiography affords meld both external event with internal emotion and expression.” By

this claim, Stone challenged the views of the autobiographer who professed to be unbiased, which was often not the case. Even autobiographers have acknowledged the limits of their own work. In the introduction of his autobiography, Gandhi (1993, p. xvii) said that he was “far from claiming any finality or infallibility” about the conclusions he reached in his book. This skepticism clearly demonstrated the relativism of the apostle of nonviolence, who believed that what he professed to be true in his book could potentially be the bone of contention in the future.

Whether the facts in memoirs are true or not, autobiography still has other unique characteristics that attract readers to the genre. According to Philippe Lejeune (1989, pp. 3-28), a French critic of the autobiographical genre, “the author, the narrator, and the protagonist must be identical” in an autobiography. He called such an alliance the “Autobiographical Pact,” a contract that promises readers that the character over whom they might be sympathizing is not only real – but is the author himself as well. This pact is of great benefit to the genre since a reader will be more affected by a character's misery, for instance, if they know that the person suffering in the narration actually exists or once existed in the real world. A work of fiction usually comforts readers by reassuring them that the events they are reading about are not true, therefore cannot necessarily happen to them. Though once readers realize that they might one day share the affliction of the character in the book, they will instantly value the autobiography a lot more than an imaginary work. Consequently, the ‘real’ books are more valuable than the ‘unreal’ ones and the authors of autobiographical works are also rewarded since their readers have been so captivated by their stories that they demand a sequel.

Though Lejeune labeled this particular benefit of autobiography as the “Autobiographical Pact”, the genre still provides many other advantages that might not have names to them. In the introduction of his autobiography, Gandhi (1993, p. xvi), though skeptical about the truths he related in his story, still believed that “a connected account of all [his] experiments will not be without benefit to the reader.” Through his autobiography, Gandhi hoped that the readers would grasp the moral behind his experiences. Such a desire, which alone could have compelled him to write about his own life, was common among great minds who wanted their thoughts to be preserved throughout time. We can refer to Montaigne, who up until the end of his life, kept adding new entries to his most acclaimed work, *Essais* (or *Essays*), or Pascal, who also throughout his life used to write down his thoughts on scraps of papers, which, after his death, were collected by editors and compiled into one literary work, his famous *Pensées* (or *Thoughts*). The two mentioned works are not typical kinds of autobiographies,

though the ubiquity of the authors' experiences and thoughts does incorporate them into the genre. In fact, books and papers about autobiography often quote Montaigne, who says, "I am myself the matter of the book." The popularity of those two authors and with time that of literary works holding the author's views and opinions, like Gandhi's autobiography, is evidence of some readers' continued interest in not only what autobiographers saw in the course of their lives – but what they thought as well.

The benefits of autobiography illustrate the importance of the genre, which does not limit itself to the literary world. Autobiographers are often praised for contributing to Mankind a unique account of the era they lived in and the world that surrounded them. It is after all thanks to writers who have kept written records of what they saw, felt and thought that we are able to learn History with such accuracy and detail regarding the quotidian lives of our ancestors. Smith and Watson (2010, p. 19) warned in *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* that autobiography was not "simply the story of an individual life." Indeed, the genre "encode[s] or reinforce[s] particular values in ways that may shape culture and History," (Dowd, Stevenson, & Strong, 2006, pp. 129-30). This role has been hailed by Charles Moore (2014), writer at the Telegraph, who called *Storm of Steel*, Ernst Jünger's account of his life in the trenches during World War I, "the greatest war memoir [he] ever read." The values mentioned above could be "the general statements" that Charles Moore identified in Jünger's book, notably the saying "In war you learn your lessons, but the tuition fees are high," a lesson the war veteran must have learned the hard way. The most praised aspect of the book by Moore, however, was the fact that the book was "particular, yet universal."

