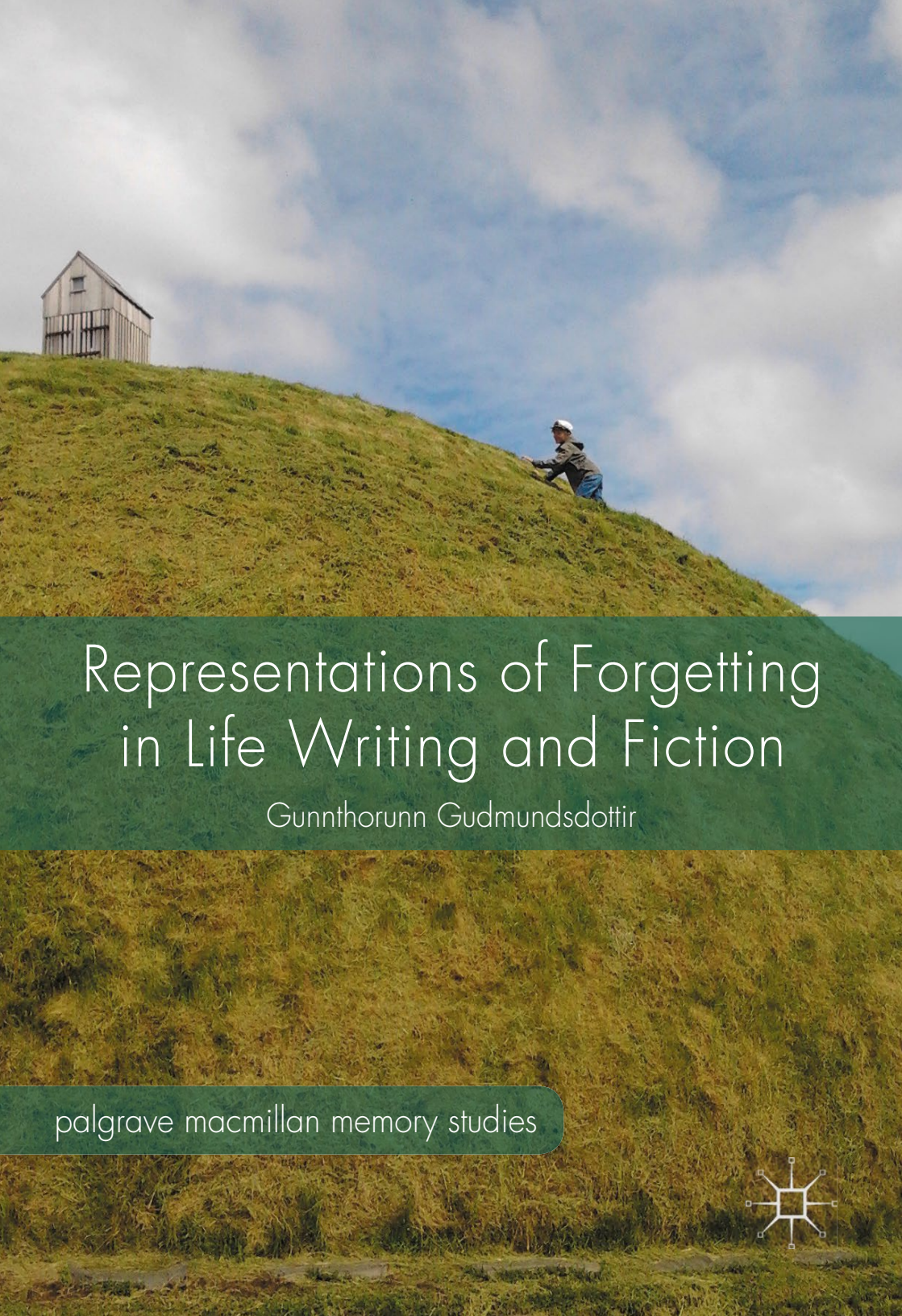

Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction

Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir

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Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir

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In memoriam
Guðmundur Georgsson (1932–2010)
and
Michael Sheringham (1948–2016)

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March 2016

Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir

Contents

1 Introduction: Writing the Forgotten 1

Part I Scenes of Forgetting in Life Writing 23

2 Forewords and Forgettings: Introductions and Preambles in Autobiography 25

3 Forgetting and the Writing Moment: Corrections and Family Archives 47

4 Forgetting Online: Self-representation on Social Network Sites 69

Part II The Past Recovered 89

5 Excavating a Troubled Past: Spanish Memory Texts 91

6 Forgetting as Disguise: Memory Debates of Occupation 113

7 The Inheritance of Forgetting: Narratives of Postmemory 129

8 Coda: *Aide de memoire or aide d'oubli*: Forgetting with Photographs 147

Bibliography 169

Index 181

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Writing the Forgotten

Let me start our foray into the world of forgetting with some pertinent questions Marc Augé poses in his book, *Les forms d'oubli*: 'Is it not true that a given individual—an individual subjected like all others to event and history—has particular and specific remembrances as well as things forgotten? I shall risk setting up a formula: tell me what you forget and I will tell you who you are.'[1] If memory is the basis of our identity and sense of self, and my contention in this study is that memory is always coloured by forgetting, we must agree with Augé's formulation. It does not follow that the relationship between remembering and forgetting is a stable one, or one that can be easily defined. The closest theorists get to classifying the connection between these terms is to say that they are not mutually exclusive; in fact, memory always entails both remembering and forgetting.[2] In order to *re*member one must have forgotten; the forgotten is always already an integral part of memory. As Douwe Draaisma suggests, 'In reality, forgetting exists within remembering like yeast in dough.'[3] Andreas Hyussen's words are also reflective of this point: 'Inevitably, every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence.'[4] And in reversal to our previous statement, in order to forget, one must have remembered. It is therefore hardly feasible to attempt to disentangle these two concepts and place them in separate categories. Instead, I will endeavour to maintain and investigate the close, but fraught, connection between them, following and expanding on José F. Colmeiro's ruminations on the subject:

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> If, as Mario Benedetti has claimed, "forgetting is full of memories," it is no less certain that memory is full of forgetting. Forgetting leaves behind traces of memory and all memory is based on silences, mediations and patches which reconstruct the past according to the necessities of the ever-changing present. "Memory forgets," as David Herzberger has said. In addition, memory reconstructs or invents what is forgotten or inaccessible in the past. Thus, remembering and forgetting are articulated in a precarious balance of forces, always in a constant state of renegotiation.[5]

Memory and forgetting are caught in each other's web, and the complexities of the processes at work should not be underestimated. In this study, the forgotten, forgetting, or oblivion, will be our main focus, but without attempting to fully extract these terms from the web of memory. Astrid Erll has suggested that 'the phenomenon of forgetting is every bit as unobservable as is memory. As an object of research it only comes into view via the observation of remembering.'[6] Hence, this study, which has as its main object of study the manifestations of forgetting, will inevitably be observing it through the prism of remembrance. The understanding derived from this has implications for our interpretation of memory texts,[7] especially those belonging to the genre of autobiography, a literary category often termed the 'genre of memory,' but is perhaps more accurately defined as the genre of 'memory and forgetting.' Paul Ricoeur devotes a detailed chapter to the forgotten in his study of memory and history. He explains what he terms 'the dialectic of presence and absence at the heart of the representation of the past': 'The problematic of forgetting, formulated on the level of greatest depth, intervenes at the most critical point of this problematic of presence, of absence, and of distance, at the opposite pole from that minor miracle of happy memory which is constituted by the actual recognition of past memories.'[8] This 'dialectic of presence and absence' will be very much in evidence in this study, where we will attempt to locate areas, themes, narrative devices, and other relevant strands in different types of texts, mostly from the last few decades and from several different countries, which highlight or, perhaps more accurately, negotiate this 'problematic of forgetting.' The texts' focus is transnational rather than comparative as they are not viewed as representative of a particular nation—with the exception of the Spanish texts which are partly investigated in terms of the national context; rather, the texts exemplify certain memory practices, which I would maintain are transnational in nature. In addition, some of the texts are transnational in themselves, as they describe or refer to migration between nations and cultures.

Ann Rigney suggests that the traditional mode of thinking about memory as one of plenitude and subsequent loss is not necessarily helpful; instead she prefers to consider it in terms of scarcity:

> Whether a private or a collective matter, recollection is not a matter of stable "memories" that can be retrieved like wine bottles from a cellar or, alternatively, that can be lost in transit. Instead, it is an active and constantly shifting relationship to the past, in which the past is changed retrospectively in the sense that its meaning is changed. Indeed, *anamnesis* may be even better than either remembrance or "memory," since it emphasizes the fact that recollection involves overcoming oblivion (an-*amnesis*), and that forgetting precedes remembering rather than vice versa.[9]

Rigney's and Colmeiro's emphasis on the dynamic relationship between remembering and forgetting is highly relevant to this study, as writing—turning memories into narrative—exposes the active and ever-changing nature of these terms very clearly. It is the most productive way by which to view the shifting connections between remembering and forgetting. Autobiography can reveal a belief in what Rigney terms as the traditional, and limiting, trajectory of plenitude to subsequent loss, while the narrative itself might demonstrate a much more vibrant and complex interaction between the two terms. Hence, the importance of narrative and the analysis of narrative to this project, for as Erll notes memory and narrative are inseparable entities: 'Storytelling is per definitionem an act of "memory," in the broad sense proposed by Augustine, namely an act of connecting the temporal levels of past, present and future.' She goes on to explain that 'Conversely, cognitive psychologists hold that acts of memory which belong to the episodic-autobiographical memory system (i.e. the memory of lived experience) can *only* be realized by way of storytelling.'[10] Thus, we can conjecture that 'acts of memory' include both remembering and forgetting, thereby confirming the constant presence of the forgotten in narrative.

Jay Winter adds another layer to the way in which the terms of remembering and forgetting are traditionally viewed; a view he regards as insufficient in explaining the social construction of the past. He puts forth a theory of silence to replace some of the commonplaces prevalent in the understanding of 'forgetting' in memory discourse: 'Silence […] is a socially constructed space in which and about which subjects and words normally used in everyday life are not spoken.'[11] 'By privileging the category of silence and the socially sanctioning activity of silencing, we get beyond this moralised and moralising moment' which implies that to

remember is to understand and to understand is to forgive.[12] His analysis of silence as relates to histories of war and violence are valuable to specific parts of this study, such as his tripartite structure of 'liturgical, political, essentialist' silence, that we shall discuss in some of the following chapters. However, in this research the focus is primarily on the category of forgetting. We cannot ignore the common understanding and usage of the binary approach to these terms. Paul Connerton promotes a careful differentiation between different meanings of the concept as he marks seven types of forgetting, some of which would correspond to Winter's instances of silence: 'I suggest that we can distinguish at least seven types: repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; forgetting as humiliated silence.'[13] Winter's and Connerton's analysis both point to the fact that 'forgetting' is perhaps too large a category to be of use as a critical tool, a term that has critics and theorists looking for ways in which to further define what we mean by it, especially when attempting to analyse its varied manifestations in private and/or collective memory. I believe this to be an important guidepost on our way to an understanding of the role of forgetting in memory texts, and one that can be helpful in the critical analysis.

A view of forgetting as a general term for particular memory processes will nevertheless be maintained to some degree in this study. As I hope to demonstrate, it can also be useful to reference the everyday notions, the common understanding and daily use of these terms in order to shed light on the varied manifestations of the intricate relationship between memory and forgetting. The metaphors used in relation to the phenomena are particularly illuminating. A common metaphor equates the terms with life and death where forgetting is the negation of memory, as the philosopher Emilio Lledó elucidates here:

> To remember and forget, to live and die are necessary and constant opposites in all literature. Memory is a vast area of expertise, of learning and, of course, a warning. Forgetting, however, signifies something like death. As if with every beat there is nothing but the hollowness of absence, an endless succession of emptiness, always the same, identical and repeated without substance.[14]

This rather bleak picture of the role of forgetting in literature draws on a familiar view of forgetting as absence. The forgotten is dead memory which cannot be revived, whereas memory is plenitude, life, and knowledge.

But the relationship between forgetting and death is more complex than this. In Augé's terms, forgetting is the end horizon for memory; it is a kind of death, the end of memory, the terminal point, as Lledó proposes, but also always *already there*.[15] Harald Weinrich explains in his seminal work on forgetting, *Lethe: Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* (1997; *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, 2004), that death does not necessarily denote an absence of memory, on the contrary, it is traditionally also a point of remembrance: 'From time immemorial men have erected barriers against forgetting in death, so that clues suggesting remembrance of the dead are considered by specialists in prehistory and archaeology to be the surest indications of the presence of human culture.'[16] We are also very familiar with the fear of forgetting death evokes, which the mass deaths of the twentieth century have brought to the fore and is perhaps the initial impetus for current memory studies. Here Winter's use of the term silence to replace forgetting, especially 'liturgical silence,' can be illuminating: 'Silence is always part of the framing of public understandings of war and violence, since these touch on the sacred, and on eternal themes of loss, mourning, sacrifice and redemption. We term these uses of silence as "liturgical silences".'[17] As ever, when attempting to unpack the two terms and the metaphors we employ to understand them, we seem to be caught in a spiral of mutual exclusivity on the one hand and an unbreakable bond on the other.

Anne Whitehead points to another common understanding of forgetting, i.e., where memory is viewed first and foremost as a 'deposit and storage.' Forgetting plays no decisive role in this system except as a result of a 'fault in the storage systems or from a decay or misrecognition of the memory traces.'[18] This view of memory and forgetting is ubiquitous nowadays in our digital times and one we will come back to in our analysis of online self-expression in Chap. 4. This way of thinking about memory negates the intricate ways in which forgetting inveigles itself into remembrance, and views it as static and frozen, an absence. And this is one of the challenges that digital technology poses: how forgetting can assert itself in the system without being viewed solely as an error or aberration in digitized memory.

One of the better-known metaphors for forgetting in and of itself is *water*, as Weinrich points out. The goddess of forgetting, Lethe, reigns over the eponymous river, where the dead bathe to forget the past in order to be reborn. The idea of rebirth and release from memory and the past can also be seen where the positive effects of forgetting are emphasised, for

instance when we talk of 'sweet oblivion.' Water metaphors are common when the cleansing effects of oblivion are accentuated. Weinrich notes that the idea of the cleansing and healing powers of forgetting is well known in classical literature: 'Forgetting one's misfortune is already half of happiness. This is known in poetry and particularly among the tragedians […] and the love poets […].'[19] Knowing how to forget has, as Weinrich points out, never been a straightforward option, usually requiring some kind of outside force, an intervention, such as drugs, and with varying results. The expression of the desire to forget a lost love seems to travel unchanged through the ages as Michel Gondry's 2004 film *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* shows, although the methods with which to achieve this change with the times.[20] The possibility of developing drugs to induce forgetfulness has been discussed by medical scientists; these drugs would 'cure' painful memories which can be harmful to us. Judy Illes of the Stanford Center of Biomedical Ethics addresses this and explains that we need a balance in our memories:

> We inhibit the consolidation of certain memories—certainly the extraneous or mundane—and sometimes we forget things we would rather not (an imperfect but often age-appropriate excitatory–inhibitory imbalance). Of what we do consolidate, of the good and the bad, we may derive meaningful experience. There is room for modulated remembering when, like the effects of profound physical pain, suffering from the memory is unbearable or leads to behavioral madness.

Once such drugs have been successfully developed and ethical concerns dealt with, Illes continues: 'these medicines must be made available. This is not a political matter. It is a matter of ethics, human dignity, good health policy, and common sense.'[21] It is hard to see how this would not be a political matter, and the possibilities for abuse seem boundless. Interference in our memory processes can hardly be viewed as harmless, and thus any medical development in the field would never go uncontested.

But we already have drugs that have some of the sought-after effect, as oblivion is not only achieved through bathing in Lethe or losing one's memory. Other methods are also known from ancient texts, where oblivion is achieved through intoxication. Weinrich traces some of the instances that highlight the positive qualities of the forgetfulness induced by wine drinking, but the effects of intoxication also point to the dark side of oblivion,[22] as the detrimental effects of induced forgetfulness are at times

emphasised. An example of this can be found in Norse mythology when Odin attempts to steal the poet's mead from Gunnlod, but drinks too much, falling prey to the 'heron of forgetfulness' (a phrase still in use in modern Icelandic) and warns others of the dangers involved in the old Norse poem *Hávamál* (Sayings of the High One):

> The heron of forgetfulness hovers over the ale-drinking;
> he steals men's wits;
> with the feathers of this bird I was fettered
> in the court of Gunnlod.
>
> Drunk I was, I was more than drunk
> at wise Fialar's;
> that's the best sort of ale-drinking when afterwards
> every man gets his mind back again.[23]

Oblivion which heralds rebirth has more dangerous dimensions when brought about by intoxication. One is 'fettered' by the drug—a prisoner of oblivion. Negative connotations of forgetting are also much more apparent in everyday language use, myths, and metaphors than positive ones. When forgetting is understood as the opposite of memory, it is viewed as a fault, or as a character flaw, a result of deterioration, of old age. This is particularly poignant in close relationships; to forget a birthday, a name, is considered negligent and uncaring, whereas professions of love and friendship often contain references to eternal memory and remembrance. Memory will survive, thus love will, and conquer forgetting—death. But death of love brings the longing for oblivion, as witnessed in the arts through the ages, the latest example of which is undoubtedly the aforementioned film *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind*.

Keeping in mind that the fear of forgetting is conflated with death, autobiography is at times viewed as an imperative act; it answers the call to remember, to preserve memories of the past, which will provide meaning in the present.[24] One of the tasks, then, of the work of memory is to rescue from the past what might otherwise be forgotten. The autobiographer must, however, also come to terms with the fact that much already has—a topic for a more detailed discussion in some of the following chapters. Forgetting is therefore a constant companion in this endeavour, but on a more fundamental level, any writing is impossible without remembering/forgetting, as is often reiterated in discussions of the dynamic relationship

between memory and writing. Of course, for Plato, writing was not necessarily helpful to memory. In *Phaedrus* he 'reveals a marked distrust of writing, arguing that it will lead individuals to rely on external letters and signs, and lose the ability to recollect that which is within.' King Thamus argued there that 'writing could act as a prompt for recollection, but not as an aid for true remembering.'[25] Thus, the double nature of writing which Jacques Derrida was later to note in Plato's work, his pharmakon, is established and will come up time and again when memory meets technology.[26] Umberto Eco famously declared that there could never be an 'Ars Oblivionalis,' as it is impossible to have a technique to intentionally forget; one can only forget by accident.[27] But our mnemonic techniques might contribute to the deterioration of memory and thus induce forgetting, as paradoxical as that sounds, so *ars memoriae* might indeed be transformed into *ars oblivionalis*.

