



Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms

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Editorial Review

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The *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* purports to be the first substantial reference work in English to "provide a map of the field across discipline and region." "Life writing" is defined by the editor as something that "encompasses the writing of one's own or another's life," meaning standard autobiography and biography as well as letters, diaries, and memoirs. Other formats that aid in the telling of life stories are also included, in entries such as *Film*, *Photography*, and *Testimony*.

More than 600 alphabetically arranged entries are written by scholars in various disciplines. The aim is to provide an overview of central genres or themes and shed light on the significance of important individual writers and works in the field of life writing, all across an international and historical perspective. There are a complete alphabetical list of entries in the front of the encyclopedia as well as a thematic list that is classified according to chronological, regional, and subject divisions. Other reader aides include *see* and *see also* references, notes on the contributors and advisors, and a comprehensive index.

Each entry contains a descriptive and critical essay with a "Further Reading" list of anywhere from a few to more than 60 books and journal articles. Entries on people also have a brief biographical sketch and a list of selected writings related to life writing. Where possible, English translations of foreign writings are given, and in cases where no English language translation is available, literal translations of titles are usually given in brackets. More autobiographers are featured than biographers to keep the focus on the form and skill of the writing rather than the fame of the life in question. Most seminal individuals in the field appear to be covered, although it is surprising that Jacobean diarist Lady Anne Clifford does not rate a main entry.

Some libraries on a tight budget may not feel the need for this resource since so much of the content is biographical, and most disciplines are already teeming with biographical dictionaries. However, this scholarly source does offer a unique perspective because it focuses on a person's contribution to life writing, to the exclusion of his or her other accomplishments. Recommended for academic libraries and large public libraries. *RBB*

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Review

"A unique perspective because it focuses on a person's contribution to life writing, to the exclusion of his or her other accomplishments."

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