The notion of universality brings to mind another factor that explains the success of the autobiographical genre. While some readers, out of curiosity, seek books relating experiences they haven't personally gone through, others find solace in those they can relate to. Relatability is an important facet of autobiographical works and it is without a doubt one of the main factors that has led to the rise of the genre. In 1996, The New York Times associated the growing popularity of the genre with the new "culture of confession" that drove ordinary people to write about their own personal experiences (Gilmore, 2001, p. 4). The ascendancy of memoirs was once again mentioned by The New York Times in 2011, though this time in a satirical tone: Neil Genzlinger (2011) warned readers looking for memoirs on Amazon to be in a "comfortable chair" when they execute the search because it will likely produce "about 40,000 hits, or 60,000, or 160,000." The explosion of the genre, according to Wendy Salinger, a memoirist herself, is due to the main role of memoirs, which are required to "tap into a universal truth," (Olson,

2014). According to Charles Moore, Jünger's *Storm of Steel* filled that requirement. Indeed, the war veteran's descriptions of the horrors and absurdity of the war and the sense of duty and manhood that compels soldiers to stand ground amid the terror are universal because soldiers who took part in World War I would all agree with Jünger's words, whether they fought with or against him.

Soldiers are obviously not the only people who can relate to memoirs. The content of the genre is diverse and as a result of the boom of electronic publishing, readers can now find autobiographical accounts that share their own predicament: cancer, depression, sex and drugs – the list is endless. Fictional works can relate such situations as well – but a reader would rather listen to a person whose own experience entitles them to speak out. In addition, since fiction novels are widely known to be a reflection of society, they consequently miss out on the untold social taboos that memoirs break the silence on. Smith and Watson (1998, p. 5) observed that "women reading other women's autobiographical writings have experienced them as 'mirrors' of their own unvoiced aspirations." As a consequence, the autobiographical genre does not only invite readers to compare their lives with that of the autobiographer – it also wakes in them a desire to follow the steps of the author, a resolve determination and appetite for change. Smith and Watson took the example of critic Barbara Christian who wrote that the autobiographical novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones* by Paule Marshall "was crucial to a deeper understanding of [her] own life."

Despite the multiple benefits of autobiographical works, the explosion of the genre and the authors that have contributed to its recent rise have been both subject of criticism. Genzlinger (2011) claimed in The New York Times that most memoirists wrote "uninterestingly about the unexceptional apparently not realizing how commonplace their little wrinkle [was]." As harsh as it sounded, the writer of the article "The Problem with Memoirs" was not the only person who spoke his mind about what he called an "absurdly bloated genre." In an interview with the Guardian, American critic Vivian Gornick declared that the majority of memoirs could not achieve literature and were not valuable to the readers because "most people who are writing memoirs are not writers," (Dean, 2015). As paradoxical as this might seem, Gornick's observation contested the true definition of a writer: was it someone who wrote *something* or a person who wrote *things* as an occupation? According to the American critic, memoir-writing should be reserved to the latter. Such elitist way of looking at literature contrasts with the rise of the autobiographical genre, which has amplified the hitherto unheard voices of untraditional writers, from politicians and rappers describing the true stories behind the headlines they make to previously marginalized groups in literature, such as women, whose

accounts rose drastically in the last century.

If one were to concede to Gornick's ideal profile of a memoirist, literature would then be limited to "real" writers, who according to Genzlinger, have the unique ability to "turn relatively ordinary occurrences into a snapshot of a broader historical moment." These writers, noted Smith and Watson (1998, p. 5), have interested critics such as Georg Misch, Georges Gusdorf and William Spengemann, who took autobiography seriously and "restricted their focus to lives of great men – Augustine, Rousseau, Franklin, Goethe, Carlyle, Henry Adams – whose accomplished lives and literary tomes assured their value as cultural capital." Regardless of the outcome of the debate between memoirists who write as an occupation and those who do not, the success of the mentioned authors is further evidence of the genre's upper hand over fiction novels. Indeed, F.C. Roe (1955, pp. 101-112) observed in 1954 that Rousseau's *Confessions* was more in demand in England than the author's two other renowned works, *Emile or On Education* and *Of The Social Contract*. As a consequence, we could argue that the autobiographical genre not only outshines novels in their nature of truthfulness, their ability to engage marginalized groups and their strong relatability – but they also outsell them.