The goddess of memory plays, of course, a much larger role in Greek mythology than does the goddess of forgetting, as Mnemosyne/Memoria holds the all-important status of being the mother of the muses, and thus the mother of all imagination and creativity, of writing. Paul Auster claims memory/forgetting is not only present in the writing process but constitutes an integral part of the poet's manner of being in the world. Forgetting is not seen here as the opposite of memory but a necessary part of it. Seeing, remembering, and writing is a continuous process as he realises when he meets a French poet who describes in exact detail a room he had seen only once many years earlier: 'If a man is to be truly present among his surroundings, he must be thinking not of himself, but of what he sees. He must forget himself in order to be there. And from that forgetfulness arises the power of memory. It is a way of living one's life so that nothing is ever lost.'[28] The only way to write and remember is therefore to forget oneself, as only then can memory work freely to record and retain what later will be told or written. Ricoeur's dialectics of presence and absence come to mind here: the presence of our selves in the world and in the inevitable presence or absence of memory and forgetting. But the very opposite notion can be found in the often cited text on the trappings of total recall, Jorge Luís Borges' story, 'Funes the memorious,' where being present, taking everything in, means nothing can be processed. Examples of this are also found outside literature, as in the case study of AJ, which Viktor Mayer-Schönberger recites in his book, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (2009). AJ is a woman who cannot forget

and therefore cannot live in the present or make any meaningful decisions: 'Too perfect a recall, even when it is benignly intended to aid our decision-making, may prompt us to become caught up in our memories, unable to leave our past behind, and much like Borges' Funes, incapable of abstract thoughts. It is the surprising curse of remembering.'[29]

So in one way or another forgetting is necessary for our being in the world, as Augé emphasises when discussing the inescapable role of forgetting in our lives: 'Oblivion is a necessity both to society and to the individual. One must know how to forget in order to taste the full flavor of the present, of the moment, and of expectation, but memory itself needs forgetfulness: one must forget the recent past in order to find the ancient past again.'[30] 'Forgetting oneself,' a phrase meaning different things in different languages, can imply altering one's viewpoint, and perhaps this is what Augé is advocating—to see beyond oneself or the recent past—rather than a silencing or an absence. In this sense, forgetting can mean letting go of what stands in the way of understanding, imagination, or creative thought, and this is echoed in Andrei Codrescu's description of memory and the writing process:

> The stories I had forgotten had something about them that made me see *exactly* why I had forgotten them. The ones I remembered, I could tell better. It's true moreover, that whatever you forget, other people remember; it's a nice thing to know in case you need witnesses in court. But amnesia is more important to art than total recall. Amnesia shapes the few remembered or misremembered scenes into whatever you're going to make.[31]

Forgetting, or amnesia, understood in this way is therefore helpful in giving shape—form, or narrative—to past events. Total recall would impede this process, as Michel de Montaigne's adage in his essay 'On Liars' confirms, where he claims perfect memory is the death of a good story, turning on its head the value conventionally placed on having extraordinary powers of retention.[32]

As I mentioned above, the autobiographer has to come to terms with the role of forgetting in his reminiscences, and in the process of writing these down, as the writing is always based on selection, one memory is chosen while the other is discarded—'forgotten' or silenced in the writing. Of course, Freudian understanding of the forgotten has permeated our thoughts on the subject in the twentieth century, where forgetting can hide trauma or reveal it. And this informs our view of the connection between writing and the forgotten, as Michael Sheringham points out:

> We could begin with the sense that to bring memories back to the light of day, into the foreground of consciousness, into language and onto the page, is to expose them […] to a potentially destructive glare. Or we could start from the related feeling that the excavation of memory can have the therapeutic character of an exorcism, that to retrieve something from memory is to draw its sting, to be done with it, to allow it to be forgotten. Instead of reintegrating us with part of our being, the act of memory, in this perspective, engenders splitting and expulsion: remembering becomes dismembering—a way of forgetting.[33]

We 'forget' *in* writing what we omit and we 'forget' *with* writing when exorcising our memories. The conversion narrative is the archetypal autobiography of which the stated aim is to expunge the writer of her past and proclaim her salvation from its hold. A more recent example of this is the nineteenth and twentieth-century immigrant's autobiography, where the subject personifies the idea of splitting and expulsion. The imperative drive is towards expunging the past and embracing the new self in a new country, much in the same narrative arc which informs the conversion narrative.[34] In Mary Antin's seminal autobiographical work of the American immigrant, *The Promised Land* (1912), she describes the difficulty of being of two places, the old world country and the new:

> All the processes of uprooting, transportation, replanting, acclimatization, and development took place in my own soul. I feel the pang, the fear, the wonder, and the joy of it. I can never forget, for I bear the scars. But I want to forget—sometimes I long to forget. I think I have thoroughly assimilated my past—I have done its bidding—I want now to be of to-day. It is painful to be consciously of two worlds. The Wandering Jew in me seeks forgetfulness. I am not afraid to live on and on, if only I do not have to remember too much. A long past vividly remembered is like a heavy garment that clings to your limbs when you would run. And I have thought of a charm that should release me from the folds of my clinging past. I take the hint from the Ancient Mariner, who told his tale in order to be rid of it. I, too, will tell my tale, for once, and never hark back any more. I will write a bold "Finis" at the end, and shut the book with a bang![35]

The past is a heavy cloak that writing will help her shed, reminiscent of the freedom offered by oblivion and rebirth. Forgetting here is therefore forgetting in Lethe's terms, to be able to be reborn, to be cleansed of the past. Antin's past does not fit into her new surroundings; it is a heavy burden and prevents her from fully partaking in the new life, of embracing freedom.

This echoes familiar metaphors of the old and the new world; the former is heavy, inhibiting, the latter, light and free. The role of writing in freeing oneself from the past is crucial in this instance. But the writing itself, or more to the point, the text itself, can also be felt as a burden. Feeling the weight of the past is, of course, not limited to the immigrant's experience. Philippe Lejeune describes the ritualistic purging some diarists go through in the double move of writing on the past and then destroying it:

> Putting something down on paper means separating it from yourself, purifying and cleansing yourself. […] But for some diarists, the destruction, anticipated from the beginning, is ritually accomplished on a set date. […] The future self is liberated from the weight of the past by this destruction, while the present self is relieved by the new writing. The function of expression is dissociated from the function of memory—one can even say it is tied to a function of forgetting. This is the logic of shedding. You leave your old skin behind you. You get rid of it to be reborn! It's Phoenix.[36]

Again, the link is made between forgetting and rebirth. One is allowed to create oneself anew by getting rid of the past, first by writing it down, which can expunge it from the self, and then by destroying the text, expunging it from the world, reminding us of the close connection between memory and identity. A forgotten past results in a new self. But long before we recall and write down our memories, oblivion, according to Augé, has already done half the autobiographer's job:

> It is quite clear that our memory would be "saturated" rapidly if we had to preserve every image of our childhood, especially those of our earliest childhood. But what is interesting is that which remains. And what remains—remembrances or traces, we shall come back to that—what remains is the product of an erosion caused by oblivion. Memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea.[37]

Here, the view is voiced that forgetting 'shapes' our memories and thereby our selves, also mentioned by Codrescu above. Forgetting relieves us of our past, but also forms our memories, the remains, the traces of that past. Remembering in this instance is made possible by forgetting and makes us able to forge a relationship with that past. But what are we looking for in our memories? Sheringham suggests that at times memory can acquire the status of myth, as when memory is presented as a sublime gift which the autobiographer makes use of, gathering the past and unifying his past and

present selves with its aid. Memory has therefore essentially done some of the autobiographer's work for him: 'The idea that memory secretly sifts and decants tends to indemnify the autobiographer not only against the accusation that what was most important may have been forgotten, but also against the suspicion that memories have been hand-picked and meddled with.'[38] This understanding of the workings of memory is one which autobiographers often make use of when introducing their text, as we shall see in the Chap. 2, echoing Augé's metaphor of how forgetting forms our memories. According to Winter, however, this ignores the role of silence, as he claims when discussing Augé's metaphor the erosion is not as straightforward or as final; the presence of the forgotten will make itself felt: 'We speak of those deposits below the surface of the water which emerge with the tides or with other environmental changes. In the framework of how we think about memory and forgetting, these hidden shapes cannot simply be ignored because they are concealed at some moments and revealed at others. They must be examined as part of the cartography of recollection and remembrance.'[39]

These are some of the ways in which the relationship between memory, forgetting, and writing has been formulated. But there is also an additional factor one needs to add to the equation: i.e., identity. The tripartite connections and convergences between memory, narrative, and identity has of course been the focus of many studies. Paul John Eakin brings together theories of narrative identity and the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio's theories on the shaping of the self by narrative and its relation to the body in his analysis of autobiographical writing.[40] We are created out of stories, and we make ourselves out of stories, as narrative is memory and by extension identity. Memory is central to this process, as the self is a temporal form: 'self is not an entity but a state of feeling, an integral part of the process of consciousness unfolding over time.'[41] This analysis of the workings of autobiographical writing offers us a different angle from which to view forgetting in autobiography, which will be explored further in some of the following chapters.

Our understanding of the role memory plays in the autobiographical narrative has been greatly influenced by an innocuous piece of pastry. Marcel Proust's exploration of the power of memory to bring us back ourselves, has invited much analysis, commentary, and imitators, at times conferring the mythical status on memory Sheringham mentions. Walter Benjamin, however, finds forgetting even in this supreme instance of the power of memory in his analysis of Proust, which points yet again to the intricate relationship between the two terms:

> Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? And is it not this work of spontaneous recollection, in which remembrance is the woof and forgetting the warp, a counterpart to Penelope's work rather than its likeness? For here the day unravels what the night has woven. When we awake each morning, we hold in our hands, usually weakly and loosely, but a few fringes of the carpet of lived existence, as woven into us by forgetting. However, with our purposeful activity and, even more, our purposive remembering, each day unravels the web, the ornaments of forgetting.[42]

This unravelling of the web of *mémoire involontaire* makes it a companion piece of forgetting—so loosely woven as to offer no resistance to purposeful remembering. Our means of preserving the past with remembrance, writing, and other such methods are often implied to work in the opposite fashion, their role in memorialisation made suspect, or their usefulness doubted. The archival quality of these methods brings us to Derrida's notion of the archive and his thought that the archive seems to invite forgetting as we can see in Richard Crownshaw's elucidation of Derrida's ideas:

> At the very heart of the archive is that which destroys it "introducing a priori, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument. […] The archive always works, and a priori, against itself." Not only does it work against itself from the beginning, it destroys itself from the beginning, devouring itself without trace. […] Working against itself, the archive works towards the eradication of memory, towards forgetting.[43]

So our main means of preserving the past, of retaining memory, can have the exact opposite effect. Again memory and forgetting seem to be locked in a peculiar wrestling match, never knowing which will come out on top, even our efforts of purposeful remembrance doomed to produce forgetfulness.

Forgetting has, of course, not only private ramifications but societal and political dimensions, often discussed in the wake of World War II, the Holocaust, and other times of trauma and crises. Colmeiro discusses forgetting in relation to the legacy of the Spanish Civil War and the Franco-era, and is of the opinion that forgetting is too 'careless' a concept. He believes 'forgetting' connotes an oversight, an accident and proposes the word 'desmemoria,' or 'dismemory,' which implies faults in historical memory, lack of knowledge or interest in the past. 'Desmemoria' is socially determined, and in Spanish history, he traces it back to Franco's repressive

regime; its characteristics can be seen in censorship, education, the media, and political decisions made during the transition to democracy.[44] The historian Josefina Cuesta agrees that 'forgetting' is not the right word and prefers to use 'silence' instead,[45] as Winter does later in his study, while Luisa Passerini emphasises the difference between the two terms:

> Silence and oblivion are often confused if memory is analysed as narration, be it oral or written. Something may be unsaid because its memory has been actually repressed—by trauma, contrast with the present, conflicts of individual and collective nature—or because the conditions for its expression no longer (or do not yet) exist. Sometimes the change in these conditions may break the silence and allow memories to be expressed, while at other times silence can last for so long and under such conditions that it may contribute to the effacing of memory, and induce oblivion. At the same time, however, silence can nourish a story and establish a communication to be patiently saved in periods of darkness, until it is able to come to light in a new and enriched form.[46]

We should therefore be careful to differentiate between 'natural' oblivion or 'erosion' on the one hand and deliberate or political silencing and 'desmemoria' on the other. We should also be aware of the cultural practices and the historical conditions governing the forgotten and silenced.

The memory boom towards the end of the millennium, with its ever increasing number of memorials of war, the holocaust, museums, and narratives, has of course produced much debate. As Huyssen explains, 'The undisputed waning of history and historical consciousness, the lament about political, social, and cultural amnesia, and the various discourses, celebratory or apocalyptic, about *posthistoire* have been accompanied in the past decade and a half by a memory boom of unprecedented proportions.'[47] But perhaps this is not as contradictory as it seems; the commemoration, the remembrance, and the calls to remember are possibly the logical conclusion of a lack of historical consciousness, with the memorials bearing witness to our need to remember but longing (like Antin) to forget our inglorious past. James E. Young explains:

> In this age of mass memory production and consumption, in fact, there seems to be an inverse proportion between the memorialization of the past and its contemplation and study. For once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. In shouldering the memory-work, monuments may relieve viewers of their memory burden.[48]

Writing, building memorials, archiving the past, all bear within them an 'act of betrayal.' And Ian Sinclair in *Lights Out for the Territory* claims that 'Memorials are a way of forgetting, reducing generational guilt to a grid of albino chess pieces, bloodless stalagmites. Shapes that are easy to ignore stand in for the trauma of remembrance.'[49] And so the wrestling match continues.

Perhaps we need a new aesthetics, a new way in which to retain in our mind the manifold and contradictory effects of the remembering/forgetting category. In his discussion of François Lyotard, Lawrence L. Langer claims that 'Lyotard addresses this dilemma when he calls for "an aestethics of the memory of the forgotten, an anesthetics." "Here," says Lyotard, "to fight against forgetting means to fight to remember that one forgets as soon as one believes, draws conclusions, and holds for certain. It means to fight against forgetting the precariousness of what has been established, of the re-established past; it is a fight for the sickness whose recovery is simulated".'[50] What I want to emphasise is how a palpable sense of the forgotten is mediated, not just in the sense of something forgotten being unearthed, but as being constantly present whether it is a politically compromised past or in private recollections. It might be made present as an obstacle, hesitation, gap, or even in a marked fluidity of memories; where there is a sense of the forgotten there is *doubt*. Lack of such doubt makes the memory seem overdetermined. Paying attention to this can reveal some of the problematics in the remembering/forgetting relationship.

At the start of this chapter I claimed that I would not try to untangle these terms, but it seems unavoidable to emphasise the different workings of the terms and point out their relationship to Winter's additional tier, silence, if we are to engage in any fruitful analysis. In the chapters that follow, the complexities, and at times contradictory ideas and commonplaces on the role of forgetting will be maintained and examined in an effort to engage with memory texts through the prism of the forgotten. It is an attempt at mapping the location of the forgotten and the doubts and uncertainties it raises, and the different ways in which those appear in life writing and fictional memory texts.

This study consists of two main parts: the first part focuses on the role of the forgotten, or scenes of forgetting, in the individual life story, examining various types of life writing and contemporary forms of self-expression, from traditional autobiography to social media websites; the second part examines societal aspects of forgetting in memory texts, fictional and autobiographical, with special emphasis on cultural memory

and forgetting. The book's main aim is to map the methods and strategies writers employ when writing the forgotten, as I maintain that forgetting is a constant companion in any memory text and plays a decisive role in the memory work performed in the texts. The main theoretical objective is to examine carefully the connection between forgetting in terms of cultural and individual memory as expressed in memory texts, by drawing from two disciplines at once: memory studies and theories on life writing, in order to gain a better understanding of the workings of forgetting in narrative. It seems useful to keep an eye out for theory from the above two directions, as I hope that my conclusions will feed into both theoretical perspectives. Some chapters will focus on one or two particular texts in detail, others attempt a broader overview of particular types of texts or types of themes found in texts. Some of the texts I will mention in this study have been written on extensively, but as I only address a limited aspect of each, I will not provide a comprehensive list of the available critical literature for every one of them.

In Chap. 2, the initial chapter of the first part, the focus is on life writing, where I show, using historical and contemporary examples, how authors address the role of forgetting in autobiography in their prefaces or preambles. The role of the introductory remarks—be it in formal introductions, forewords, or simply some words in the first paragraphs of the text—varies greatly. In some cases the author makes use of them to sound off a warning to the reader regarding the veracity of the text, perhaps in an attempt to renegotiate the autobiographical pact—often in the hope of influencing the reading and the reader's expectations of the text. Many authors address the form itself, the role of memory, and its relationship to narrative. The ubiquity of such preambles bears witness to a certain disquiet about the possibilities and restrictions of autobiographical writing, not least regarding its founding principle: memory. Often they make the presence of the forgotten felt by drawing attention to it, for instance in the hesitation voiced by writers in claiming authority for the narrative of their memory texts, fully aware that the forgotten will also always have its say. The different ways authors express this is highly illuminating for the processes at work in the shaping of autobiography and our expectations of the genre.

The third chapter is devoted to the analysis of texts which use paratextual devices such as extensive footnotes, corrections, or multiple narratives in order to accentuate the complications of writing memory. The focus is on particular representations and reworkings of the past, which for one reason or another, cast doubt on their own veracity and referentiality,

and therefore align themselves more with the forgotten than with remembrance. Texts analysed include the works of Mary McCarthy, Georges Perec, Dave Eggers, and Martin Amis. By analysing texts that bring to the foreground the memory processes at work in autobiographical writing, we should gain insight not only into the nature of experimental texts of this type but into autobiographical writing in general. In these cases forgetting can be seen to take on form in narrative; these scenes of forgetting are apparent, for instance, where the gaps, the forgotten, the mis-remembered is constantly drawn attention to. In the second half of the chapter I discuss autobiographers' search and encounter with the family archive. As in the notes and corrections, this is an area which draws attention to the writing moment and to the attempts the authors make at discovering, corroborating, and reworking the past. The texts demonstrate a certain desire for the archive—a hope or expectation that it will make up for or eliminate forgetting. Among the texts discussed are works by Vladimir Nabokov, Sally Mann, and Linda Grant.

In the fourth chapter we move on to new forms of self-expression and investigate the role of the forgotten for our digital remembering selves. The challenges posed by new technologies of expression are different to the politics and performance of memory than those of traditional textual representation. Online self-expression is proliferating in many different forms across the internet, which raises questions about memory and forgetting, privacy and intimacy. This chapter will explore the different types of narrative of the self, created in third generation web pages, and how daily self-expression impacts on our sense of self and our narratives of self and past history. This is especially relevant as the digital world has been renegotiating the possibility of forgetting, as the emphasis there is always by default on preserving and remembering, therefore the place of the forgotten in self-expression has to be redefined.

The second half of the book addresses the social and political ramifications of forgetting using examples from different parts of the world, which all concern in one way or another collective memory of historical events: the Spanish Civil War, the Nazi occupation of Norway, the Holocaust, and immigration. The twenty-first century has witnessed an intense debate on memory, forgetting, silence, and the past in Spain. The book's fifth chapter reviews this debate, examines theoretical texts on this subject and attempts to elucidate the role fiction plays in this debate on forgetting. The literary response to this discourse will be investigated in texts from the first years of the transition to democracy and from the first decade of

this century; analysis will include texts by authors such as Carmen Martín Gaite, Javier Cercas, Jaume Cabré, and Jordi Soler. The intense interest in the past and the overriding impulse to dig up the past, to bring to light what has been forgotten, has to come to terms with the obstacles put in the way of collective remembrance, but the obstacles in themselves can be seen as the impetus behind the writing. The forgotten is an ever looming presence in the texts, and the writers all have different methods of reworking and recreating a forgotten past.

In Chap. 6 we turn our sights to northern Europe, to Knut Hamsun's autobiographical work, *On Overgrown Paths*, in order to examine how a disputed past and controversial actions are addressed in life writing, and the role played by forgetting where it becomes a central rhetorical device in dealing with the past. In this short text a convergence of different elements of forgetting come together in the voice of a man who is fighting not only the natural forgetting of the aging process, but also the common consensus of the memory politics of the day of what should be remembered and forgotten. It is an attempt to represent his version of the past, in a meandering and fragmented text which does not provide the solace his readers craved.

In the seventh chapter I investigate the unknown or unseen past in postmemory texts, particularly in the work of Lisa Appignanesi and Linda Grant. The discourse of postmemory is linked to theories on forgetting, trauma, silence, and writing. As in the previous chapters we see where collective memory and private remembrance meet, but this time they are very much in relation with the complexities introduced by the generational divide, with the introduction of postmemory into the mix, adding yet a different hue to the presence of the forgotten in memory texts. The role of the memory of our parents will come under special scrutiny when analysing texts where the dementia of a parent is one of the issues at stake.

