

Editorial: Experience of Change in Practices of Life-Writing

This issue of *Anglica Wratislaviensis* concerns the experience of change in practices of life-writing. It presents seven papers which probe the meanings and understandings of change in life narratives of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. The autobiographical accounts analysed in the issue show the challenges of navigating between the possible and the inexpressible in the experience of change, as well as the questions of capturability of the self in the contest of changing ideas about the relation between the self and society, and the self and language. At the same time, they acknowledge opportunities in calling into question the re/forming experience of change. The papers respond with acuity to shifting and changing conditions of change. Re-evaluating its force, life writers are shown to divest it of novelty, invest it with substance, and re-think its individual and social potential. Ascribing value to change in life-writing, the contributors to this issue propose an examination of what can be identified as changeable, also of what contributes to major changes in production and reading of global life narratives.

In “The Transfer of the New Biography: Virginia Woolf and Lytton Strachey in Interwar Poland”, Paulina Pająk explores the influence of changes in the literary marketplace on the circulation and reception of biographies in interwar Poland. Pająk presents the cultural transfer of the new biography, reconstructing the publishing networks responsible for the circulation of Virginia Woolf’s biofiction and Lytton Strachey’s modernist biographies. The article focuses on strategies of cultural transfer as developed by the Rój publishing house that launched Strachey’s books, as well as on diverse cultural mediators who reviewed and popularized Woolf’s and Strachey’s works.

Rowland Cotterill’s “‘We Are Changed by What We Change’: W. H. Auden’s *New Year Letter*” explores representations of change—“change as a process, or a set of processes, both internal and external to a notional (but, *ex hypothesi*, changeable and changing) self”—in W. H. Auden’s *New Year Letter*. Published in 1941, the poem addresses a major change in Auden’s life: his “conversion” to, or back to, Christianity. Cotterill analyses complex facets of this change, while paying special attention to Auden’s focus on changes of conceptions of human lives. This paper

examines three overlapping aspects of Auden's *New Year Letter*: its consideration of quests for personal change, particularly those to be found in the lives of poets; its project for the diagnosis of change within a world at once individualized and public; and its embrace of written and performative genres and modes by which these two lines of poetic and conceptual discourse may tend towards convergence, if not fusion.

"The New Age Spiritual Life Narrative: New Wine in Old Wineskins?" by Magdalena Ożarska discusses religious conversions in the New Age spiritual memoir. Ożarska examines patterns of conversion in this genre, emphasizing in particular structural differences between New Age and Christian spiritual memoirs. She identifies them in a significant number of "turning points" (several "awakenings" vs one conversion experience). Reading a wide range of memoirs (Stanislav Grof's *When the Impossible Happens: Adventures in Non-Ordinary Realities* [2006], Ram Dass's *Being Ram Dass* [2021], Tony Parsons's *The Open Secret* [1995], Richard Sylvester's *I Hope You Die Soon: Words on Non-Duality and Liberation* [2006] and *Confessions of a Seeker* [2018], Suzanne Segal's *Collision with the Infinite: A Life Beyond the Personal Self* [1996]), Ożarska takes a closer look at the modalities of change from the non-existent I-now, as opposed to the conventional I-then, in the pre-awakening part of the memoirist's life narrative.

Personal metamorphoses feature in Wojciech Klepuszewski's article "Alcoholics Onymous: Experience of Change in Women's Recovery Memoirs". Investigating narratives of alcohol addiction by British women, Klepuszewski identifies processes of personal change from alcohol dependence to sobriety, exposing uses of representation of alcoholic downfalls and physical and mental degradation, paradoxically, as ways of imaging the "retrieval" of one's identity. Recovery memoirs, apart from telling a story of the alcoholic past, Klepuszewski writes, provide an account of change which leads to self-invention, the final lifeline, which is best encapsulated in "lots of me being, finally, the New Me".

"Fiction at the Root of My Existence" offers a creative reading of changes in Astrid Swan/Joutseno's life. They are large and small and lead to the gradual sharpening of what Swan/Joutseno identifies as "the urgency of being alive". Marked by "all possible endings in mind", this striking personal exploration traces a multitude of shifts and turns in one's life; it shows the ways they have been sustained by connections with art and writing, with all the "blurry edges of what I recall and how I choose to tell it".

"Greta Thunberg's Life-Writing on Facebook: A Quantitative Analysis" by Oleksandr Kapranov explores the way this iconic figure engages with the issues of the environment and climate change. Kapranov presents a quantitative study on Thunberg's status updates on Facebook, which he problematizes as instances of life-writing in digital personhood. The goal of the study was to collect a corpus of Thunberg's Facebook status updates and to analyse her preferred ways of constructing climate change- and environment-related discourse. The corpus analysis,

which was executed in the software program AntConc, revealed that Thunberg's life-writing on Facebook was characterized by such frequently occurring lexical items, as self-mentions (e.g., *we*) and the words *climate* and *strike*. The high frequency of self-mentions in the corpus are suggestive of a lexically embossed pattern that Thunberg utilizes in her writing on Facebook, her digital log, or a digital diary of life-writing.

Wojciech Drąg's "Tracking Change in Data-Driven Autobiography: Nicholas Felton's Annual Reports, 2005–2014" addresses the considerable change in how we understand ourselves in the age of informational abundance. The paper examines Nicholas Felton's self-tracking project as an instance of data-driven autobiography—an experimental form of autobiography whose structure and content are determined by the empirical data that has been systematically gathered. Drąg considers its capacity to register various aspects of change in the author's life, such as his work–play ratio, food and alcohol intake, and reading habits. The analysis is embedded in the context of a critical discussion about the quantified self-movement and its positivist outlook on the possibility of enhancing one's self-knowledge through a close engagement with personal data.

Teresa Bruś
Wrocław, 3 July 2024