The success of books uninfluenced by authors' personal experiences

Though the autobiographical genre, fueled by the author's life, has been successful in recent times, one should concede that, in parallel, other works, devoid of the author's experiences, feelings and thoughts, have also had their share of success. Indeed, the autobiographical genre remains, after all, a genre, and the vast majority of written works are not memoirs or autobiographies. Indeed, literature offers a wide and diversified range of writings: novels, poems, plays, essays and many more. In order to truly assess the pivotal role of personal experiences in writing, one is compelled to look into works completely devoid of them. According to Bell-Villada (1998, p. 3), the art of literature "neither reflects nor is affected by the social, historical or biographical circumstances of its creation." Such a claim was the motto of a literary movement that rose in the 19th century and that prioritized form over content: Parnassianism. This movement, Ziomek (1966, p. 88) observed, preferred "art with no autobiographical implications – impassive, marble-like and purged of emotion." This requirement, in particular, pits the Parnassians and all the other movements adhering to the principle of Art for Art's sake against autobiographers, who believe in an opposite and irreconcilable ideology, and the success of the former proves that though

personal experiences in writing is certainly a utility – but it is not a necessity.

Many factors explain the rise of this ideology. Art for Art's sake is first of all a rebellious kind of doctrine, which according to Guerard (1936, p. 1) manifested itself in the "refusal of the artist to be caught in the mesh of social statistics, to bow down, to conform, to serve; this defiant assertion of the Unique against the laws of the herd." This nonconformism, however, was multifaceted, since more than one tradition has been rejected by Parnassians and other similar movements. Socially, Albert Cassagne explained that the rise of the doctrine was a reaction to the "lack of elevation" of the predominant themes in literature and in art as a whole during the 19th century, which usually depicted the mundane stories of the bourgeois life (Bell-Villada, 1998, pp. 9-14). Religiously, Bell-Villada (1998) noted that the theory of Art for Art's sake rose because "literature needed to shake off religious and neoclassical rules and, beyond that, to free itself from clerical and courtly limitations." Finally, on an individual level, this doctrine, the author asserted, was a "symptom of the alienation of the artist from mankind at large." All three reasons above, along with a supporting historical background, compelled authors to break social, religious and artistic dogmas and the result of such defiance are all the writings we have inherited that challenged and revolutionized Man's conception of beauty and made them rethink and redefine what is 'good' and 'bad' literature.

A variety of arguments have been laid on the table when it comes to assessing the success of works adhering to the doctrine of Art for Art's sake. The main argument finds its roots in the origins of the word 'aesthetics', which means perception in Greek. This narrow and straightforward definition of beauty is the very foundation of the doctrine of Art for Art's sake and it explains the reason why people are drawn to works devoid of the artist's experiences, thoughts and feelings. Indeed, Paul Guyer argued that "our pleasure in beauty is a response only to the perceptible form of an object, not to any matter or content it may have," (Leighton, 2007, p. 5). This theory therefore challenged the so-called benefits of the autobiographical genre: the biographical circumstances of a work are irrelevant – it can only achieve true literature if it is beautifully written. Bell-Villada (1998) concretized the theory, arguing that "most of us find Gothic cathedrals beautiful, regardless of what we think about the late-medieval popes."

Once Art for Art's sake was put into practice, the advantages of the doctrine became clear. Indeed, Ziomek (1966) observed that its adherents, the Parnassians, "considered each poem almost like a jewel to be polished and coaxed into perfection by endless, patient work." The products of such *modus operandi* are literary works enjoyed by poetry lovers and especially logophiles. The

poets of those works were, as Aaron Schaffer (1923, p. 414-425) noted in *The Gentle of Art of Saying-Nothing Gracefully*, “mastery in the use of the tools of the craft,” a title only attributed to authors that prioritized form over content. Besides the literary success of these authors, they have also been credited for a social merit. According to Schiller, the “beautiful unites society because it relates to what is common to all,” (Bell-Villada, 1998, p. 27) As a result, the German author concluded that “the ideal of equality finds itself fulfilled in the aesthetic.”