The final chapter of the book, or coda, is concerned with the part forgetting plays in the use of memory aids, particularly in the use photographs in memory texts. A discussion follows of recent experimentation with the interplay of image and text, and how this *aide-memoire* can become a tool for forgetting and/or recreating the past. I will examine the use of photographs in the texts of James Ellroy and Sally Mann. Here, I attempt to pinpoint particular visual ways, from which can emerge places of forgetting, voids that highlight the constant movement between the two terms as a flickering sign in the wind: remember/forget, memory/forgetting, remembrance/silence. A short discussion on the use of metaphors of memory in texts of life writing will then lead us to the conclusion,

where the different strands of the argument, as it has been developed through the chapters, will be brought together.

Note on texts and translations: In all instances primary texts were consulted in the original language (with the exception of the text by Jaume Cabré, written originally in Catalan, where the Castellan translation was used), but where available, existing English translations were used in all quotations; in all other cases, the translations are mine.

Notes

1. Marc Augé, *Oblivion*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 18.
2. See for instance Astrid Erll's careful differentiation between memory, remembering, and forgetting: 'Remembering and forgetting are two sides—or different processes of the same coin, that is memory.' *Memory in Culture,* transl. Sara B. Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 8. In common parlance, however, memory and remembering are often conflated, with forgetting viewed as its opposite. This will inevitably colour some of the discussion in this book.
3. Douwe Draaisma, *Forgetting: Myths, Perils and Compensations*, trans. Liz Waters (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 4. Jens Brockmeier also suggests that we need to 'overcome the traditional picture of Remembering vs Forgetting, and instead conceive of them as two sides of one process, a process in which we give shape to our experience, thought and imagination in terms of past, present and future.' 'Remembering and Forgetting: Narrative as Cultural Memory,' *Culture and Psychology* 8.1 (2002): 15–43, p. 21.
4. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 4.
5. José F. Colmeiro, *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural. De la postguerra a la postmodernidad*, Memoria Rota: Exilios y Heterodoxias. Serie estudios 40 (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2005), pp. 28–29. Colmeiro is referring to the title of a work by Mario Benedetti, *El olvido está lleno de memoria* (Madrid: Visor 1995). The quote from David Herzberger is from, *Narrating the Past: Fiction and Historiography in Post-War Spain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 82.
6. Erll, *Memory in Culture*, p. 9.
7. In this study 'memory texts' denote life writing as well as fiction that has memory as one of its main themes or narrative constructs.
8. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 414.

9. Ann Rigney, 'Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory,' *Journal of European Studies* 25.1 (2005): 11–28, p. 17.
10. Astrid Erll, 'Narratology and Cultural Memory Studies, *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, eds. Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 212–227, p. 213.
11. Jay Winter, 'Thinking about silence,' *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 3–31, p. 4.
12. Winter, 'Thinking about silence,' p. 10.
13. Paul Connerton, 'Seven types of forgetting,' *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 59–71, p. 59.
14. Emilio Lledó, *El surco del tiempo. Meditaciones sobre el mito platónica de la escritura y la memoria* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1992), p. 11. Quoted in Alberto Reig Tapia, *Memoria de la Guerra Civil: Los mitos de la tribu* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1999), p. 108.
15. Augé, *Oblivion,* p. 14.
16. Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, trans. Steven Rendall (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 24.
17. Jay Winter, 'Thinking about Silence,' p. 4.
18. Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 48. She quotes John Frow's classification of different types of memory categories in *Time and Commodity Culture: Essays in Cultural Theory and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 227.
19. Weinrich, *Lethe,* p. 15.
20. Much has been written on Gondry's film and its approach to memory and forgetting. See for instance the collection of essays *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,* Philosophers on Film, ed. Christopher Grau (London: Routledge, 2009).
21. Judy Illes, 'Not Forgetting Forgetting,' *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 7.9 (2007): 1–2, p. 2.
22. Weinrich, *Lethe*, p. 16.
23. Verses 13 and 14 in 'Sayings of the High One,' *The Poetic Edda,* trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1999), p. 16.
24. Paul John Eakin termed the phrase 'the autobiographical imperative' in one of his earlier studies on autobiography, see *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 275–278. However, he later distanced himself from what he was to term 'grand' claims in 'Living Autobiographically,' *Biography* 28.1 (Winter 2005): 1–14, p. 3.
25. Whitehead, *Memory,* p. 20.
26. Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy,' *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 61–172.

27. Umberto Eco, 'An *Ars Oblivionalis?* Forget it!' trans. Marilyn Migiel, *PMLA* 103.3 (May 1988): 254–261.
28. Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 138.
29. Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 13.
30. Augé, *Oblivion,* p. 3.
31. Andrei Codrescu, 'Adding to My Life,' *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, eds. Kathleen Ashely, Leigh Gilmore, Gerald Peters (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 21–30, p. 30.
32. Michel de Montaigne, 'On Liars,' *Essays*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1993), pp. 28–33.
33. Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires. Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 311.
34. See William Boelhower, *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States: Four Versions of an Italian American Self* (Madison, WI: Essidue Edizione, 1982), p. 29. Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong has pointed out the need to differentiate between first and second generation immigrant autobiography in applying this model in 'Immigrant Autobiography: Some Questions of Definition and Approach,' *American Autobiography. Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Paul John Eakin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp. 142–170.
35. Mary Antin, *The Promised Land*, Introduction and Notes by Werner Sollors (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 3.
36. Philippe Lejeune, 'How do diaries end?' trans. Victoria Lodewick, *Biography* 24.1 (Winter 2001): 99–112, p. 106.
37. Augé, *Oblivion,* p. 20.
38. Sheringham, *French Autobiography,* p. 290.
39. Winter, 'Thinking about Silence,' p. 3.
40. Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How we create identity in narrative* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).
41. Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*, p. 75.
42. Walter Benjamin, 'On the Image of Proust,' *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, 1927–1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 237–247, p. 238.
43. Richard Crownshaw, 'Reconsidering Postmemory: Photography, the Archive, and Post-Holocaust Memory in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*,' *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 37.4 (2004): 215–232, p. 219. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 11–12.

44. Colmeiro, *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural,* p. 35.
45. Josefina Cuesta, *La odisea de la memoria: historia de la memoria en España. Siglo XX* (Madrid: Alianza, 2008), p. 44.
46. Luisa Passerini, 'Memories between silence and oblivion,' *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts,* eds. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 2006), pp. 238–254, p. 238.
47. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), p. 5.
48. James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 181.
49. Iain Sinclair, *Lights Out for the Territory* (London: Granta, 1997), p. 9.
50. Lawrence L. Langer, 'Memory's Time: Chronology and Duration in Holocaust Testimonies,' *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 13–19, p. 10. François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'The Jews,'* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. xxii.

PART I

Scenes of Forgetting in Life Writing

CHAPTER 2

Forewords and Forgettings: Introductions and Preambles in Autobiography

Our memory is an imperfect resource, for as we know we can only recall a limited number of events, periods, and people from our past. We also each have different mnemonic capabilities—some retain in the episodic memory[1] and recall vividly certain periods in their lives—school years, university years—and regale their environment with stories from those times. Some have a particularly strong semantic memory and are good at remembering faces, numbers, or names, while for others this kind of memory is very poor. We might have blurred memories of people and places from our past which we then try to conjure up on being reacquainted with at a later date, for instance when walking through a city we visited a long time ago, we are surprised at how far geographical memory has carried us. Some periods in our lives we rarely recall; 'broken chains' of memory such as the loss of a close family member, loss of spouse, loss of country, or similar breaks can prevent us from being reminded of the past. We might hesitate to delve deeply into a past shared with an ex-partner; loss of parents at an early age leaves us without the necessary reminders of our young selves; and if our old country is dramatically different from the one we live in, it hardly has a place in our daily existence. Paul Connerton, in his typology of forgetting, calls this type of forgetting '*constitutive in the formation of a new identity*. The emphasis here is not so much on the loss entailed in being unable to retain certain things as rather on the gain that accrues to those who know how to discard memories that serve no practicable

G. Gudmundsdottir, *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59864-6_2

purpose in the management of one's current identity and ongoing purposes.'[2] Then there are the misremembered or repressed events, possibly a traumatic past characterised in our memory by gaps or silences. All these areas of forgetting nevertheless form a part of our life story, our pasts, our identity, and the question I want to ask is how can this be, and how is it expressed in autobiographical narrative? How do we tell stories of the lost bits, of the absences, of nothing? How does the forgotten stake its claim in our life narratives?

The influence upon our memory of traumatic events is well known and researched. Cathy Caruth's work in this field and her definition of trauma has been very influential in forming our understanding of the phenomenon: 'The pathology consists […] in the *structure of* experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it.'[3] Trauma is characterised by 'repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site.' And this entails that to 'listen to a crisis of a trauma […] is not only to listen to the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor's departure from it; the challenge for the therapeutic listener, in other words, is *how to listen to departure*.'[4] Caruth and Dori Laub place great emphasis on *telling* and *listening* as a response to trauma, while analysing carefully the obstacles that can impede both efforts. Laub explains with specific reference to the Holocaust: 'what was ultimately missing, not in the courage of the witnesses, not in the depth of their emotional responses, but in the human cognitive capacity to perceive and to assimilate the totality of what was really happening at the time.'[5] This cognitive gap is what trauma sufferers can come across, not only in their listeners, but in their own mind and memory. Susannah Radstone in her discussion of Caruth and Laub explains:

> The subject of trauma theory is characterised by that which it does not know/remember. This is not a subject caught up in desire, but a subject constituted by forgetting. The inner world of the traumatized subject is characterized not by repression of unacknowledgable fantasies but by dissociated memories—traceless traces. […] The traumatized subject can remember its having forgotten, if you like—can acknowledge the gaps and absences. Most importantly, this act of "recovery" takes place in relation to a *witness*.[6]

Again, the emphasis is on telling and listening, but Radstone highlights here the inroad the forgotten makes in traumatic memories. This can raise the thorny issue of repressed and recovered memories which have also been

prominent in the discourse on trauma. Summing up the available research on the phenomenon Douwe Draaisma concludes that 'The outcomes converge towards the conclusion that there is a degree of forgetting, so that details disappear from the memory and discrepancies gradually creep in, but there is no repression or splitting off. What traumas seem to demand of memory is their recurrence rather than their repression.'[7]

The study of the relationship between trauma and narrative became very prominent in the wake of the Holocaust, and with it developed a certain outlook on literary representations of trauma which some theorists at least claimed to have a particular place in avant-garde or modernist texts. While trauma studies during the last three decades or so have argued the representative and narrative impossibility of trauma, a veritable growth in trauma narratives can nevertheless, in retrospect, be observed as having developed alongside it. The millennial 'memory boom' appears to have affected literature along with other public spaces, as Peter Middleton and Tim Woods' study of 'literatures of memory' from 2000 shows, and I will examine this issue further in Chap. 5.[8] To Roger Luckhurst this demonstrates that the impossibility of representing trauma generates not only narrative rupture, but narrative possibility as well: 'Cultural forms have provided the genres and narrative forms in which traumatic disruption is temporalized and rendered transmissible,' he suggests. And despite the 'prescriptive aesthetic associated with canonical trauma fiction' that any literature that does not experiment uncompromisingly to find formal ways of conveying the *aporia* generated by traumatic experience is unethical, there has been an explosion of mainstream and popular texts dealing with trauma and memory, spanning a wide spectrum of fictional forms.[9] The discourse on trauma is thus well established, and some of it will inform the discussion in this study on the larger category of forgetting and, by extension, the question whether it is possible to locate forgetting in autobiographical writing.

Before we attempt to interrogate these instances of forgetting we need to give some thought to the reciprocal relationship between memory and narrative. One of the underlying assumptions of this study is the well-established notion I discussed in the Introduction that memory and narrative are inextricably linked, as the only way we have access to another's memory, and in some sense our own, is through narrative. Autobiography, as the narrative genre most associated with remembrance, is an ideal starting point, as it also allows us an insight into the processes and transactions at work when writers take on narrative form and remembering/forgetting.

Narrative is impossible without memory, and this applies both to the telling and listening. As Peter Brooks explains, memory is a 'key faculty in the capacity to perceive relations of beginnings, middles, and ends through time, the shaping power of narrative.'[10] Antonia Harbus goes one step further suggesting the 'circularity of influence, and the mutual interdependence of published (and therefore culturally transmitted) life-writing, the creation and deployment of autobiographical memories, and life narratives deserves closer scrutiny.' She suggests that the way to go about this might be to consider 'the role played by published and specifically literary autobiographies on the generic and narrative features of reported autobiographical memories.'[11] Thus, our memory narratives are always culturally conditioned and possibly directly influenced by published autobiographical works, if Harbus' theory bears out.

We rely on memory and narrative to overcome the obstacles forgetting inevitably places in our way. Remembrance, recall of an event, whether clearly or dimly remembered can be the kernel of narrative, an incitement for storytelling; however, there is not one particular narrative it calls for but countless, changing with time, form, and audience. Brooks in his analysis of the much discussed 'stolen ribbon' scene in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782) explains how one event can generate countless narratives:

> Rousseau makes it explicit that the contradictions encountered in the attempt to understand and present the self in all its truth provide a powerful narrative machine. Any time one goes over a moment of the past, the machine can be relied on to produce more narrative—not only differing stories of the past, but future scenarios and narratives of writing itself. There is simply no end to narrative on this model, since there is no "solution" to the "crime."[12]

Authors represent themselves and their sense of self in narrative based on memories of particular events, and if these memories can in theory produce countless narratives, what effect can the telling possibly have on memory in the process? Marc Augé claims that narrative gives shape and form to remembrances, as we saw in the Introduction, and by doing so narrative inevitably will bring changes to that memory. The almost inevitable process of bringing our memories into narrative seems therefore to carry its own risks as not only does it run the risk of forgetting but also—and perhaps the end result is the same—being turned into something else.

Augé explains: 'As soon as one risks making "remembrances" into a tale by bringing order and clarity to what at first were merely confused and unique impressions, one risks never to remember anything but the first tale or those that followed it.'[13] In this scenario narrative threatens to obscure memory, calling to mind Plato's view of writing as a technique which can replace our memories, as I mentioned in the Introduction. This leaves us with a question: How can we retain memories of the past without recounting them in narrative? Neurological research on memory has also shown interest in the effects of narrative, as Jonathan K. Foster explains. He takes the example of the experience people have after watching a film:

> Later, when we come to try to remember that event, some parts of the film come readily to mind, whereas other parts we may re-construct—based on the parts that we remember and on what we know or believe must have happened. (The latter is likely to be predicated on our inferential processes about the world, combined with the elements of the film that we recall.) In fact, we are so good at this sort of re-construction (or "filling in the gaps") that we are often consciously unaware that it has happened. This seems especially likely to happen when a memory is told and retold, with different influences present at each time of retrieval.[14]

We embellish, fill in the gaps automatically and unconsciously in our seemingly primal need (or in our culturally conditioned need) for a coherent narrative. The photographer Sally Mann in a foreword to her recent memoir, *Hold Still: A Memoir with Photographs* (2015), is traveling along similar lines when she notes,

> I tend to agree with the theory that if you want to keep a memory pristine, you must not call upon it too often, for each time it is revisited, you alter it irrevocably, remembering not the original impression left by experience but the last time you recalled it. With tiny differences creeping in at each cycle, the exercise of our memory does not bring us closer to the past but draws us farther away.[15]

Thus, from this vantage point, we talk ourselves away from the past, rather than evoke it, resurrect it or bring it to life, as other common notions of narrative and memory would have. This idea is perhaps counterintuitive to the common sense attitude to memory, where repetition is favoured as a mnemonic device, although that generally pertains more to semantic memory than episodic, autobiographical memory. The way in which

narrative can obscure memories also manifests itself in its form and aesthetics. Mann notes that narrative has its own agenda, so to speak:

> I had learned over time to meekly accept whatever betrayals memory pulled over on me, allowing my mind to polish its own beautiful lie. In distorting the information it's supposed to be keeping safe, the brain, to its credit, will often bow to some instinctive aesthetic wisdom, imparting to our life's events a coherence, logic, and symbolic elegance that's not present or not so obvious in the improbably, dishevelled sloppiness of what we've actually been through. (xii–xiii)

So narrative has a particular role and function as a tool in memory work; it allows us to recount past events, our mind and narrative conventions and structures helpfully filling in the gaps of memory—and it allows us to share our past with others. But by sharing it with others, as is inevitable if we take on board Maurice Halbwachs' theory of how our memories are formed in society, the memory is transformed, it changes, is distorted, or even forgotten, in the telling.[16] Augé explains how this inroad made by others into our memories can be troubling: 'The trouble with childhood memories is that they are soon reshaped by the tales of those who take charge of them: parents or friends who integrate them into their own legend.'[17] In the two types of instances recounted—on the one hand the telling in itself, on the other the influence of the reception—the retelling of memory either alters it or replaces it (thus inducing forgetting of the initial memory), and the outside influences on this narrative, our 'inferential processes' and the influences of the group we tell them to, suggest that narrative will inevitably obscure memory. This presupposes an original memory which can be retained by some other means, and promotes a belief in an original, 'pristine' memory.

We should keep in mind that Augé is here referring to the tales we tell of our memories in everyday life, and we have to differentiate between that process and what is at stake in published autobiographies. Everyone tells stories of their lives to others; very few publish autobiographical texts, although this traditional pattern is being transformed in the twenty-first century with people's ever present self-expression online, as I discuss further in Chap. 4. Here we are concerned, however, with what happens to these quotidian narrated memories in published texts, i.e., how do autobiographical practices impinge on memory processes, and furthermore what 'risk' does the autobiographer take by turning his memories into a structured narrative to share with others. Does the public

readership have a similar effect on memory as Augé's familial influences? Is this a pressing concern in autobiographical writing? Claire Boyle has theorised on the anxiety that can accompany autobiographical writing, on what she describes as the autobiographer's fear that her self will be consumed by others. This might also pertain not only to self but also to memory with the writers anxious of losing ownership of their lives and memories—writing not only replaces memory in this instance, as in Plato's estimation, but removes it from its 'rightful owner' and/or transforms it. Boyle discusses the anxieties often apparent in late twentieth-century French autobiographical writing and suggests that what generates these anxieties is fear: 'fear of being exposed to external perception, and fear of what exactly those external perceptions will be.'[18] The texts in question employ certain strategies in countering this: 'The principal aim of these strategies, I shall argue, is to discourage readings in which the textual self is seen as the gateway to the walking, talking self of the author.'[19] The message to the reader is a warning that the autobiographical work will not provide him with a stake in the person of the author, her self or her memory.

It seems that autobiographical writing can be a hazardous journey and leave writers exposed to the influences of the reception of their writing. The additional doubt voiced by many autobiographers is that conventional or traditional narrative devices are not capable of doing justice to their memories or cannot accurately reflect the structure of their past. The initial problem for the autobiographer, however, is not only the problem with narrative, its form and transformative properties, but simply with memory itself; not least of which is the fact that what we remember is not necessarily the whole story, and that the forgotten might tell a different version of it altogether. After describing some of her earliest memories in 'A Sketch of the Past' Virginia Woolf goes on to explain in words echoing Freud's theory of screen memories that 'These then are some of my first memories. But of course as an account of my life they are misleading, because the things one does not remember are as important; perhaps they are more important.'[20] In his autobiographical work *Nothing to be Frightened of* (2008) Julian Barnes voices a similar concern over the role of the forgotten in our life stories and the problems with representing it in narrative: 'We talk about our memories, but should perhaps talk more about our forgettings, even if that is a more difficult—or logically impossible—feat.'[21] The thought that the forgotten might tell a different story of our lives to the one we believe memory tells us, and an anxiety of what that might do to our sense of self, is a real concern here.