Though the advantages and benefits of the doctrine have been acknowledged by most critics, Art for Art’s sake has been nonetheless criticized. According to Amiel, a “ juggler in rhyme” and a “conjurer in verse” weren’t the only traits readers sought in poets: they also looked for a “painter of life, a being who thinks, loves and has a conscience, who feels passion and repentance,” (Schaffer, 1923, 414-425). Such characteristics are found in none of the Parnassians works. For example, the famous poem *Aphrodite* of Jose-Maria de Heredia, a member of the movement, is devoid of the author’s views and emotions: there are no themes or connotations relating to the historical background; Heredia only described the birth of the goddess Aphrodite using imagination-striking images and similes, paying his sole attention not to the content of his descriptions – but the way he conveyed them. However, Art for Art’s sake has not only been criticized for its lack of humanity. Louis MacNeice (1938, p. 4) in *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* declared that “Art for Art’s sake was a doctrine of cowardice,” and that “poets were afraid they might be thought prigs or bores.” MacNeice’s claims bring to mind a distant Victorian England, where Art, in order to be successful or even accepted, must be deemed moral. It was only when authors like Oscar Wilde rose to prominence that the traditions of the century were challenged and broken. Indeed, in his preface of *The Picture of Dorian*, Wilde (1993, vii) asserted that a work of art could not be “immoral” and that a book could only be deemed good when it was “well-written” – which was the cornerstone of the doctrine of Art for Art’ sake. Finally, there is one last reproach that has been given to Parnassians and similar movements. Kuspit (1968, p. 93-98) valued the artist’s personal experiences in the creation of Art and he argued that “aesthetic climax” and “beauty” were the outcome of “successful experience.” This claim is essentially “an attack on the idea of Art for Art’s sake” – consequently backing the arguments of autobiographers. All criticisms considered, most critics concede that the doctrine of Art for Art’s sake has still revolutionized the artistic world and literature. As Maupassant put it, “a writer must be criticized not for what we should like him to have done but for what he himself wished to do.” When it comes to assessing what Parnassians desired to achieve, one can only commend

them for the polished and perfect jewels of poetry they have produced.

Art for Art’s sake is not the only doctrine that requires the author to produce a text devoid of his personal experiences. Though the realist movement does call attention to the historical and social background of works, it nonetheless omits the biographical circumstances of its creation. Realism mirrors not the author but the world. Baudelaire defined the realists as authors that wished to “represent things as they are, or as they will be, by supposing [they] didn’t exist,” (Carrier, 2010, p. 170). Zola (2001, pp. 5-9) agreed with Baudelaire in the preface of *Therese Raquin* in which he said that “so long as he was writing, [he] forgot about [his] world.” Finally, in his foreword of *Therese Desqueyroux*, Mauriac (2012, p. 21-22) explained that he had no control over his character and further asserted that the protagonist of the story was not a character but a real person that thought for herself. This autonomy bestowed upon the anti-hero of the book is characteristic of the realist movement as a whole – a doctrine that prioritized others over the self.

Many factors explain the success of the movement. Objectivity, “a requirement practically indispensable” according to Kindt and Muller (2003, p. 99), is common among realist books and a reader would rather believe the descriptions of an author who isn’t personally implicated in the story than that of autobiographers whose emotions might get the better of them. In addition, the characters in realist books, according to Mauriac (1990), “help us to better understand ourselves.” The latter wasn’t the only role of the movement: Bertolt Brecht noted that “realism is an issue not only for literature: it is a major political, philosophical and practical issue and must be handled and explained as such – as a matter of general human interest,” (Higgins, 2013, p. 161). Finally, the trait that contributed directly to the success of the movement is, according to Morris (2004, p. 1), “its insistence that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspects of human existence.” This aspect of the book has helped the genre to reach out to a “much wider social range than earlier forms of literature.” Indeed, the realist movement, in conjunction with the rise of literacy in Europe, rendered an elitist literature accessible to a wider audience.

Despite the revolutionary aspect of the movement, many of its characteristics have been criticized. In his preface of *Pierre et Jean*, Maupassant (2014) observed that “an artist will choose from life’s many hazards and futilities only the characteristic details and they will overlook the rest.” By such a claim, Maupassant questioned a realist’s ability to faithfully reproduce reality and he concluded that realists should be rather called “illusionists.” The social themes of realists’ works have also been criticized. Morris (2004) warned that a reader “may feel literature must aspire to truths and values

beyond the everyday mundane." Despite such criticisms, Sidney and Geoffrey (1965, p. 47) asserted that realism "remains continually satisfying to many people." The success of the movement is longstanding: though the movement rose in the 19th century, its foundations dated back to Antiquity. After all, realism was based on the principle of mimesis, and Aristotle claimed in his *Poetics* that it was "natural for all to delight in works of imitation, (Sidney and Geoffrey, 1965, p. 47).

Though an author who chooses to omit his personal experiences in his writings can be a realist, at the other end of the spectrum, he can also be a surrealist. According to Gerrad de Cortanze (1985, p. 11), "for the surrealists, Man is a stranger to himself." Indeed, surrealist artists do not procure their ideas by reflecting about their own lives – instead, they seek inspiration in the unconscious world. Cocteau noted that "nothing audacious existed without the disobedience of rules," which cracked the motive behind the rise of surrealism: breaking the tradition. This doctrine built a bridge between the author and their work: Balakian (1986, pp. 1-2) that surrealist authors desired to "destroy the language stereotype to emancipate the word." This autonomy attributed to words clearly demonstrated the author's will to rise beyond his experiences and feelings in a dull and mundane world and access a world completely strange to them. This modus operandi has been hailed by Peyre (1948, pp. 34-49) in *The Significance of Surrealism* as an attempt at "changing, not only literature and painting, but psychology, ethics and man himself." Overall, the movement has been successful and has become a trend in modern literature: Balakian (1986) noted that "more surrealist writings are available today" than before.

Finally, there is one more literary method that guarantees success to authors who choose to close their eyes to their personal experiences. This one is a method, rather than a doctrine, since it remains an unofficial and spontaneous way of conceptualizing successful books and up until today it isn't founded on declared principles. Raymond Queneau's *Exercises in Style* perfectly illustrates it: the book is completely devoid of the author's experiences, feelings and thoughts and it is basically one imagined scene rewritten ninety nine times in different styles. Despite its simplicity, the book has been successful. This success is similar to that of the Parnassians: Queneau, too, prioritized form over content, spending most of his time thinking about the way he wanted to write instead of focusing on what he should have written. Such books have indeed made of literature an industry that seeks commercial books that enable a widespread distribution to the masses. This way of thinking has not been attributed a name yet, but it might as well be called Art for Business' Sake.

The influence of personal experiences and its success

The diversity of literature and the success of each of its branches bring us to stand at the crossroad: if works influenced by authors' personal experiences and works devoid of them are both successful, which side should a debut author pick? Unfortunately, this paper cannot answer this problematic and age-old question because the question in itself is incorrectly formulated. In the second part of the paper, numerous authors who professed that their works were uninfluenced by their lives have been listed. The first objective of this paper, however, was to contradict this claim – the influence of personal experiences in writings is inevitable. Consequently, though the arguments covered in the latter part of this paper remain more or less valid, one can add a few more omitted points to make the evaluation even more comprehensive.