The forgotten might also be viewed as haunting our memories, our stories, over which we have no control. Such thoughts on the unreliability of memory and the ambiguous and perhaps unknowable role of the forgotten in our life stories—the forgotten stories of our lives—can be said to characterise a type of autobiographical practice (which we may term literary) in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These thoughts inform a tendency in many such texts to question the capability of autobiographical writing to represent the past, a life, a self—whether such reservations are influenced by psychoanalytical thought, modernist doubts about narrative conventions, or postmodern/poststructuralist ideas about our relationship to the world outside the text. This is not to say that the forgotten is somehow a recent phenomenon in life writing, but rather that in the last century its role in autobiographical texts is brought very much to the foreground in a variety of ways, some of which we will explore in more detail in Chap. 3. Woolf's and Barnes' words on the paradoxical status of memory in autobiographical writing echo what many autobiographers have voiced throughout the history of the genre, often when addressing the reader in some form or another, when they raise the issues of the impact of narrative or generic literary form on remembering/forgetting.

Introducing a Life

Autobiographers often address these issues directly in the introductions to their works. Using historical and contemporary examples from a wide range of autobiographical writing I hope to show how authors seem compelled to explain in their prefaces or preambles the way in which they attempted to come to grips with the problems they faced in writing an autobiography. The tone and content of the introductory remarks—be it in formal introductions, forewords, or simply some words in the first paragraphs of the text—varies greatly. In some cases the author makes use of them to sound off a warning to the reader regarding the veracity of the text—often with an eye to influencing the reading and the reader's expectations of the text, thereby attempting to renegotiate the autobiographical pact—others extol the virtues of memory and its powerful hold on their writings. 'The original assumptive authorial preface,' Gerard Genette explains in his book on paratexts in a section devoted to introductions, 'has as its chief function *to ensure that the text is read properly.* This simplistic phrase is more complex than it may seem, for it can be analysed into two actions, the first of which enables—but does not in any

way guarantee—the second […]. These two actions are *to get the book read* and *to get the book read properly*.'[22] The latter function seems to be of particular relevance to autobiographers. Many authors discuss the form itself, how choosing one form over another is a reflection of their sense of self; some discuss the role of memory, more often than not its unreliability; others expressly discuss the link between memory and narrative. The ubiquity of such preambles bears witness to a certain disquiet about the possibilities and restrictions of autobiographical writing, not least regarding its founding principle: memory. Often they make the presence of the forgotten felt by drawing attention to it, for instance in the hesitation voiced in claiming authority for the narrative of their memory texts in terms of historical accuracy, fully aware that the forgotten will also always have its say. The different ways authors express this is highly illuminating for the processes at work in the shaping of autobiographical narrative and our expectations of the genre, so it is worthwhile to pay attention to those introductions Paul John Eakin describes as 'the promises and disclaimers that autobiographers instinctively make before they get started.'[23]

Of course, there is a significant difference between a formal preface and introductory paragraphs; the introduction or preface would belong to the paratext in Genette's terms, the others not, but they essentially serve the same purpose. They most often contain some form of a statement of purpose, a reference to the truthfulness of the work in question; many of them mention sincerity; some touch upon the status of the genre between fiction and autobiography, and all by default draw attention to the writing moment and the referential status of the text. This is part of the transaction between writer and reader, and highlights the particular significance of that relationship in autobiography. The author is calling the reader as a witness to a testimony, and the introductions emphasise the role the reader plays as a receiver of these memories and in his interpretive function. It also brings to the fore how important 'ways of reading' are for autobiography. Philippe Lejeune sees this, of course, in terms of the 'autobiographical pact' when the 'implicit or explicit codes of publication—on that fringe of the printed text which, in reality, *controls* the entire reading (author's name, title, subtitle, name of the collection, name of the publisher, even including the ambiguous game of prefaces).'[24] This 'ambiguous game' is one of the tools the autobiographer makes use of to further define this pact. To *introduce* an autobiography to its readers with a preface or introductory paragraph seems to reflect a need

to distinguish the autobiographical work from other types of works (philosophical or literary), and it is an attempt to steer the reader in a particular direction.

Famously, some introductions serve the purpose of proclaiming the subject's singularity, importance, individuality, that needs expression and demands an audience, such as Rousseau's assertive introduction to his *Confessions* or Nietzsche's grand statements in his *Ecce Homo* (1908), where he explains that it is necessary for him to tell his story as 'the disparity between the greatness of my task and the *smallness* of my contemporaries has found expression in the fact that I have neither been heard nor even so much as seen.'[25] Of course, settling scores, righting wrongs, expressing one's 'true self' as opposed to the rumours circulating about the writer, is very much part of the stated or inferred motivation in the introductions, with Rousseau leading the way. He also sets the tone struck repeatedly in later writings when he states that mistakes in the narrative are not wilful, nor intended to mislead: 'if by chance I have used some immaterial embellishment it has been only to fill a void due to defect of memory.'[26] In the neurological understanding, as Foster explained above, this would be a perfectly legitimate statement reflecting a common trait. But it also exemplifies how overt references to the forgotten usually functioned in autobiographies. The void needs simply to be filled; embellishment is an inevitable part of our need for a coherent narrative. The implied understanding here of the role of the forgotten in our life stories is that it merely constitutes some gaps or lacuna in the recollection. Rousseau's extravagant claims of selfhood and uniqueness are rarely matched in other introductions; instead what is at the heart of many of them and what they reveal is a palpable fear of the reader's judgement. The autobiographer's fear of exposing his inner life (inadequately) to an (unsympathetic) audience—what could be termed, echoing Boyle's contention the 'autobiographical angst'—is apparent in many of these introductions.

We move from grandiloquent proclamations of uniqueness to another type of statement of purpose: Stendhal's manner of preamble to his *La vie de Henri Brulard* (1890) is inward looking, in the sense that his stated aim is to get to know himself. Of course, this is a rhetorical device, but it still indicates to the reader that this autobiography is a milestone on the road to self-knowledge, rather than a confession to the reader: 'I'm going to be fifty, it's high time I knew myself. What have I been? What am I? The truth is, I'd be very hard put to say.'[27] He has decided that the text will be published posthumously, so he addresses this to a reader in the future: 'What an encouragement to be *truthful* and nothing but *truthful,* that's all that

counts. […] But how many precautions does one not need to take to avoid being untruthful!' (8). The ever present question of truth and truthfulness rears its head, here in the contention that a faithful account should in this instance bring about self-knowledge and understanding from others. He gets waylaid by other stories, by other things: 'But I'm letting myself get carried away, I am digressing, I shall be unintelligible if I don't stick to the order of events, and moreover the circumstances won't come back to me so well' (9). Narrative is in this sense an *aide-memoire* as writing in a particular order will help memory; an orderly narrative has a clear mnemonic function. What a modern reader would question is to *what* can/will the author be faithful, what type of documentary value can autobiography offer? A modern reader might indeed conclude that Stendhal's digressions *are* the truthful/faithful demonstrations of his memory.

Some autobiographical writing is deliberately and manifestly partial in nature; the writer does not proclaim a grand motive such as wanting to show the world what he is or writing to gain self-knowledge. Joseph Conrad restricted his memoirs to two time periods in his life: the time when he wrote his first book, *A Personal Record* (1912), and his first 'contact with the sea,' *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906).[28] It is therefore modest in scope and intention, and the introduction reflects this and also his hesitation in the undertaking as a whole. In 'A Familiar Preface' to *A Personal Record* it is apparent that he is very much aware of the trappings of autobiographical writing and is extremely circumspect in his proclamations, describing the text as a 'Truth of a modest sort […] and also sincerity.'[29] He is not one of the world's natural confessors, not used to exposing his inner life, or simply talking about himself as he terms it, 'without disguise' (xiii). It is for him a frightening task, but also an illusion, as there is always some kind of aesthetic principles involved in the writing, some kind of 'disguise,' and he worries about sounding insincere: 'So I proceed to declare that I have always suspected in the effort to bring into play the extremities of emotions the debasing touch of insincerity' (xvii). He wants to 'give the record of personal memories by presenting faithfully the feelings and sensations connected with writing of my first book and with my first contact with the sea' (xxi). The words 'faithfully' and 'truthfully' clearly indicate a belief in an original 'pure' memory and a whole, united subject, which the author will get at and represent faithfully and truthfully. The dogged question of truth in autobiography can be seen to haunt many an introduction, with some writers taking issue with how form and narrative might stand in the way of truthfulness. We saw above

how Mann in her introduction voiced concern over the part aesthetics play in our reminiscences, and she continues here:

> Elegance and logic aside, though, in researching and writing this book, I knew that a tarted-up form of reminiscence wouldn't do, no matter how aesthetically adroit or merciful. I needed the truth, or as a friend once said, 'something close to it.' That something would be memory's truth, which is to scientific, objective truth as a pearl is to a piece of sand. But it was all I had. (xiii)

'Memory's truth' in this understanding is inevitably partial, incomplete, as memory has always already been raided by forgetting and the aesthetics of telling; nevertheless it is presented as being of great personal significance to the writer. Statements of this type serve to 'disarm' the reader; it urges him to be gentle in his reading, and to set his expectations at an appropriate level to the author's wishes.

While Rousseau's stated aim in his *Confessions* is to provide a document of his self, others claim their writing to be motivated by a need to document their time, their era, thereby circumventing the prevalent accusation of the egotistical dimension of autobiography. For those writers it is imperative to save a world/time from oblivion through personal narrative. John Stuart Mill's declaration in the first paragraph of his *Autobiography* (1873) is a well-known example of this type of motive, full of humility and modesty:

> It seems proper that I should prefix to the following biographical sketch, some mention of the reasons which have made me think it desirable that I should leave behind me such a memorial of so uneventful a life as mine. I do not for a moment imagine that any part of what I have to relate, can be interesting to the public as a narrative, or as being connected with myself. But I have thought that in an age in which education, and its improvement, are the subject of more, if not of profounder study than at any former period of English history, it may be useful there should be some record of an education which was unusual and remarkable […].[30]

The emphasis here is on preserving a record of an education which was particular to him, to preserve it from oblivion, as it might be of interest to the times.[31] Of course, Mill's autobiography has much to offer besides the account of his education; he also gives the reader an insight into his character, personal development, and emotional life. Mill is not alone

in declarations of this type. Johann Wolfgang Goethe claims his main purpose of writing an autobiography in his foreword to *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1833) is to show people in their environment, how they built their image of themselves of the world they live in, and if they are artists, poets, or writers, how they have reflected their times.[32] The claims in the introductions are time and again betrayed in the texts that follow; the introductions being no more reliable, despite their paratextual air of authority, than any other parts of the text. First and foremost, claims of motives, reservations, or directions to the reader alert us to the writing moment, and when they draw attention to the difficulties involved in writing on the past they inevitably point to how forgetting plays a complex role in autobiographical writing.

Reclaiming or Losing the Past

One of the most lauded autobiographies of the twentieth century is no doubt Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* (1967), which in its celebration of memory exemplifies a certain type of life writing. He includes a lengthy introduction in the 1967 version where he recounts the work's genealogy and ruminates on autobiographical writing and remembering/forgetting. He describes how memory can be interrupted by seemingly inconsequential details, the forgotten impeding the memory work, and normal embellishments, or filling in gaps, being ultimately troubling and unsatisfactory:

> an object, which had been a mere dummy chosen at random and of no factual significance in the account of an important event, kept bothering me every time I reread that passage in the course of correcting the proofs of various editions, until finally I made a great effort, and the arbitrary spectacles (which Mnemosyne must have needed more than anybody else) were metamorphosed into a clearly recalled oystershell-shaped cigarette case, gleaming in the wet grass at the foot of an aspen on Chemin du Pendu, where I found on that June day in 1907 a hawkmoth rarely met with so far west, and where a quarter of a century earlier, my father had netted a Peacock butterfly very scarce in our northern woodlands.[33]

Forgetting can be overcome, the 'wrong' memory dispelled and the past reappear by force of concentration and with writing. Nabokov describes the process of rewriting and reworking memory, for instance when he translated parts of the text into Russian in 1953:

> I revised many passages and tried to do something about the amnesic defects of the original—blank spots, blurry areas, domains of dimness. I discovered that sometimes, by means of intense concentration, the neutral smudge might be forced to come into beautiful focus so that the sudden view could be identified, and the anonymous servant named. (9)

The past is brought into light by intense concentration and brought from the forgotten into remembrance. Michael Sheringham takes *Speak, Memory* as an example of autobiographical practice where memory reigns supreme:

> Nabokov celebrates "the pathological keenness of the retrospective faculty" with which he is gifted. […] If memory holds the key to our personal homeland it is because of its contrapuntal genius, the capacity to gather disparate threads into an organic whole, to manifest the latent thematic designs which underlie our scattered lives. *Speak, Memory* gives striking expression to a theme which pervades (but, as we shall see, does not monopolize) the autobiographical tradition from Augustine, through Rousseau, Wordsworth, and Dilthey, down to the present. Memory, these writers tell us, gathers and redeems, preserves and reintegrates.[34]

Nabokov thus convinces us in the introduction of the power of memory to overcome 'domains of dimness,' instead of warning the reader against its vagaries. As Sheringham suggests, Nabokov's view of memory represents one strand of autobiographical writing, whereas another strand is much more hesitant in its attitude to memory. One of the common tropes in introductions of autobiographies of the latter persuasion are warnings to the reader from treating the text as an historical document; i.e., they explain that the text is based on their memory that can be faulty or imperfect, or simply change with time passing, and thus cannot be read as an 'accurate' depiction of the past. The Icelandic writer Guðbergur Bergsson claims in a preface to the first volume of his autobiography *Faðir, móðir og dulmagn bernskunnar* (1997, Father, Mother, and the Myth of Childhood) that 'Life stories do not exist, strictly speaking, as nothing is lost more completely than one's life […] This work is therefore historically incorrect. It is only meant to be partly correct, emotionally, as regards the author.'[35] This echoes what Mann calls 'memory's truth' as we saw above; memory can provide an emotional, personal truth, but nothing more, and such provisos pre-empt any challenges to the text on the basis of its historical accuracy. The Icelandic poet and playwright Sigurður

Pálsson in his memoir *Bernskubók* (2011, Book of Childhood) is concerned with memory's relationship to the real, to the world outside the text: 'Memory is constantly searching for the truth of the mosaic that we are, a mosaic constantly in progress. Thus memory forms us out of fiction which is admittedly founded in part on so-called reality.'[36] When memory's status has thus become provisional, its authority partial at best, and the 'historical' dimension of autobiographical texts questioned, the presence of the forgotten has become palpable. Unreliability, reservations, hesitations suggest the texts' closer affinity with fiction than in the earlier works I have mentioned. As Astrid Erll notes, 'It is the literary representation of problems of memory (such as forgetting and distortion) or a fragmented traumatic memory that may in many cases lie at the heart of unreliability.'[37]

I mentioned at the start of this chapter that autobiographers have to come to terms with memory being incomplete and that forgetting our lives is a natural state of affairs. Some authors address the provisional status of their texts and have a more practical explanation for this. Isaac Bashevis Singer voices in an 'Author's note' at the beginning of his memoir, *Love and Exile: The Early Years—A Memoir* (1984), an oft repeated dictum of the story not being complete:

> While *Love and Exile* is basically autobiographical in style and content, it is certainly not the complete story of my life from my childhood to my middle thirties, where the book ends. […] Actually, the true story of a person's life can never be written. It is beyond the power of literature. The full tale of any life would be both utterly boring and utterly unbelievable.[38]

A life story, in Bergsson's and Singer's understanding, is an impossibility—such a story cannot exist in the words of Bergsson, and in Singer's estimation it would be too dull and unconvincing. The Icelandic novelist Halldór Laxness wrote four volumes of memoirs he called 'essay-romans,' in the time honoured tradition of autobiographers coming up with new labels for their autobiographical writing. The 'claim that the text one is writing belongs to a new genre,' as Sheringham explains, is 'a claim which features recurrently from Rousseau to Robbe-Grillet.'[39] In the second volume (*Úngur ég var,* 1976, In My Youth) Laxness states, 'No one can tell the story of one's own life, it becomes more like gibberish, the more you attempt to tell the truth.'[40] None of these three writers stipulates exactly what prevents the life story from being told—Bergsson intimates the unreliability of memory, Singer, the utter boredom of recounting every

quotidian detail of a life, and Laxness believes the truth is impossible to tell. In Singer's estimation one can infer that there is an ideal autobiography somewhere in the background, which his own will not live up to: 'In the author's notes to parts of this work, I call the writing spiritual autobiography, fiction set against a background of truth, or contributions to an autobiography I never intend to write.' The only one capable of writing the complete life is in Singer's, the believer's, view certainly not himself: 'As a believer in God and His Providence, I am sure that there is a full record of every person's life, its good and bad deeds, its mistakes and follies. In God's archive, in His divine computer, nothing is ever lost.'

The introductions do play 'an ambiguous game' inasmuch as they are at times misleading, and they display the autobiographer's wish to exercise control over the reader, while in fact showing distrust of the genre itself—the autobiography, which once written and published they have no control over, and the base for this medium: memory. Others, by contrast, praise the genre's power. Introductions often highlight the problematics of autobiography, the ambiguous status of the genre, the anxiety of writing the self and memory, addressing the thorny issue of sincerity as they claim to attempt to render truthfully feelings and sensations. Autobiography is a sensitive area; the writer is in a way offering his life to the reader. The need to *introduce* one's life is in that respect very understandable.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, immigrant autobiography can provide a particular insight into autobiographical narrative, memory, and forgetting. One of the issues raised by immigrant autobiography is the discontinuity, the ruptures, that can affect recall of the past. This not only applies to the author's own memory but also to his relationship to the older generations, and the family archive—photographs, letters, diaries, etc.—(which autobiographers make continual use of and I will discuss further in Chap. 3 and Coda) are more often than not lost or left behind. Edward Said has some salient points to make in the preface to his autobiographical work *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999):

> *Out of Place* is a record of an essentially lost or forgotten world. Several years ago I received what seemed to be a fatal medical diagnosis, and it therefore struck me as important to leave behind a subjective account of the life I lived in the Arab world, where I was born and spent my formative years, and in the United States, where I went to school, college, and university. Many of the places and people I recall here no longer exist, though I found myself frequently amazed at how much I carried of them inside me in often minute, even startlingly concrete, detail. [41]

On the one hand we have a 'lost or forgotten world' and on the other the sense of how remarkably well it is preserved inside him. His writing will serve as an extension of the life he carries with him, and hamper its forgetting. Memory discourse in immigrant autobiography is often a signpost to what happens in autobiography in general, not least because the rupture between 'now' and 'then' is often so stark. The old world is more often than not completely gone, except in the inner lives of the writers or their families, and Antin also draws attention to this in her description of geographical memory of her old hometown, the village of Polotzk:

> You may make a survey of Polotzk ever so accurate, and show me where I was wrong; still I am the better guide. You may show me that my adventureful road led nowhere, but I can prove, by the quickening of my pulse and the throbbing of my rapid recollections, that *things happened to me* there or here; and I shall be believed, not you. And so over the vague canvas of scenes half remembered, half imagined, I draw the brush of recollection, and pick out here a landmark, there a figure, and set my own feet back in the old ways, and live over the old events. It is real enough, by my beating heart you might know.[42]

Again, 'memory's truth' makes its entrance, here as more reliable than 'objective' truth. Her barometer of the veracity of her account is her emotional response. The reader can therefore enter her inner world, the gateway to a lost, non-existent world. Linda Grant in her work on her mother's loss of memory, *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (1998), explains that memory is indeed life: 'Soon, she will no longer recognize me, her own daughter, and if her disease progresses as Alzheimer's does, her muscles will eventually forget to stay closed against involuntary release of waste products. She will forget to speak and one day even her heart will lose its memory and forget to beat and she will die. Memory, I have come to understand, is everything, it's life itself.'[43]

The descriptions of memory's force in introductions are different from the warnings of historical accuracy; they in fact alert the reader to these writers' mnemonic capabilities or emphasise the personal importance memory has for the individual, as in Said's touching declarations, when fighting death, memory—not just in and of itself, but memory work—was his solace. Said meets the family's former butler in Cairo, whose feats of memory help him bring the past back, reverse forgetting, and provide the sense that he is not alone with his memories:

> I was astounded that Ahmad minutely remembered not only the seven of us—parents and five children—but also each of my aunts, uncles, and cousins, and my grandmother, in addition to a few family friends. And then, as the past poured out of him, an old man retired to the distant town of Edfu near Aswan, I knew again how fragile, precious, and fleeting were the history and circumstances not only gone forever, but basically unrecalled and unrecorded except as occasional reminiscent or intermittent conversation. (xv)

Said gets conformation of his memories of a lost past, a lost world, from someone who is still there, as if the lost world had spoken to him directly. It is, however, also evidence of the precariousness of memory, of unwritten and unrecorded memory, as it can fade into forgetting at any time. Thus, it is not memory that is the starting point or the impetus of autobiography, but forgetting. For Said the distance in time and place also affords him emotional distance from the past:

> The main reason, however, for this memoir is of course the need to bridge the sheer distance in time and place between my life today and my life then. I want only to mention this as an obvious fact, not to treat or discuss it, except to say that one of its results is a certain detachment and irony of attitude and tone, as I have set about reconstructing a remote time and experience. (xvi)

One strand of autobiographical writing focuses on revelations of a family secret, a silenced and unknown past, that if not written at this time will disappear. J.R. Ackerley's *My Father and Myself* (1968) is a well-known instance of this, a text full of turning points and startling revelations, which have to be carefully metered out, as he explains in the foreword:

> The apparently haphazard chronology of this memoir may need excuse. The excuse, I fear, is Art. It contains a number of surprises, perhaps I may call them shocks, which, as history, came to me rather bunched up towards the end of the story. Artistically, shocks should never be bunched, they need spacing for maximum individual effect. To afford them this I could not tell my story straightforwardly and have therefore disregarded chronology and adopted the method of ploughing to and fro over my father's life and my own, turning up a little more sub-soil each time as the plough turned. Looking at it with as much detachment as I can command, I think I have not seriously confused the narrative.[44]

Ackerley's revelations in this text concern the double life his father led, and such a double life needs its own narrative form—two stories happened simultaneously without the knowledge of the participants in each. To explain his method, Ackerley uses the image of life as a field that needs ploughing, thereby unearthing the forgotten, the silenced, the untold, bit by bit. It needs a methodical going-over and a particular narrative structure to mediate its impact, in an effort to emulate the impact it had on the autobiographer.