When it comes to the doctrine of Art for Art's sake, for example, no one can contest the fact that the adherents of the movements produced the most polished and perfect poems ever to grace literature. In this patient and demanding process, however, the verses of Parnassians and similar poets still gave away fragments of their identities and achieved feats they never desired to attain. Indeed, according to Bell-Villada (1998), "Schiller argues the apparent paradox that receptivity to pure, independent, non-didactic beauty is a necessary precondition for the growth of our rational and moral sides." By this claim, Schiller revealed the twofold role of Art for Art's Sake, a formula which he believed must be extended to "Art for Art's Sake and then for the sake of the true, the Good and the social." Consequently, even a doctrine that prioritized form over content inevitably offered to Mankind more contributions than its adherents had ever expected to. Even realism has been unable to completely conceal the author. Morris (2004) observed that "writing has to select and order; something has to come first, and that selection and ordering will always in some way entail the values and perspective of the describer." Indeed, a realist describes the world he himself beholds with his own two eyes and unfortunately for them, perception is not reality. Likewise, surrealism has also failed to meet the goal of the poet. Despite their insistence to flee from the world around them, a surrealist is incapable to write down verses without giving some meaning to them. Indeed, Aaron Schaffer asserted that "words are essentially a vehicle of communication and so ipso facto have intellectual, emotional or moral connotations."

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the artist's wishes, a work of art will always reflect in one way or another its own creator. There cannot be a debate on the supremacy of autobiographies over the Parnassians' poems, the realists' novels or the surrealists' verses – or vice versa – because all of these literary works belong to one same family and they all embody their writers. Nonetheless, this paper still provided a word of advice for authors who are torn between writing about their own lives and writing about their imagined characters' lives. The solution is nothing complicated. The author has to only realize that he or she is in fact torn between two extremes and that it is between those two boundaries that they will find literature's most successful works. For instance, even though their titles are not their creators' names, *Dorian Gray* and *Dom Juan* still represent their makers' lifestyles and they are arguably as successful as works that professed to be the most faithful portraits of their creators. Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night* is as successful as Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel*, despite the fact that Celine's account of the war he experienced isn't as accurately and truthfully retold. Salinger might not have gone through the same experiences as Holden Caulfield – yet their conception of the world is one. Undeniably, the influence of authors' personal experiences in their writings is not only inevitable – it is also implicitly ubiquitous.

The diverse forms and aims of literature we inherited certainly leaned on one side of the extremes when new literary movements surged to break the tradition. This paper, however, sought to encourage authors to take a more liberal stand when it comes to writing books. Through an evaluation of the different conceptions of successful poems, novels and autobiographies, the study concluded that our literary ancestry facilitates a modern author's task of producing works that appeal to the widest audience possible. Indeed, the success of a book is almost always guaranteed when an author is able to find the middle ground between fact and fiction. This applies to all arts: certainly, Van Gogh's self-portraits are one of the most acclaimed paintings in the world, but the artist's true personal experiences, feelings and thoughts are best revealed in his most famous work, *The Starry Night*, where the depicted powerful winds perfectly represent the painter's state of mind at the time of the creation. It is fitting to end this paper with Edgar Allen Poe's advice to Mankind:

"If any ambitious man have a fancy to revolutionize, at one effort, the universal world of human thought, human opinion and human sentiment, the opportunity is his own – the road to immortal renown lies straight open, and unencumbered before him. All that he has to do is to write and publish a very little book. Its title should be

simple – a few plain words – 'My Heart Laid Bare.' But – this little book must be true to its title," (Richards, 2004, p. 41)

Indeed, every author should aspire to write their autobiography – regardless of the inaccurate, ambiguous and unconventional way they choose to relate it.

REFERENCES

- Balakian, A. (1986). *Surrealism: The Road to the Absolute* (pp. 1-2). University of Chicago Press.
- Bell-Villada, G. (1998). *The Idea, the Phrase, the Problem*. In *Art for Art's Sake & Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology & Culture of Aestheticism* (p. 3). U of Nebraska Press.
- Carrier, D. (2010). *High Art: Charles Baudelaire and the Origins of Modernist Painting* (p. 170) Penn State.
- Dean, M. (2015, May 24). *Vivian Gornick: 'Most people who are writing memoirs are not writers'* The Guardian. Retrieved July 10, 2015.
- De Cortanze, G. (1985). *Le Monde Du Surrealisme* (p. 11). Editions Complexe.
- Dowd, G., Stevenson, L., & Strong, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Genre Matters: Essays in Theory and Criticism* (pp. 129-30). Intellect.
- Galchen, R. (2013, October 22). *What's Behind the Notion That Nonfiction Is More 'Relevant' Than Fiction?* The New York Times. Retrieved July 7, 2015.
- Gandhi, M. (1993). *Introduction*. In M. Desai (Trans.), *Gandhi: An Autobiography - The Story of My Experiments With Truth* (p. xvii). Beacon Press.
- Genzlinger, N. (2011, January 28). *The Problem With Memoirs*. The New York Times. Retrieved July 10, 2015.
- Gilmore, L. (2001). *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (p. 1). Cornell University Press.
- Guérard, A. (1936). *Art for Art's Sake* (3rd ed., Vol. 10, p. 1). University of Oklahoma.
- Higgins, J. (2013). *Against the New Conformism*. In *Raymond Williams: Literature, Marxism and Cultural Materialism* (p. 161). Routledge.
- Kindt, T., & Hans-Herald M. (2003). *What Is Narratology?: Questions and Answers Regarding the Status of a Theory* (p. 99). Walter De Gruyter.
- Kuspit, D. (1968). *Dewey's Critique of Art for Art's Sake*. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 27 (1), 93-98. Retrieved July 9, 2015.
- Leighton, A. (2007). *Form's Matter*. In *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (p. 5). OUP Oxford.
- Lejeune, P. (1989). *The Autobiographical Pact*. In *On Autobiography (Theory and History of Literature)* (pp. 3-28). University of Minnesota Press.
- MacNeice, L. (1938). *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay*

- (p. 4). Ardent Media.
- Maupassant, G. (2014). Preface. In *Pierre et Jean*. Libro.
- Mauriac, F. (1990). *Le Romancier et ses personnages*. Pocket.
- Mauriac, F. (2012). Thérèse Desqueyroux (pp. 21-22). *Le Livre de Poche*.
- Moore, C. (2014, March 2). The greatest war memoir I have ever read. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved July 13, 2015.
- Morris, P. (2004). *Realism* (p. 1). Routledge.
- Olson, E. (2014, October 10). Appeal of Penning Memoirs Grows, Along With Publishing Options. *The New York Times*. Retrieved July 11, 2015.
- Peyre, H. (1948). The Significance of Surrealism. *Yale French Studies*, (2), 34-49. Retrieved July 16, 2015.
- Richards, E. (2004). "The Poetess" and Poe's Performance of the Feminine. In *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (p. 41). Cambridge University Press.
- Roe, F. (1955). L'image que se font les Anglais de la littérature française. *L'Association Internationale Des études Françaises*, 7(7), 101-112. Retrieved July 8, 2015.
- Schaffer, A. (1923). The Gentle Art of Saying-Nothing Gracefully. *Johns Hopkins UP*, 4 (31), 414-425. Retrieved July 8, 2015.
- Sidney, P., & Geoffrey S. (1965). Introduction. In *An Apology for Poetry: Or, The Defence of Poesy* (p. 47). Manchester UP.
- Smith, S., & Watson, J. (1998). Introduction. In *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (p. 5). Univ of Wisconsin Press.
- Smith, S., & Watson, J. (2010). Life Narrative: Definitions and Distinctions. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (p. 19). U of Minnesota.
- Stone, A. (2000). Foreword. In *Memoirs of A Cold War Son* (p. 11). University of Iowa Press.
- Wilde, O. (1993). Preface. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (p. vii). Dover Publications.
- Ziomek, H. (1966). *Modernismo: A Comparative Study* (p. 88). University of Georgia.
- Zola, E. (2001). Preface. In *Thérèse Raquin* (pp. 5-9). BookSurge Publishing.