Dave Eggers offers a postmodern twist on the tradition of autobiography and its prefaces and afterwords in his *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000), a work which will be examined further in Chap. 3. The original edition has a foreword where he goes to great lengths to explain the text as if avoiding at all costs to be taken for a traditional autobiographer and the work being relegated to the 'terrible childhood' genre; in addition, it also has a chapter entitled 'Rules and Suggestions for Enjoyment of this Book.' As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note in their detailed discussion of the opening section, 'In these prefatory sections Eggers situates his narrative as autobiographical in ways more reminiscent of the metafiction of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and the stories of Cortázar and Borges. This elaborate set of introductions both draws readers in, and warns about the traps of sincerity and authenticity in personal narrative.'[45] Eggers makes use of all the framing devices he can possibly find. Even on the credit page all the normal trappings, such as publication details, copyright, etc. are framed with additional text, notes and additions. Below the 'All rights reserved' bit a note is added: 'This is a work of fiction, only in that in many cases, the author could not remember the exact words said by certain people, and exact descriptions of certain things, so had to fill in gaps as best he could.'[46] In the preface he explains that the dialogue 'has been written from memory, and reflects both the author's memory's limitations and his imagination's nudgings' (ix). Both statements are already familiar to us from earlier autobiographical practice but here made visible in a more playful and self-conscious manner.

These author's statements and claims in the 'ambiguous game' of introductions shows both the presence of the forgotten and an awareness or concern with forgetting, and its part in autobiographical narrative. Even in texts were memory has the power to unite disparate breakages from the past, forgetting is always already there to contend with. It has to be dealt with, forced back even, fought against; it is always one of the obstacles, but also one of the motivations, for autobiographical writing.

Notes

1. As Johnathan K. Foster explains, 'Episodic memory includes recollection of *time, place,* and associated *emotions* at the time of the event. (*Autobiographical memory*—the recall of events from our earlier life—represents a sub-category of episodic memory […]).' This is in contrast with '*semantic memory,* the memory of *facts* and *concepts*.' *Memory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 39. Antonia Harbus further defines autobiographical memory 'as the recollection of one's own prior experiences, a reconstructive act that is always culturally situated, context sensitive and susceptible to narrative configuration.' 'Exposure to Life-Writing as an Impact on Autobiographical Memory,' *Memory Studies* 4.2 (2011): 206–220, p. 207.
2. Paul Connerton, 'Seven types of forgetting,' *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 59–71, p. 63.
3. Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction,' *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 3–13, p. 4.
4. Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction,' p. 10.
5. Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle,' *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 61–75, p. 69.
6. Susannah Radstone, 'Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics,' *Paragraph* 30.1 (2007): 9–29, p. 20.
7. Draaisma, *Forgetting: Myths, Perils and Compensations*, trans. Liz Waters (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 148.
8. Peter Middleton and Tim Woods, *Literatures of Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
9. Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 80 and 105.
10. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 11.
11. Harbus, 'Exposure to Life-Writing as an Impact on Autobiographical Memory,' p. 208.
12. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 35.
13. Marc Augé, *Oblivion*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 22.
14. Foster, *Memory,* p. 14.
15. Sally Mann, *Hold Still: A Memoir with Photographs* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2015), p. xii.
16. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 25.
17. Augé, *Oblivion*, p. 22.

18. Claire Boyle, *Consuming Autobiographies: Reading and Writing the Self in Post-War France* (Leeds: Legenda, 2007), p. 4.
19. Boyle, *Consuming Autobiographies*, p. 4.
20. Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past,' *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Jeanne Schulkind (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 78–160, p. 83.
21. Julian Barnes, *Nothing to be Frightened of* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 38.
22. Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation,* trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 197.
23. Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 34.
24. Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. Paul John Eakin, trans. Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 29.
25. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 33.
26. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1978), p. 17.
27. Stendhal, *The Life of Henry Brulard*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 2.
28. Both were serialised before being published in book form, the chapters in *The Mirror of the Sea* from 1904–1906 and *A Personal Record* from 1908–1909.
29. Joseph Conrad, 'A Familiar Preface,' *The Mirror of the Sea and a Personal Record*, ed. Zdzilaw Najder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. xi–xxi, p. xiii.
30. John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography,* ed. John M. Robson (London: Penguin, 1989), p. 25.
31. In the twentieth century testimonials or autobiographies by those who are the last witnesses to a lost world become ever more relevant and put autobiography at the forefront as a tool for understanding major political and historical events.
32. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Aus meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit,* in *Werke: Hamburger Ausgabe,* Band 9: Autobiographische Schriften, eds. Liselotte Blumenthal and Erich Trunz (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1982), p. 9.
33. Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 9.
34. Sheringham, *French Autobiography,* p. 288.
35. Guðbergur Bergsson, *Faðir, móðir og dulmagn bernskunnar* (Reykjavík: Forlagið, 1997), preliminary pages.
36. Sigurður Pálsson, *Bernskubók* (Reykjavík: JPV, 2011), p. 56.
37. Astrid Erll, 'Narratology and Cultural Memory Studies,' *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, eds. Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 212–227, p. 223.

38. Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Love and Exile: The Early Years—a Memoir* (London: Penguin, 1986), preliminary pages.
39. Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, p. 16.
40. Halldór Laxness, *Úngur ég var* (Reykjavík: Vaka-Helgafell, 1990), p. 236.
41. Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta, 1999), p. xiii.
42. Mary Antin, *The Promised Land,* Introduction and Notes by Werner Sollors (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 69.
43. Linda Grant, *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (London: Granta, 1998), p. 17.
44. J. R. Ackerley, *My Father and Myself* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 7.
45. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'The rumpled bed of autobiography: Extravagant lives, extravagant questions,' *Biography* 24.1 (Winter 2001): 1–14, p. 6.
46. Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (London: Picador, 2001), credit page of paperback edition.

CHAPTER 3

Forgetting and the Writing Moment: Corrections and Family Archives

In Chap. 2 I focused on how the forgotten in life writing makes its presence felt in the proclamations and statements made by autobiographers in their introductions and prefaces. We saw in this discussion the authors' attempts to engage with the reader, to get him on their side, so to speak, in the challenging task of representing a life in narrative. These common admonitions to the reader have, however, in some works been taken to the extreme with a constant flow of comments on the writing, addressing similar issues to those voiced in the introductions, such as sincerity, truthfulness, narrative form, memory, and forgetting. 'Some autobiographers,' as Michael Sheringham suggests, 'offer a running commentary on their performances, revealing fluctuations, transformations, crises of intention.'[1] This is particularly evident where authors use footnotes, comments, or corrections, i.e., paratextual material as commentary on their autobiographical narrative, as I will investigate in the first half of this chapter. In the second half of the chapter I identify another area in autobiographies which opens up the discussion of the work of memory and the complexities arising from writing on the past; i.e. where the authors engage with the family archive. As in the notes and corrections, this is an area which draws attention to the writing moment and to the attempts the authors make at discovering, corroborating, and reworking the past. The texts demonstrate a certain desire for the archive—a hope or expectation that it will make up for or eliminate forgetting.

G. Gudmundsdottir, *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59864-6_3

Correcting the Past

The notes and commentaries provided by autobiographers can offer intriguing insights into the autobiographical process, and they are also an important marker for the referential status of the texts. It is one of the ways this status is physically manifested in the works and alerts the reader to the real: 'the autobiographer directs the reader's attention to the generic specificity of the text,' as Sheringham notes, 'principally its referential status: this is an autobiography, such interjections say, written by a real person, and you must read it as such.'[2]

Footnotes, endnotes, comments added to the main text make up part of the paratext and in particular the portion of such material inside the book, which Gerard Genette terms the 'peritext': 'Within the same volume are […] sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter titles or certain notes. I will give the name *peritext* to this first spatial category.'[3] Before we get to the main text, however, other paratextual material introduces the reader to the work—the title, subtitle, cover, etc.—and all this influences the reading, reception, interpretation of the work in question. The status of the paratext and its intersections with the main text are of interest here, and Genette's suggests ways of thinking on its role: 'More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather a *threshold*, or—a word Borges used apropos of the preface—a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back.'[4] The reader is led through the 'vestibule' of the text with the paratext acting as guide and initiator into the world of the text. It is an in-between world, but also a world where the presence of the reader is keenly felt:

> Indeed, this fringe, always the conveyor of commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author, constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it.[5]

As in the preambles or introductions, which also form part of the paratext, the emphasis is very much on direct communication with the reader. These transactions often display an anxiety about the reception of the work, as I discussed in the previous chapter, an attempt at preventing misunderstandings or misreadings, and therefore presuppose a particular type of reading, a certain type of invasion into their memories and their memory work.

One can hardly discuss notes and commentaries of this kind in autobiography without mentioning perhaps the two most celebrated examples: Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957) and Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000). Both authors write extensive commentaries that seem to serve as a medium between the main text and the reader. Overall, it problematizes any simple reading of the text, addressing areas of difficulty and uncertainty, as Sheringham notes when autobiographers 'seem to revise and update [their motives] as they go along, they are usually responding to problems and pressures which have arisen in the process of writing about themselves.'[6] McCarthy includes a twenty-page introduction to her collection of autobiographical essays with the title 'To the Reader' where she discusses several aspects that impinge on her accounts of the past. The problems she mentions are somewhat applicable to autobiographical writing in general, and some are more particular to her experience as they regard her family history or the lack thereof. She attempts to address this and respond to and pre-empt the reader's response, as she claims readers tend to believe because she is a writer that she has 'made up' stories from her past. She accounts for fictional elements, such as dialogues, which she explains as only serving to fill in the gaps of her memory—a familiar refrain by now in the texts examined in this study. One of the major difficulties she encounters in her memory work, and which is one of the main themes in the essays that follow, is the loss of her parents. She describes succinctly the effect this has on her memory: 'One great handicap to this task of recalling has been the fact of being an orphan. The chain of recollection—the collective memory of a family—has been broken.'[7] This major disruption to a child's memory inevitably influences the writing; it has left her with an incomplete story, where absence, the forgotten, and the disappeared loom large. In addition, her parents have not only left her, they have left her with a tricky legacy, as she claims to have inherited a strain of 'untruthfulness' from her father: 'My father was a romancer, and most of my memories of him are coloured, I fear, by an untruthfulness that I must have caught from him, like one of the colds that ran round the family' (15). In her interpretation she seems preordained to fictionalise her past, and it is as if she hopes these extrapolations will redeem her from accusations of inaccuracy. After each chapter she includes (at times lengthy) notes with corrections, voiced hesitations, or additional material—which seem like attempts to locate the forgotten, to point it out and try to eliminate it with a constant flow of comments and corrections. Leigh Gilmore calls these sections of the work 'a sequence

of italicized interchapters' as they are placed between 'the numbered chapters, the purportedly truthful accounts drawn from life,' where McCarthy 'distinguishes what she *really* remembers from what she invented to satisfy her own artistic sensibility.' Gilmore concludes, 'Yet, she insists always that any departure from what she absolutely remembers occurs in the service of telling the truth or of squaring refractory memory with what 'must' have happened.' Thus, the confessional motive of the text is transformed: 'The very act of confessing seems almost to conspire against the one bound to tell the truth. That is, in telling the *truth*, autobiographers usually narrate, and thereby shift the emphasis to *telling* the truth.'[8]

The narrative in and of itself takes over as the main focus in the commentary. The end of the first chapter, 'Yonder peasant, who is he?' is followed by a lengthy 'interchapter' of corrections and revisions of events and narrative, prefaced with this sentence: 'There are several dubious points in this memoir' (44). At the end of the third chapter, 'Blackguard,' she explains, 'This account is highly fictionalized' (85). Notes and corrections have here a paradoxical function. On the one hand they stake a claim for a certain authority over the past, as footnotes do with their aura of scholarship and factual accuracy, but on the other hand the notes are themselves riddled with hesitation, forgetfulness, and uncertainty. As Martha Lifson in her analysis of McCarthy's work highlights, 'the italicised commentaries which follow each chapter add to the purposeful and often playful undermining of truth.'[9] Gilmore notes the paradoxical status of the corrections as well: 'On the one hand, she claims her account is the truth because it really happened. On the other, the fictions she creates to cover the gaps in history and memory have come to fit so neatly into her narrative that they attain the status of remembered fact.'[10] As regards the veracity of the text, fiction seems to contain its own truth, as is evident in her comments at the end of the fourth chapter, 'C'est le Premier Pas Qui Coûte,' where she explains, 'This story is so true of our convent life that I find it almost impossible to sort out guessed-at and the half-remembered from the undeniably real' (108). The negotiation between truth and untruth is acted out in the field of memory with remembering and forgetting in a constant, one could say performative, transaction.

Dave Eggers in the second edition (2001) of his *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* added to the back of the book a chapter he called 'Mistakes we knew we were making: Notes, Corrections, Clarifications, Apologies, Addenda.' In it he combs the book for mistakes, embellishments, and instances of forgetting, as if he is continually rewriting the

same text, in a playful postmodern questioning of the possibilities of a 'truthful' or 'accurate' or 'final' account of the past. As in McCarthy's work, the foreword and the notes and corrections are in smaller font and contain subsections in even smaller font which makes them very difficult to read. The lettering suggests the paradoxical role these additions play in the work; they are not a part of the text 'proper,' but an addition, an aside, a meta-commentary, a 'paratext' included in the work but not an indivisible part of it. Thus, as Genette explains, notes in a text have a particular status: 'Above all, we must observe that notes, even more than prefaces, may be statutorily optional for the reader and may consequently be addressed only to certain readers: to those who will be interested in one or another supplementary or digressive consideration, the incidental nature of which justifies its being bumped, precisely, into a note.'[11] The added material is, therefore, a surplus or as Bran Nicol suggests 'consciously *supplementary* in the sense that Derrida famously used the term in his reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* (1976).' In Derrida's use the term '"supplement" designates something added optionally to that which is already complete, but which implies as a result, paradoxically, that the prioritized entity is actually incomplete.' Nicol concludes that

> The very existence of the prefatory material means that despite Eggers's disingenuous claims to the contrary, the ingenious supplementary texts are what produce, make possible, the heartbreaking dimension. They position the work as a whole, let us know how it should be read, or rather instil an uncertainty as to how far we should trust its attempts to direct us towards a reading.[12]

In their use and appearance the notes are presented as virtually superfluous, but nevertheless they constitute seemingly frantic intrusions into the narrative and display a profound unease about the generic status of the work. Although some of the paratextual material only appeared in the second edition of the work, Eggers explains at the start of the appendix that they were originally meant to be included in the first hardback edition when he says he made

> the mistake of telling a writer friend about it, with, let's admit it, a certain smugness. I was, I figured, the first to think of adding a corrective appendix to a nonfiction work, one meant to illuminate the many factual and temporal fudgings necessary to keep this, or really any, work of nonfiction, from dragging around in arcana and endless explanations of who was exactly where, and when, etc.

When the friend replies '"Oh, right, like Mary McCarthy,"' he is completely taken aback, his dreams of originality crash into reality: 'There was in the distance, the sound of thunder and of lightning striking, presumably, a kitten.'[13] There is no getting away from the intertextual connections in autobiographical writing, as Sheringham notes: 'Explicit discourse concerning intentions and methodology in autobiography tends to be markedly intertextual since, explicitly or not, it implicates other practitioners and invokes the genre or canon as the author imagines it to exist before his or her contribution is made.'[14] The metafictional, or perhaps more appropriately, the meta-autobiographical, alerts us constantly to the 'made-up' element of the non-fictional text as Nicol suggests: 'It reminds us that everything in his story, like all stories—like all confessions—is narrativized, nothing is "natural," "as it was". This, of course, is the implication in all works of metafiction: they remind us that writing is artifice and must not be taken as a true representation of reality, because of the very nature of representation.'[15] The emphasis on the 'meta'-elements in the texts draw the reader's attention to the writing moment, to the here and now, or as Gilmore says of McCarthy's 'interchapters':

> These are the only sections of the book written contemporaneously; that is, written *as* her autobiography. In direct address to the reader, she challenges her own account, finds it accurate, and thereby preserves the structure of confession with the self of the interchapters playing confessor to the self of the sketches. The reader is compelled to witness the account, which, as early as the title of the preface, is clearly addressed to her or him.[16]

Mary McCarthy explained that in her case 'the chain of recollection had been broken' with the loss of her parents, and few texts have demonstrated this as palpably as Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975; *W or The Memory of Childhood* 1988). This is a seminal work of French autobiography, a text that mixes a fantasy tale about the island of W with vague and disjointed childhood memories of war and parental loss, where the forgotten, the hardly or wrongly remembered, is constantly questioned and drawn attention to.[17] It is a work centred around the lack of memory, the loss of a past, and, as Sheringham explains, is permeated by 'a sense of the otherness of memory,' which 'stems from the recognition that remembering is as much an activity of concealment and displacement as of preservation. What Perec investigates and seeks to come to terms with is not so much what his memories mean, and the story they tell, as what

they disguise, and the history they partially supplant.'[18] Perec supplements some of his chapters on the childhood memories with notes and corrections, at times noting his ignorance of simple facts and dates, at others questioning his memory, claiming that certain events had not happened to him at all, but to a friend. David Bellos has pointed out that the uncertainties and corrections in the work are not necessarily as they seem, that some of the 'errors' are not convincing and could easily have been checked by Perec.[19] The status of the main text and the notes is therefore unstable and provisional, with no overarching belief in the power of memory to bring together disparate fragments into a whole picture of the past.

As McCarthy before him and Eggers subsequently, Perec also uses a different typeset to differentiate between three types of text that make up his work: the fictional work—the fantasy on the island of W—is in italics; an earlier attempt at writing about his past is in bold lettering; while the rest of the childhood memories are in normal font. In Perec's work it seems clear that the fiction and the older text are seen as aberrations to the text proper—the childhood memories, which are most closely linked to conventional narrative. Lifson suggests that the effects of this on McCarthy's text, and I believe this applies to Eggers' and Perec's works as well, 'draws special attention to a characteristic split in autobiography between the writer and the written, the one involved in the process of writing and the one being described, placed, characterized.' By including the 'interchapters' McCarthy not only addresses 'issues concerning multiples selves, particularly in the prologue, she also mirrors and dramatizes the split in the structure of the book by alternating narrative chapters with italicised commentaries.'[20] The splitting of the two subject positions, the remembering (or forgetting) self and the remembered (or forgotten self) is made manifestly visible with the use of notes and corrections, a secondary, contemporaneous level of commentary, which draws the reader into the conversation and transaction between the two positions. The notes have, thus, a particular function because, as Genette suggests, if the writers were to incorporate the note into the text, it 'would entail some loss or impairment.' The main loss seems to him to be 'that in denying himself the note, the author thereby denies himself the possibility of a second level of discourse, one that sometimes contributes to textual depth.' The notes have, in fact, particular qualities that other textual matter does not; for Genette the 'chief advantage of the note is actually that it brings about local effects of nuance, or sourdine, or as they also say in music, of *register*, effects that help reduce the famous and sometimes regrettable linearity of

discourse. […] If the note is a disorder of the text, it is a disorder that, like some others, may have its proper use.'[21]

The 'disorder' of the texts points on the one hand to the literary devices at play in autobiography, and by drawing attention to it rather than glossing over it, the forgotten makes itself felt. The disorder also alludes to the disorder they have all been left with in their memory work, because of a loss they suffer, as all three texts tell of the loss of parents. As Sheringham claims in Perec's case, 'Regardless of its relative success or failure, the *act* of writing—in its inherent endlessness, its eternal severance from the concrete, its intrinsic incapacity to grasp the real, its basis in absence—is attuned to the reality of loss.'[22] Perec's text includes corrections and comments on the older memory texts, a commentary which has some elements of a paratext, but perhaps that is indeed the main text—it is impossible to ignore and is very much at the heart of the reader's interpretation of the work, and in some ways this goes for some of the commentary in McCarthy's and Egger's works as well. Perec's textual meanderings accentuate loss and absence, and the difficulties of pinning down remembrances and turning them into text. Lifson says of McCarthy that she is 'committed to an uncovering of all that the years have hidden from her, as if in recalling pieces of that past she will be able to find herself.' She is constantly searching for the past: 'there is an almost frantic, but certainly an unrelenting, attempt to grasp something, to remember clearly, to understand the hidden, whether in the lost person she was or in others, to find out what that Catholic Girlhood was and means.'[23] Writing an autobiography means knocking on the door of forgetting, willing the past into life with a varying degree of success, albeit a re-created life, mediating that which is already mediated. As Gilmore concludes, 'At one time sceptical and challenging (as in the interchapters when she admits to fictionalizing), at another fully convinced of her authenticity (as when she insists upon her accuracy), the reader and the autobiographer gaze into the unfathomability of memory and concede that the telling of lies is inextricable from the writing of memories.'[24]

In Martin Amis' autobiographical work, *Experience* (2000), he writes on his relationship with his writer father Kingsley Amis and on the shocking fate of his cousin, Lucy Partington, who disappeared in 1973 and was exhumed twenty years later from the basement of the serial murderer Frederic West. The latter story remains outside the scope of this brief analysis, which instead will focus on what Amis writes on his own upbringing, his adolescence, his writing, and how throughout the text he makes

heavy use of footnotes. The narrative travels back and forth in time, sometimes literally as he includes a number of older texts, particularly letters he wrote to his family, which he then comments on in footnotes. Again here, the notes emphasise the splitting of the subject, and this is perhaps their main function in Amis' work. He includes a number of letters he wrote as a teenager to his parents and then uses the footnote for commentary. An example of the type of commentary the footnotes include can be found when he writes in a letter to his father: 'A friend of mine asked dutifully what book of yours I recommended. "Lucky Jim" I told him. He promptly bought it and, one evening, I went into his room and was retching into the sink, with tears streaming down his face, recovering from a laughing fit induced by a passage in the said novel.' In the footnote to this paragraph, he chastises his younger self for inaccuracy: '*Which* passage, you fool! The "said novel", indeed … But I mustn't heckle my past self too raucously. I have made no change in this armpit-scorching archive, except to protect the innocent. And the really generous reader will concede that I was innocent too.'[25] Thus by revealing the contents of the archive in this manner, he also reveals his younger self to his own scrutiny and that of the reader, with the comments at times pre-empting the reader's response to statements and descriptions. The archive is made visible in his use of documents; this is not a complete rewriting of the archive but laying parts of it bare, always drawing attention to the gap between the subject then and now. At times the footnotes include pleas to the reader for understanding of his teenage self. He writes in a letter to his parents, 'I just want to be comfortable, to have a sense of establishing my own discipline by doing certain things for myself, and to fuck girls (a litotes I couldn't resist and not to be given unfair emphasis).' The footnote to this sentence addresses the reader: 'Litotes ("ironical understatement")? No, this is just a clunking attempt at bathos. More generally, I ask my male readers to remember what they were like at eighteen. And I ask my female readers to remember the kind of boys they were having to deal with then, and what *they* were like' (37). A forgotten self is unearthed in the archive, revisited and mulled over. In other instances the footnotes seem to offer asides, additional information, not deemed worthy of being part of the main text. In one paragraph Amis claims, 'My father never encouraged me to write, never invited me to go for that longshot.' A footnote, however, adds what seems quite a significant memory and one that casts doubt on the statement in the main text: 'Unless you count the following exchange. At some point in our late teens Kingsley asked my brother and I what

we wanted to do in life. "A painter," said my brother, who became one. "A novelist," I said. "Good," said Kingsley, rubbing his hands together rapidly, even noisily, in that way he had. "That means the Amises are branching out into the other arts while keeping their stranglehold on fiction." He meant Jane [Elizabeth Jane Howard], too' (25). This exchange can seem to the reader too significant an exception to relegate to a footnote; placing it there, however, insists on the exceptional nature of the conversation and how out of character it was—thus the form of the note itself carries with it its own meaning.

Amis clearly wants to maintain the two sets of discourses and the tension between them. There are other instances when the reader must ask what deserves to be mentioned in the main text and what does not. At one point the narrator declares in the text, 'I loved my sister Sally, and often considered myself to be her appointed guardian.' The footnote adds, 'Sally was born on 17 January 1954, at 24 The Grove. I was allowed on the scene soon afterwards, and I have an utterly radiant—and utterly false—memory of my hour-old sister, her features angelically formed, her blond tresses curling down over her shoulders. In fact, of course, she was just like the other Amis babies: a howling pizza' (148). The utterly false memory is included, as it is nevertheless a memory, but kept in a footnote as part of the secondary discourse, outside the main memory narrative. As I suggested above, the notes reveal the autobiographical process, the contemporaneousness of the writing and along with it the work of memory—and one of Amis' footnotes exemplifies this: 'I have just remembered the following incident. When I was about sixteen I was seriously undercharged for a packet of cigarettes in a newsagent's. Hearing me crowing about this, my father took me back to the shop and looked on as I returned the money. I humoured him in what I took to be a ludicrous piety. Now I marvel, not at the piety, but at the energy' (185). The note implies that with writing, and going over the text, forgotten incidents will be recalled. It also shows the different reactions from the teenage self and the writing self—and how both will be forgotten if not written down.

Comments and corrections of memory in autobiography are, of course, often included in the main body of the texts and not necessarily in the form of notes. The autobiographer recalls a moment and then queries the recollection and wonders about its relationship to the real. Mary Antin speculates on a childhood memory in *The Promised Land* (1912): 'Of the interior of the house I remember only one room, and not so much the room as the window, which had a blue sash curtain, and beyond the

curtain a view of a narrow, walled garden, where deep-red dahlias grew.' An unnamed other has cast doubt on the memory as Antin explains:

> Concerning my dahlias I have been told that they were not dahlias at all, but poppies. As a conscientious historian I am bound to record every rumor, but I retain the right to cling to my own impression. Indeed, I must insist on my dahlias, if I am to preserve the garden at all. I have so long believed in them, that if I try to see *poppies* in those red masses over the wall, the whole garden crumbles away, and leaves me a gray blank. I have nothing against poppies. It is only that my illusion is more real to me than reality. And so do we often build our world on an error, and cry out that the universe is falling to pieces, if any one but lift a finger to replace the error by truth.[26]

This passage elucidates how our 'forgettings' are no less our own than our 'memories.' They form part of who we are, even if it is based on things misremembered, and when others try to correct her memory, when they take her memory apart, the universe falls to pieces. She still includes the correction in her text, shading her memory with the shadow of forgetting, while still maintaining its importance for her.

The textual intricacies in the works I have briefly touched upon can be seen to serve as a bridge between the text proper and the world outside the text, Genette's *threshold* constantly drawing us back to the moment of writing. They are texts of forgetting, which repeatedly interrupt and at times almost draw to a halt the flow of narrative of the main text: the text of memory. They reveal writing processes and expose the genre of autobiography as a web of texts, rather than an 'accurate' reflection of a person's memory. They make visible in their form and physical presence the constant renegotiation between memory and forgetting in autobiographical narrative. Douwe Draaisma contends in his book about forgetting 'that the study of forgetting confirms what we hope or fear about our memories, namely that they have a disturbing ability to change.'[27] I believe the discussion above bears this out, as this 'disturbing ability' is foregrounded in the ongoing commentary on the memory narrative, wherever the presence of the forgotten makes itself felt.

Figures of Forgetting in the Family Archive

Aleida Assmann differentiates between two forms of forgetting in cultural practices: '*Active* forgetting is implied in intentional acts such as trashing and destroying.' She explains that 'Acts of forgetting are a necessary

and constructive part of internal social transformations; they are, however, violently destructive when directed at an alien culture or persecuted minority. Censorship has been a forceful if not always successful instrument for destroying material and mental cultural products.' The second form of 'cultural forgetting' is the '*passive* form' which 'is related to non-intentional acts such as losing, hiding, dispersing, neglecting, abandoning, or leaving something behind. In these cases the objects are not materially destroyed; they fall out of the frames of attention, valuation, and use.' It is important to note—and this also relates to forgetting and silence—that what 'is lost but not materially destroyed may be discovered by accident at a later time in attics and other obscure depots, or eventually be dug up again by more systematic archaeological search.'[28] In the case of autobiographers (re)visiting and reconstituting the family archive, they interfere and reverse the passive forgetting of the unseen or unresearched archive. What the family archive contains and how it relates to the writing subject's memory and experience is often one of the elements the autobiographer concerns herself with, and in it inevitably has to face up to the forgotten. Sheringham in his discussion of the archive suggests that 'the archive can be shorthand for certain kind of encounter between subject and memory, where memory, even one's own, has become other.'[29]

The encounter with the family archive in life writing can thus reveal processes and transactions between remembrance and forgetting. I include in my approach to the family archive the memory of other family members, which the autobiographers often consult to confirm or corroborate their own memories or ideas on past events, much as they would documents in a family archive. For the orphan Mary McCarthy the archive is especially significant, but paltry at best: 'For events of my early childhood I have had to depend on my own sometimes blurry recollections, on the vague and contradictory testimony of uncles and aunts, on a few idle remarks of my grandmother's, made before she became senile, and on some letters written me by a girlhood friend of my mother's' (11). Vladimir Nabokov explains the problems so often encountered by the immigrant in *Speak, Memory* (1967)—the lack of (physical or cultural) access to the archive: 'While writing the first version in America I was handicapped by an almost complete lack of data in regard to family history, and consequently, by the impossibility of checking my memory when I felt it might be at fault.'[30] The belief voiced here by Nabokov is a common one; the archive should provide the answers, light up the murky areas of family history, provide logic and continuity. Linda Grant describes in *Remind Me Who I Am,*

Again (1998) that for her, a descendant of Jewish immigrants in Britain, access to documents is limited, and with the link to the generational memory—her mother's memory—rapidly disappearing, the effort is precarious: 'Cancer is cancer but when you lose your memory the whole family goes down with it and you must do what you can to reclaim yourself from oblivion.'[31] The rupture in family history caused by immigration complicates matters considerably: 'If you lose your memory in Yorkshire, Yorkshire is all around you. You can go to the parish church and there are records of births and marriages and deaths. That's not to say your experiences are commonplace, it's just that they are easier to replicate, though not of course those family memories, the secrets that all parents keep from children' (30–31). Sally Mann in her memoir *Hold Still: A Memoir With Photographs* (2015) points to yet another issue which can disrupt the family narrative in immigrant families: 'In an immigrant society like this one, we are often divided from our forebears less by distance than by language, generations before us having thought, sung, made love, and argued in dialects unknown to us now.'[32] There is a desire, a longing, for the 'perfect' archive in many of these texts, a belief that documentation will save us from forgetting—which often does not count for how documents can obscure as well as illuminate the past.

Aleida Assmann suggests that the material of the archive, the knowledge stored there, is 'inert. It is stored and potentially available, but it is not interpreted.' She defines it 'as a space that is located on the border between forgetting and remembering; its materials are preserved in a state of latency, in a space of intermediary storage (*Zwischenspeicher*). Thus, the institution of the archive is part of cultural memory in the passive dimension of preservation.'[33] This passive dimension is what the autobiographer reverses, thus turning the passively forgotten into the actively remembered, whether such an endeavour is ever completely successful is another matter, as the archive can also prove 'unlockable,' its material somehow 'unknowable' and thus outside memory. Sheringham maintains that in the field of life writing 'the figure of the archive, and the related vocabulary of document and trace, have become increasingly prominent.' In his estimation this is a reflection of 'a number of shifts: from a focus on the individual to the interaction of individual and collective; from exploration of inner life to 'la vie extérieure' (Annie Ernaux's phrase), where identity is a function of the encounter with others in social space; from a sense that the materials of autobiography are personal to a sense that they derive equally from the social framework of memory.' He claims that all this is

'evident in the evolution of autobiographical writing, in the second half of the last century, towards a confrontation between an individual subject and the products of quasi-archival practice.'[34] This is, as I mentioned above, particularly relevant in the autobiographies of the descendants of immigrants, and in works of postmemory, which we will examine more closely in Chap. 7, where the narrator in many cases describes travels and visits to particular official archives to address the lack of a family archive—to fill in the gaps in the (ruptured) family history.

As Marianne Hirsch contends, 'Archival practices invariably rely on documents, objects, and images that survive the ravages of time and the destruction wrought by violent histories.' But despite our efforts to engage with them, collect them, etc., she suggests that 'we cannot disguise the lost and shadow archives, and the absences, that haunt all that we are able to collect.' What is important to ask is 'How can our albums and archives gesture toward what has been lost and forgotten, toward the many lives that remain obscured, unknown, and unthought?' She finds this in 'the relentless obsessive searches characterizing postmemory, and the inevitable disappointments that follow, enable us to conjure images that cannot be found, marks that are invisible. We fill the emptiness through our performative practices of desire. In an opposite move, however, silence, absence, and emptiness are also always present, and often central to the work of postmemory.'[35] Thus, the potential of the plentiful archive is very often thwarted. It promises more than it can deliver, and so the autobiographer has to contend with that unanswered quest, loss, and absence.

Nabokov explains what happened in his writing when he was finally able to access the archive: 'My father's biography has been amplified now, and revised. Numerous other revisions and additions have been made, especially in the earlier chapters. Certain tight parentheses have been opened and allowed to spill their still active contents' (9). If we think of immigration as being locked away from the past, Nabokov suddenly gains access to a lost past:

> When after twenty years of absence I sailed back to Europe, I renewed ties that had been undone even before I had left it. At these family reunions, *Speak, Memory* was judged. Details of date and circumstance were checked, and it was found that in many cases I had erred, or had not examined deeply enough an obscure but fathomable recollection. Certain matters were dismissed by my advisers as legends or rumors or, if genuine, were proved to be related to events or periods other than those to which frail memory had attached them. (10–11)

The family circle thus provides alternative memories, other stories, or corroboration, all providing coherence and making sense of the past. Despite his best efforts his 'frail memory' has erred in many cases, if the memories of others are to be believed. As I stated earlier, the autobiographer is often in some kind of interaction with other people's memories, and the end result is at times described as a cooperative effort. Michael Ondaatje recounts this in his family memoir *Running in the Family* (1982). He suddenly has access to the archive, to communal family memory, on his return to Sri Lanka in search of his family history: 'This morning is spent with my sister and my Aunt Phyllis to trace the maze of relationship in our ancestry.'[36] He continues: 'Later the three of us moved to the dining room while my Aunt plucked notorious incidents from her brain. She is the minotaur of this long journey back' (25). As the one who stayed behind she is the guardian of the family's past, with other members scattered around the globe and hence dislocated from memory. And together they can rebuild the past: 'In the heart of this 250-year-old fort we will trade anecdotes and faint memories, trying to swell them with the order of dates and asides, interlocking them all as if assembling the hull of a ship' (26). In the exchange of memories that takes place, a narrative emerges, saving certain episodes from oblivion, but also transforming memory to fit in with the other people's remembrance. Nabokov tells of such an incident when his sisters do not agree with his version of events:

> Both my sisters angrily remonstrated against my description of the journey to Biarritz [...] and by pelting me with specific details convinced me I had been wrong in leaving them behind ("with nurses and aunts"!). What I still have not been able to rework through want of specific documentation, I have now preferred to delete for the sake of over-all truth. (11)

The accuracy he desires, after all, despite his 'frail memory,' takes dominance over his own version of the past, and things that cannot be verified are excluded. Thus memory's limited capacity is acknowledged while its unusual power is also celebrated, as we saw in Chap. 2. In Linda Grant's text, she includes an interview or a discussion she had with a man involved in the care of the Jewish elderly in London, John Bridgewater. He tells her, '"Without memory there's chaos. Without memory we don't exist. When a member of the family starts to lose their memory it turns everything up because not only are they losing their recall of you, your recall

of them is challenged. It's almost a challenge to your own existence. If you live in the memory of someone else and their memory starts to fade, where are you?"' (268). The generational memory disappears, so one's own memories cannot be tested against those of others.

One of the features of the forgotten is that it can make itself felt again, it can re-emerge from a state of oblivion to a state of remembrance. The inert archive, the passively forgotten one, especially the distant one in another country, can at times make itself felt in unusual ways. Mary Antin recounts such as experiences:

> In after years, when I passed as an American among Americans, if I was suddenly made aware of the past that lay forgotten—if a letter from Russia, or a paragraph in the newspaper, or a conversation overheard in the street-car, suddenly reminded me of what I might have been—I thought it miracle enough that I, Mashke, the granddaughter of Raphael the Russian, born to a humble destiny, would be at home in an American metropolis, be free to fashion my own life, and should dream my dreams in English phrases. (156)

Here, memory is obviously related to identity, as her stated goal is to pass as an 'American among Americans'—the presence of forgotten can be uncomfortable in such circumstances, and its intrusion into daily life is not always welcome, and may interfere with the formation of a new world identity. Sally Mann's introduction is particularly concerned with the archive—the boxes in the attic she feels she needs to pay attention to: 'We all have them: those boxes in storage, detritus left to us by our forebears. Mine were in the attic, and there were lots of them. Most were crumbling cardboard, held together by ancient twine of various type' (ix). The archive is in the attic, in a precarious state, and might not last much longer. This draws our attention to the fact that the family archive is not necessarily kept somewhere in perfect conditions, preserved for all eternity. It is rather a dispersed archive, with limited capabilities of assisting the autobiographer in a search for the past.

There is still however a strong drive towards the archive, to find it, and to find answers in it. Aleida Assmann suggests that the 'function of the archive, the reference memory of a society, provides a kind of counterbalance against the necessarily reductive and restrictive drive of the working memory. It creates a meta-memory, a second-order memory that preserves what has been forgotten. The archive is a kind of "lost-and-found office" for what is no longer needed or immediately understood.'[37]

Thus the archive has a double function; on the one hand a promise to the writers of a physical place where they can find their past and thus illuminate what they have forgotten, and on the other, as the last repository, the only thing that prevents their ancestors/family histories from being forgotten, as Mann explains: 'In them was all that remained in the world of these people, their entire lives crammed into boxes that would barely hold a twelve-pack' (xiii). There is often an effort involved in dealing with the archive; it is laborious, difficult, and even lonely work. Mann describes the physical effort she performed while delving into it:

> I began this Knossian epic by cutting, one by one, the strings securing the boxes that I had hauled back from the nursing home after my mother died. As if eager to spill their guts, they spewed before me letters, journals, account books, ships' manifests, stopped watches, menus, calendars, pressed flowers, scribbled love notes, telegrams, a ring from which the jewel had been crudely torn, dance cards, photographs, and newspaper clippings, all stashed away without system or order. For the hot half of the year, I bent into the angle of the attic eave and sifted through his wholly unsuspected, revelatory and peculiar past. (171–172)

The family archive is far from being the ordered, arranged, categorised, and preserved entity we associate with official archives. Instead, it is a collection of disparate material, mementoes whose original purpose may long have been forgotten, letters, and photographs. The autobiographer, therefore, has a double function as an archivist and as the researcher who mediates the material. Laboriously, Mann goes through the material and unearths the forgotten.

Harriet Bradley in her essay appropriately titled 'Seductions of the Archive,' includes an account of her own encounter with the family archive. After the death of her mother she has to sort through her things, and after 'discarding most of it' she decides to keep 'letters, notebooks and photographs. The archive was reduced to a couple of boxfiles and folders to be stored in cupboards and on shelves in the homes of my sister and myself.' After archiving the material this was what was left:

> Here was the archive as individual life narrative, a chronicle of personality summarized in writings, scraps, mementoes. Such an archive offered to me a double recovery, that of the story of my mother's life, the grasp of her more vigorous, younger self so dear to me, and that of my own past, the story of me as a child, the primal self beneath the accretions of experience, of pleasures, pains and losses.[38]

A death of a parent is often the catalyst that opens up the archive, as Sally Mann describes: 'This post-mortem readjustment is one that many of us have had to make when our parents die. The parental door against which we have spent a lifetime pushing finally gives way, and we lurch forward, unprepared and disbelieving, into the rest of our lives' (172). But Bradley also explains that the work in the family archive is so very often autobiographical in nature and thus leaves out, 'forgets,' other areas of the archive. Those things that do not serve the interest of the investigator/writer are at times 'actively forgotten' inasmuch as they can be discarded and thrown away. This in the end is her own archive, which, 'rather than unlocking the door to my mother's being, the archive merely seemed to transmit images all too familiar to me.' As she explains, 'Perhaps this is an inevitable function of the selection process: in choosing what to keep I was drawn to things with which I could easily identify: pictures, letters concerning myself—and concerning those things closest to myself—births, deaths, loves. So that what I see in the scraps and relics of my mother's life, is primarily myself.'[39]

Looking for oneself is thus a familiar endeavour in the archival work, a search for understanding, an attempt to paint a fuller picture of origins and family traits. Mary McCarthy found an explanation for her own fascination with fiction in the strain of 'untruthfulness' she believes she inherited from her father. Autobiographical searches in the family archive can turn up exactly this kind of evidence; the writers find explanations for their own being. Sally Mann also links her findings to her own self: 'But no less marvellous is the strength of the genetic threads that, woven together, explain those romantic artistic tendencies otherwise unaccounted for by my personality or upbringing. These threads I have followed with all the diligence and groping optimism of a mythic hero, and with as many dramatic discoveries' (171). Thus her finds in the archive shore up and support her identity as an artist:

> Most of what I have discovered about my mother's family history, while unfamiliar in its details, felt strangely recognizable to me on an emotional level. The curious tapestry of fact, memory, and family legend that emerged from my attic seems to suggest antecedents for certain aspects of my character that have always been mysterious to me—the occasional but intense bouts of sadness, my romanticism and tetchy sensitivity, the plodding work ethic, and my tendency toward Talmudic hairsplitting, fractiousness, and unrest. These genetic threads bind me invisibly to the past, and especially to my stoic, passionate, and sentimental grandfather, Arthur Evans. (203)

As Bradley elucidates, 'The archive is the repository of memories: individual and collective, official and unofficial, licit and illicit, legitimating and subversive. And on the basis of such memories we strive, however ineffectively and partially, to reconstruct, restore, recover the past, to present and re-present stories of the past within our narratives.'[40] In this lies the promise of the archive: 'There is the promise (or illusion?) that all time lost can become time regained. In the archive, there lingers an assurance of concreteness, objectivity, recovery and wholeness.'[41]

Sheringham, drawing on the works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Arlette Farge, posits that 'recent theorizations provided a context for significant reorientation of autobiographical and biographical practices.' He focuses on one trait that to him 'seems to characterize the renascence of the archive as a figure of memory. This is the way that […] archival practice involves a hiatus between the materials of the past and the present act of manipulation. […] The archival encounter has its own belated truths to offer, and those are the more potent for being hedged with uncertainty.'[42] The 'belated truths' the archive can offer, are not necessarily always ones that bring the autobiographer a sense of herself; it can also reveal troubled pasts and upsetting material which do not necessarily fit in with the autobiographer's image of her family. This Sally Mann discovers as she unearths letters concerning her grandmother's affair with a rich man who saw to the family's upkeep, and thus influenced her mother's upbringing and education: 'What a story. Imagine my dismay, week after week up in my own attic surrounded by journals and piles of string-tied letters, piecing these facts together, cross-checking and confirming as the picture got bleaker. Every improbable account is documented: it's all true and in so many ways surpassingly sad' (194).

The archive can contain documents of what should have remained silenced or forgotten, and sometimes archival work involves piecing together unpleasant memories and histories. Draaisma emphasises that memories are always needed to make sense of an archive. Recounting the Hungarian author Péter Esterházy's discovery when the police and state archives became available after 1989 that his father had been an informer for the secret service, a revision of memories is inescapable:

> In Esterházy's dealings with the Historical Institute where all this misery originated, the archive and the human memory seem to abide by the traditional division of roles. Péter's memories turn out to be capable of revision. They change in colour, feeling, taste and significance; they now refer

> to a different past from that which existed when the secret service documents were still stored unopened on the shelves. The files, by contrast, have remained what they always were: the written record of a long career as a secret agent.[43]

Draaisma explains how Esterhásy 'creates' the archive, 're-remembers' it through working through it, commenting on it and correcting it: 'In fact everything mentioned in the files is surrounded by comments, memories, explanations, confirmations, denials, clarifications—in other words, it is because of the son's memories that the father's notes acquire a significance that makes it possible truly to read them, to understand what they say.'[44] Another interpretation of the same archive is also possible, as when the claim surfaces that Péter's father was in fact forced by beatings to become an informant—other readings and interpretations open up, and Draaisma believes that in this 'lies an essential similarity between documents and memories.' As he contends that

> Documents do not just need human memories to interpret them, they can change as those memories are brought into play. Archivists who call their archives 'memories' are therefore ultimately right, although the similarity goes rather deeper than the simple notion that both memories and archives have to do with the preservation of the past. Archives share the fluidity of the human memory. Archives too can forget.[45]

Dealings with the family archive reveal the complex and ongoing negotiations operating in memory work and in bringing it into narrative form. Amis' approach to his own archive highlights the double discourse involved between writer and subject, between contemporaneous autobiographical narrative and engagement with archival documents. The precarious state of the family archive points to the impossibility of rescuing the past from oblivion and suggests that we will only ever have fragments and scraps we need to make sense of in narrative, filling in the gaps—either with the often cited 'embellishments' or with constant commentary and querying of memory. Digitization of the family archive changes these dynamics to a degree we still have to come to grips with; on the one hand its abundance of material is possibly overwhelming, and on the other hand difficulties with access and questions of ownership seem to be inevitable side effects of new technology, as I discuss in the following chapter.

Notes

1. Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires. Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 1.
2. Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, pp. 1–2.
3. Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation,* trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 4–5.
4. Genette, *Paratexts*, pp. 1–2.
5. Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 2.
6. Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, p. 2.
7. Mary McCarthy, *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (London: Penguin, 1963), p. 10.
8. Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 121.
9. Martha R. Lifson, 'Allegory of the Secret: Mary McCarthy,' *Biography* 4.3 (Summer 1981): 249–267, p. 256.
10. Gilmore, *Autobiographics,* pp. 122–123.
11. Genette, *Paratexts,* p. 324.
12. Bran Nicol, '"The Memoir as Self-Destruction': *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*,' *Modern Confessional Writing: New Critical Essays*, ed. Jo Gill (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 100–114, p. 108.
13. Dave Eggers, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (London: Picador, 2001), p. 5.
14. Sheringham, *French Autobiography,* p. 15.
15. Nicol, '"The Memoir as Self-Destruction",' pp. 108–109.
16. Gilmore, *Autobiographics*, p. 123.
17. I have written in more detail on memory in Perec's work in *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003), pp. 34–42.
18. Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, p. 320.
19. David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words* (London: Harvill Press, 1993), pp. 548–549.
20. Lifson, 'Allegory of the Secret,' p. 256.
21. Genette, *Paratexts*, p. 328.
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CHAPTER 4

Forgetting Online: Self-representation on Social Network Sites

Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook have now become one of the ways we tell, share, and record the story of our lives—or the stories in our lives—one of the tools we use to serve the autobiographical impulse.[1] The proliferation and global spread of active members of these sites has taken place in a very short space of time, in just over a decade, and this swift and dramatic change in self-expression deserves our attention and calls for analysis and discussion. But the pace of these changes in the field also means that any such discussion runs the risk of quickly becoming dated and redundant (think of the fate of MySpace and the current decline of Facebook use among teenagers).[2] It should be noted that this chapter is not primarily concerned with the *social* aspect of the sites, i.e., the network or networking, which has been written on extensively in recent years, but more specifically with the self-expression performed there and the role that plays in our memory processes. The stories we tell of our lives and selves are based on a complex interaction between self, identity, remembrance, forgetting, and narrative. The way we express these stories on SNSs, taking on board theories on the convergence of identity and narrative, must inevitably affect our sense of our own past, this sense which is a deciding component in our identity, our sense of self. The stories we tell of ourselves are not only the result of natural or physical processes but are always heavily circumscribed by the world around us. This includes narrative traditions, social conventions, a shared sense of what is appropriate, and the

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rules and rituals applied to such interaction, according to the traditions of each genre, be it autobiography, diary, letter, or other similar texts, and not least the available technology. Self-expression performed online is therefore governed by a different set of rules from those operating on the blank pages of the diary, the conventions of letter writing, or within the traditional boundaries of the family album. These older traditions of self-expression and autobiographical storytelling, however, influence the type of life writing performed online in the here and now and inform many of its aspects. Thus, even if the type of mediation is recent and of our time, the stories told there are not created in a vacuum, but bear the traces of earlier practices and narrative forms.[3] This chapter addresses some of the issues relevant to our understanding of the form these types of narratives of self-expression take, for instance the significance of the interplay between image and text, and how they can demonstrate the intervention of recent technology in our memory processes—the mediatization of our memories—not least how they shift and interrupt common patterns of forgetting.[4] Thus taking on board Andrew Hoskins' view that 'contemporary memory is thoroughly interpenetrated by a technological unconscious in that there occurs a "co-evolution" of memory and technology. Memory is readily and dynamically configured through our digital practices and the connectivity of digital networks.'[5]

For a discussion on how our online activities impinge on memory and forgetting we need to look at the temporalities at play in this mode of self-expression. Immediacy is one of the defining features of SNSs, their 'selling point' which brings them closer to the diary than the autobiography. The sense of immediacy implied by these sites might lull us into thinking that Paul Ricoeur's ideal chronicler has been found,[6] the gap between lived experience and representation has been bridged, but this is to overestimate the reality of that immediacy and underestimate the effect of mediation. SNSs cannot circumvent the problem faced by every other type of self-expression, i.e., 'the fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable,' as Andreas Huyssen describes it in a different context.[7] This fissure autobiographers, biographers, diarists, and scholars of life writing have engaged with in a variety of ways through the ages. The immediate presence and ubiquity of SNSs does however add a dimension that should not be overlooked and one autobiographies and diaries usually do not share. A status, a tweet, an image, a shared link, references an event, an experience, an opinion on a SNS; the original event itself might have been triggered by an earlier

story shared on a SNS, and the way in which we experience and express our experience of these events may very well be influenced by the SNS in turn, thus the mediation and communication that takes place in this world is circular in nature. This applies to everyday events, such as a food photo posted on a site, which might encourage others to try the same recipe, posting their own photo, recipe or description in turn, setting in motion a chain reaction. This can also happen in more dramatic circumstances with political and social activism online, which can in turn generate flash mobs, demonstrations, or even uprisings.[8] In this way the things we post on SNSs, and our actions and environs, coincide and converge, creating over time with every posting an image of a self at work, at play (or at mildly drunk YouTubing), while frequently diverging significantly from any sense of everyday mundane selfhood—the one that takes out the rubbish, or perhaps more appropriately does not. By 'sharing' an image of ourselves, by posting an item on a site, our presents become pasts. The presumed immediacy of such activity is, of course, in part illusory, but with the photography sharing site Instagram and other such sites and applications, the immediacy is of course greater than with earlier technology. Nevertheless, we turn our present into a past in the here and now, into a narrative, creating cybermemories, or at least traces of our presence in cyberspace, which no one really knows who owns or will have access to.

Thus posting texts and photographs online is one of the ways we turn the present into the past; a temporal sense of then and now has been established, the sense that by documenting an event, it becomes the past, no matter how recent. Geoffrey Bowker points out that while providing us with new ways of archiving and memorialising, new ways to access our past, new temporalities come into play, what he terms potential memory:

> One read on the current set of memory practices is that we are moving culturally from the era of recorded memory to one of potential memory. There are so many and multiply determined traces out there on the Internet, and they are so easily searchable, that I (this is the comedy of the commons) do not have to worry so much about collecting my own books and films, annotating them, jotting down obscure facts and quotes on index cards, memorizing genealogies.[9]

As Paul Connerton suggests, 'To say that something has been stored—in an archive, in a computer—is tantamount to saying that, though it is in principle always retrievable, we can afford to forget it.'[10] It is therefore

relevant to discuss online self-expression in terms of memory (and thereby forgetting), despite the emphasis on SNSs on what could be termed aggressive immediacy. 'Tell us what you are thinking,' Facebook asks us; 'Where are you now?' map apps want to know; the sites want to place us in time and space, but also insist on knowing our pasts. 'Where did you go to school?' 'Where were you born?' 'Your profile is almost complete,' Facebook points out if the user has not responded to every question posed on the profile page.[11] The emphasis is on fixing us in time and space online, and this is where corporate and commercial interests come into play, in direct opposition to the initial pull of the world online, which promised to free us from such restrictions. David Kreps shows how illusory such dreams are when in his analysis of our online self-expression he explains that each website, blogosphere, SNS, sets constraints on how we can represent ourselves:

> The tools available prescribe the range of what one can be in this medium—presenting for us a figure of the phenomenological constraints our identities are placed under within the socio-political context of the networked society within which such profiles are made possible. It is also clear that the romantic notions of the virtual profile gaining us freedom in the cyberspatial world from the perils and tribulations of the mundane are as illusory as the shadows of the allegorical Cave.[12]

But what type of autobiographical narrative emerges from our (albeit limited and restricted) online behaviour, and how does it relate to questions of identity? It is important to take on board Robert Cover's reminder that our identities are not static, as some would have us believe, but that their representation on SNSs displays an 'ongoing reflexive performance and articulation of selfhood.'[13] According to Paul John Eakin autobiographical writing is at once a manifestation of a natural process and a formative part of our selves and identities. One of the reasons for this is that we sense that our selves (and this, children can fathom from about the age of three) have a past. Our selves extend past the here and now and to cope with this we need narrative and memory. Eakin's analysis in *Living Autobiographically* is based on Antonio Damasio's theory of the self where our consciousness and self is divided into core consciousness and core self and extended consciousness and autobiographical self.[14] The extended consciousness is created by time, and our memory of time passing creates the autobiographical self, as Eakin explains: 'The premise of Damasio's

theory of self is "the idea that a sense of self [is] an indispensable part of the conscious mind." The body responds to its encounters with objects in its environment and it also responds to its own changing internal states.'[15] As a result, Eakin explains that 'When it comes to our identities, narrative is not merely *about* self, but is rather in some profound way a constituent part *of* self.'[16] This natural, or human, process of 'living autobiographically' is in some ways challenged by the online digital world. Our profile pages can be seen to become cyber versions of ourselves, at once a product of our lived experience and an influence upon it, turning us into cyborgs without the usual prerequisite physical mechanics.

How We Talk About Ourselves Online

Our narratives of self are not only conditioned by biological processes but, as mentioned above, are heavily circumscribed by cultural forms and social conventions. If Antonia Harbus' contention, discussed in Chap. 2, holds up to scrutiny—that published autobiographies influence the form of our memory narratives—then the much more widely available SNS must potentially hold an extraordinary influence on our *telling* of the past.[17] We need to pay attention to the form the mediation of our memories takes: the framework, the maintenance, and the potential present and future audiences of the traces of these memories, just as Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney have pointed out when discussing collective and cultural memory. We must take into account '"medial frameworks" of remembering and the specifically medial processes through which memories come into the public arena and *become* collective.'[18] Not only has online self-expression proliferated in recent years, in addition, as Nancy Thumin suggests in her work on self-representation and digital culture, the two 'are now inextricably linked, thus one facet of digital culture requiring theorization is precisely the ubiquitous genre of self-representation.'[19] She explains as regards the framework which governs the user's activity on Facebook: 'in order to participate in online socialising here, people *must* represent themselves. Thus self-representation is a condition of participation in this online space. On Facebook self-representation becomes both inadvertent and banal.'[20] The representation becomes banal, it forces the narrative into a certain type of framework, but its banality is not only due to the technological boundaries but also social ones.

Not only do the sites themselves set strict boundaries for self-expression, as the user pages only allow certain type of expression in prescribed boxes,

their users also develop certain codes of behaviour regarding what is appropriate on these sites. In an article entitled 'Bannað á Facebook,' or Forbidden on Facebook, in the Icelandic newspaper *Fréttablaðið* in January 2014, six people (from the ages of 25–45; journalists, a comedian, an author, and a producer) were asked what they thought should not be allowed on the site. The piece is written with tongue firmly in cheek, but it is nevertheless an indication of how quickly social norms in the uses of new technology develop. The younger the interviewee, the stricter the rules: 'it is strictly forbidden to like your own status or comment,' says the young comedian. 'I hate people who have baby photos as their profile pictures,' says the young producer.[21] The users of this fairly recent type of self-expression have evidently already formed their own strict and rather conservative restrictions and boundaries.

Another deciding and influencing factor in the impact of SNSs is that, as Thumin has pointed out, 'commercial interests frame the self-representation and aesthetic, moral and political decisions are made by people other than the person representing him or herself, just as with any other kind of representation.'[22] As she says, this is of course also true of other kinds of representation. For instance, life writing as a commodity is very well known, such as in the genre of the celebrity (auto)biography. But the scale of self-expression on SNSs is unprecedented both in terms of the number of people using it and the frequency with which they use it, so the potential for commercial interests would appear limitless. This is of course also a privacy issue, as despite the choices of privacy settings some of the sites offer, for instance by allowing the user to choose who he shares photos and statuses with, the risk of self-exposure is still enormous. The self-expression performed in this fashion crosses the grey divide which is the division between the public and private in cyberspace, where such boundaries are blurred and constantly eroded. As boyd and Marwick point out, 'As social constructs, privacy and publicity are affected by what is structurally feasible and socially appropriate. In recent history, privacy was often taken for granted because structural conditions made it easier to not share than to share. Social media has changed the equation.'[23]

Autobiographical practice has of course always had to negotiate the division between the public sphere and the private, at times threatening social conventions and levels of intimacy, but again with the new technology the question has become ever more urgent. The circular movement between event, postings, images, memory, forgetting, and sense of self is particularly prominent in this conflagration. The fear that disclosure will leave us vulnerable, or the question of what level of self-exposure is

appropriate in autobiographical expression, has accompanied the genre since its inception—and in the nineteenth century these issues became highly contested as Laura Marcus has demonstrated, especially with the proliferation of women's and so-called ordinary people's autobiographies.[24] The revelations of Edward Snowden, however, reveal the unprecedented scale of intervention in our unprecedented scale of self-expression.[25] This is in addition to the social pressures on our memories already in play on such sites as mentioned above: the pressure exerted by the *known* quantity of readers of our self-expression. Now we have to come to terms with the fact that we have no idea to whom we are telling our life stories or how, and where, and if, they will be preserved. Our lives in cyberspace are truly out of our hands, and thereby our memory traces, and so is our control over what should be forgotten or silenced.

The changes brought about by new technology seem inevitable because of the nature of that technology, as Viktor Mayer-Schönberger explains in his 2009 book *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age*: 'Since the beginning of time, for us humans, forgetting has been the norm and remembering the exception. Because of digital technology and global networks, however, this balance has shifted. Today, with the help of widespread technology, forgetting has become the exception, and remembering the default.'[26] The implications of this for online self-expression are by no means clear. As discussed in previous chapters, forgetting is an essential part of our narrative of our selves, without it we would not be able to tell our stories. Digital technology has quite a different relationship to forgetting, and there is an interesting ongoing negotiation between our memory processes and digital memory. One of the places where this negotiation is at play is on SNSs. Digital technology never forgets, or only due to faulty mechanics. It is however only a sum of its parts; it contains what we put in there, preserve, and arrange. Francisco Delich explains that

> Computers have memory but, as far as I can tell from my reading, they have no memories. Neither are they able to forget, since they would no longer have a *raison d'être*. It is a perfect memory, which can be destroyed but not self-modified. It can be partly or wholly replaced, intentionally or not, but nothing forgotten will come back, no memory will disturb the perfect order of the system.[27]

The way our digital traces are organised or archived, however, is a contentious matter and one we have hardly any control over. Bowker wonders what these traces constitute: 'Taken globally, the set of traces

that we leave in the world does without doubt add up to something. It is through operations on sets of traces that I understand an event that I take part in.'[28] If it constitutes our identity—the definition of our being in the world—control is one of the key elements in the process. As Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading point out, '"Social network memory" is […] a new hybrid form of public and private memory. The instantaneity and temporality of social network environments disguise their potential as mediatized ghosts to haunt participants far beyond the life-stage of their online social networking.'[29] It therefore seems impossible to second-guess how this will influence our stories and our lives in the future. The discussion of the family archive in the previous chapter pointed to its recurrent use and its meaning for memory work in life writing. A digitized family archive must have different properties and carry with it a different set of problems for the autobiographer; questions of abundancy, access, and ownership will all become more pressing. It is one of the many contradictions we face in our online digital lives—*we* do not know how to remember, *the internet* does not know how to forget. Forgetting, as in the natural erosion of the past, is, at least not in theory, offered by digital technology. We may think of material on the web, blogs, comments, status updates on Facebook, etc. as in some ways ephemeral. It is not necessarily meant to last—it carries with it the taste of the everyday, as we comment on current affairs, family news, or the weather. But as with everything digital, it refuses to disappear, to be forgotten. One of the features Facebook used in 2015/2016 is to publish in the user's newsfeed her status on the same day from previous years, titled 'your memory'; the text then addresses the user by their name and reads, 'we care about you and the memories you share here. We thought you'd like to look back on this post from [1–10] years ago.' This often provides a jarring juxtapositions with the here and now—the past suddenly appearing without the subject's own remembrance or recall playing any part. It highlights the problematic status of the traces we leave, as Bowker describes it:

> A central aporia is constituted by the very general condition that what we leave traces of is not the way we were, but rather a tacit negotiation between ourselves and our imagined auditors (whether in the sense of listeners, readers, or moral or economic watchdogs); and yet we also need at some level an understanding of what actually happened in order to forge our futures.[30]

There are of course also social, political and economic forces at work here.[31] The persistent pressure in our times to preserve, publish, post, archive, and remember ignores our need to forget. Our constant presence

is required in cyberspace, disappearing is hardly an option, or rather, it involves a great deal of technological know-how, which specialised services, internet sites, and self-help books offer to help one with.[32]

Dying Online

As I discussed in the introductory chapter, memory and forgetting are often expressed in terms of life and death. Thus death and forgetting, death and remembrance are intertwined in such a way that examining what happens to the online traces of those who pass away might tell us a great deal about the workings of memory/forgetting online. It has become increasingly common to create memorial sites for the deceased, which in part solves the problem of what to do with their online lives. Such sites have a certain amount of activity, of active memory work by its members (or 'friends'), in the immediate aftermath, which then slowly decreases as time passes. What remains are memory traces that have little or no function, the pages slowly becoming sites of forgetting. What is perhaps a more contentious issue regarding death and digital technology is the relationship between our physical presence in the world and our presence online, which presents new problems and issues to contend with.

In early 2009 Pia Farrenkopf died in the backseat of her car parked in the garage of her house in a small suburban town in the state of Michigan, USA. She had recently left her job, had travelled extensively for work and so the neighbours usually did not see much of her. She had lost touch with her family, and thus no one realised she had died until her body was found five years later. For a significant proportion of that time she had paid her bills on time through automated internet banking, and upon the discovery of her body she became a symbol for the afterlife offered (or forced upon us) by cyberspace; death seems to have no particular place there.[33] Thus most of us will be faced with the question at one time or another of what to do with the online traces such as profiles on SNSs, blogs, email accounts, or homepages of those who pass away. How do we gain access to them and what do we do when/if we do so? Closing them all down immediately seems almost cold-hearted. Should one create a memorial site, announce a person's death on their own page? How do we communicate death across the web, grief, loss, or absence? Who knows how many pages with the profiles of people who have passed away are still around on Facebook and other such SNSs. Is Facebook, along with the rest of the internet, prepared to forget? Luis Castro and Victor González have

pointed out that 'One could argue that the extent to which the digital presence—represented by an online profile—can be perceived as "real" can remain the same even when there is no physical presence behind (i.e., after somebody dies).'[34]

The year Farrenkopf died Michael Massimi and Andrea Charise, specialists in Human-Computer Interaction coined the term *thanatosensitivity*, which refers to subjective and practical issues related to death which they wanted to encourage programmers and other computer specialists to build into their computer systems.[35] Among the problems they identified as needing a solution was how descendants could gain access to the online lives of their parents which are protected by passwords, i.e., how can our online lives be passed on after our death.[36] It is safe to say that forgetting poses a problem in our online lives. Of course, this is often cited as its main strength, digital memory being so much more powerful than our own, and from classical times, good memory has been priced as an asset. But forgetting as natural erosion in Augé's terms, its crucial role in human memory is absent, and thus so is disappearance and death, as Farrenkopf's fate shows. The internet does not forget by itself, it needs to be forced to. The European Court seemed to agree with this when it ruled in favour of Mario Costeja González in May 2014 in his case against the Google Corporation, where he demanded Google remove from its search engines an old news item about his financial difficulties, which he had successfully solved a long time ago. With this ruling the court supported the European Union's battle to legislate for the 'right to be forgotten,' which forms part of its laws on the preservation of privacy, online, as in other fields of life. The legislation has been in the pipelines for some time and has received considerable attention. According to the EU, 'The objective of the rules in the current EU data protection instruments is to protect the fundamental rights of natural persons and in particular their right to protection of personal data, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.' The explanation continues: 'clarifying the so-called "right to be forgotten", i.e. the right of individuals to have their data no longer processed and deleted when they are no longer needed for legitimate purposes. This is the case, for example, when processing is based on the persons consent and when he or she withdraws consent or when the storage period has expired.'[37] This has caused a lively debate about the technical, social, and financial problems such a law would generate, as well as a debate on free speech and the role of journalism in the digital age. *The Guardian* columnist Tessa Mayes warned against another danger in her analysis of the difference between the right to privacy and the right to be forgotten:

> A right to privacy means something because we live in a society. It is a demand to have privacy from society and still engage in it. To fully function in public life sometimes we need downtime from it. By contrast, a right to be forgotten is about extreme withdrawal, and in its worse guise can be an anti-social, nihilist act. If enacted, a right to be forgotten would signify the emasculation of our power to act in the world. And who benefits from that?[38]

The question the 'right to be forgotten' raises is in part one of control. Mayes however wants to emphasise the loss of power (or control) being forgotten raises. But it also points to the role of active remembrance with digital technology, i.e., the move from 'storage' to active remembering and access, the move from passive forgetting to active remembrance. News of González's financial difficulties will still be available in the archive of *La Vanguardia,* the newspaper which first published the story, but it will be removed from the all-powerful Google search engine, which means that it is thereby removed from active recall.

Our reliance on digital technology to preserve our pasts can have other dangers as Mayer-Schönberger suggests: 'Despite having been rewritten many times, humans trust their memories, and thus trust in the past they remember […] As digital remembering relentlessly exposes discrepancies between factual bits and our very own human recall, what we may lose in the process is the trust in the past *as we remember it*.'[39] The traces we leave in cyberspace, are not 'ours,' in the sense that we have no control over them, and also in the sense that they can possibly erode our own memories, our subjective remembrance, which influences our identity. Has 'our own story' been taken away from us, a personal self-owned account of one's own past, once it has been made digitally available? But the incursion of others in our memories is not new as we have seen in previous chapters, although its shape and form changes drastically in the digital world.

How will our lives in cyberspace influence our memories, our mnemonic processes and 'forgettings' (to coin a term from Julian Barnes)? This question has arisen with every technological advance in media which has in some fashion intervened in our memory processes. The fear that technology will erode our mnemonic capabilities, will replace our 'proper' (in the sense of our own) memories with 'ersatz' memories (such as photographs) and that it will remove our ownership, our sovereign authority over the all-important sentence 'I remember,' has been voiced throughout our history, as evidenced by Plato's *Phaedrus* and the many later reworkings of those ideas.[40] Writing down our memories is in this sense not a way to preserve the past but rather replace our own thoughts of the past:

> We are currently undergoing just such a slow yet dramatic shift in our relationship with the past. Its final results are unclear: The "save everything" mentality of the early days has already been replaced by the "save the minimal legal set" mentality of many companies and individuals today. At the same time we are exploring new genres for keeping people and events live on the Internet long after their respective ends.[41]

Thus the ongoing negotiation mentioned above between our memory processes and digital memory can be highly volatile and contested. The fear of the role technology in our memory extends here to the effect it can, might, or does have on our sense of self and identity. As Gregory Crane argues, 'One could argue that the *Phaedrus* is the foundational text for all information science, because it confronts the problems that emerge when human beings are able to represent language in a durable form external to the human brain.'[42]

Perhaps this highlights that one needs a different set of tools for approaching our digital memories. The technology might not forget, but the framework of the SNSs encourages a certain type of remembering, as certain things should rather be forgotten or silenced. Thus the demands and conventions of the SNSs encourage a particular type of narrative, a particular form of remembrance, a particular way of expressing our sense of self. In this way certain types of memories become part of the digital archives; others do not leave any traces there. Another obvious way in which forgetting impinges on our online lives is the self-fashioning, the image-making, at work. The glossy image presented, the avoidance of certain issues, the presentation of ourselves in the cyberworld, is generally not an inclusive effort, aimed to give an accurate and thorough account of our lives—there are other forces at play here.

Sharing a Life in Photographs

How does all this affect or circumscribe our own online pasts and selves? We are encouraged, even required on SNSs, to tell our story in words *and* pictures. Users have several possibilities for posting photographs on Facebook: The profile picture and the 'cover photo,' 'selfies,' the links we post generally display an accompanying image, and older photographs, often from the family album.[43] The pressure on the user to post these images manifests itself in several ways. If we do not use a profile picture on sites such as Facebook, a ghostly blue silhouette appears instead, and such

faceless pages denote the threatening presence of the internet troll, no one wants to be associated with. Many, of course, try get around this pressure of self-disclosure by using an image of something completely different—a drawing maybe, an artwork, a statement of some sort—but however far removed from a conventional profile picture, it will always be read as their 'portrait,' their image of themselves.[44] Not posting a standard headshot therefore becomes a type of inevitable self-expression, given the title of the page: 'my profile.' Photography is the medium which most obviously displays our presence in the world. As such and because of its intimate relationship with memory and record keeping, it has become an inseparable part of autobiographical expression, as I discuss more extensively in the Coda. SNSs not only demand a profile picture, they operate only with the constant presence of both text and image; no story told is complete without the accompanying image, courtesy of the constant presence of the camera phone. When taking a photograph on a smartphone or tablet, the device immediately suggests the user shares it and gives him a variety of options, depending on the sites he has downloaded on the device. The message is clear: taking a photo is only worthwhile if it is then shared with others.

One of the photographic practices on Facebook harks back to earlier forms of remembrance, when users post old photographs they have scanned and now preserve in their digital archive. The photograph is the main medium for our past to appear on SNSs, and these photos, very often from childhood or youth, make the presence of the family album felt. In the postings of such photographs one can see the formation and the active participation of Maurice Halbwachs' memory groups; a technology he couldn't possibly have foreseen proves fertile ground for such groups. Facebook makes it possible for users to establish 'groups,' either limited to certain members or open to everyone, some of which are specifically formed for the type of memory work Halbwachs describes in his theory on the workings of collective memory.[45] For instance former students of school X from year Y form a group, often in conjunction with a reunion or a similar activity; members then post school photos and the memory work begins. Individual users also post old photographs on their own pages, and what happens when those are released from the family album one might call both memory work and evidence of the changing context of memories. The comments posted with some of those photograph reveal this. A 'friend' might say, 'I remember when you looked like this'; a member of the user's family might add a story or a memory to the comments, but 'friends' who have no connection to the memory can also comment

and make discoveries or connections hitherto hidden or forgotten. The memory work which takes place on these sites is thus always influenced by who is allowed to participate.

When we post a photo online, 'tag' people (i.e., identify other 'friends' in the photograph, thus alerting them and their 'friends' to its existence), give it a title, we feel as if we are in control of our own self-expression, but as Joanne Garde-Hansen explains, 'SNSs like Facebook can restructure, at will, how your life is organised, regardless of your objections and those of other Facebook users who create groups declaring those objections to the Facebook Company.'[46] This was very much in evidence when Facebook turned ten on 4 February 2014, marking the occasion by offering users to 'make [their] own Facebook movie,' which involved just such a restructuring of the user's past. When clicking on the link a short video (just over two minutes) was played entitled 'A look back.' It included a sentimental instrumental soundtrack and began with a sample of photographs from the year one joined with the title 'Your first moments,' then a couple of statuses posted in the sequence 'Your most liked posts,' and the sequence 'Photos you shared' followed, flicking through another random sample of photographs. The first and next to last frames was a collage of photographs, in the centre the user's profile picture surrounded by other photographs shared, and the last frame was the famous Facebook thumbs-up, or 'like'-sign. The Facebook 'movie' is thus swathed in nostalgia with its use of appropriate music, slow-moving frames, and soppy titles. It taps neatly into our expectations of digital memory culture as Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, and Reading see it: 'A longing for memories, for capturing, storing, retrieving and ordering them: this is what digital memory culture is all about.'[47] But the framing is out of the user's hands, words and images are out of context, the choice of photographs is random, and the segment turns subjects into objects, as if someone had written the user's biography, reminding us of Boyle's theory on autobiography discussed in Chap. 2.[48] It also appeals to the user's vanity by calling the short segment a movie and by making one look at oneself from the outside. Memories the users have shared in certain postings and the wildly eclectic choice of photographs, posted perhaps with very different intentions, transforms the past into a nostalgic turn. Surrounded by a corporate logo, it is abundantly clear who is in charge of our digital traces. This is what our past looks like as told by the Facebook Company. Bowker notes that 'we loop memory out heterochronously across a range of media and materials (friends, conferences, photos, letters, date books…) so that at any one time we can, in theory, draw it all together along the single timeline of our past. […] Resonant

with this material distribution of our memory traces is their metaphorical representation as we describe ourselves. My life is an open book.'[49] But this book is clearly not solely of our own making.

The traces we leave, the memories we 'loop across a range of media' can be made use of in a variety of ways, most of which we have little or no control over. This impinges on our relationship with the past, possibly refashioning to some extent the way we remember and forget. These traces can at times be our own *aide-mémoire*; we can 'google' ourselves to remind ourselves when we did/said/wrote/shared this or that. But this lack of control over what will be remembered and what will be forgotten must have an effect on how we perceive ourselves, not only in the past, but our sense of identity in the present. Theorists of life writing should be in a good position to add to the discourse on self-expression online; that a story of a self is always mediated comes as no surprise to us, that the medium plays a role, that there is no such thing as a 'natural' story of a life, but the sheer scale of the SNSs means we need a multipronged approach in our analysis of the many converging factors governing self-expression online.[50] I am not sure romantic notions of a memory that is our own, identity that is stable, has much currency in this day and age. But perhaps we could ask does digital technology mean that we have to find new ways to negotiate between remembering and forgetting? Does our online self-inscription include forgetting, or narrative? Do our public diary entries last forever? Or are they as prone to passive forgetting as their context is lost as any other neglected archive?

Constantly telling our stories in words and pictures online gives rise to new interactions in memory groups, but it also means that we are constantly fashioning our self image, our past, at the mercy of global businesses, and our memory traces can be stored and used by governments and other such entities for some unknown future use. Negotiating the divide between human and digital memory is a pressing concern, and one where we need to pay attention to the two faces of memory: remembering *and* forgetting.

Notes

1. Here I refer to danah boyd's and Nicole B. Ellison's definition of SNS's as 'web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.' 'Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship,' *Journal of Computer Mediated*

Communication, 13.1 (2007): 210–230, p. 211. Note however the debate on the term network vs. networking in David Beer's article, 'Social Network(ing) Sites… Visiting the story so far: A response to d. boyd and N. Ellison,' *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 14.1 (2008): 516–529.

2. See for instance the Facebook Company's Third Quarter 2013 Result on http://investor.fb.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=802760.
3. This echoes Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation: 'What is new about new media is therefore also old and familiar: that they promise the new by remediating what has gone before.' Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 270.
4. I address some of these issues in 'The Online Self: Memory and Forgetting in the Digital Age,' *European Journal of Life Writing* 3 (2014).
5. Andrew Hoskins, 'Digital Network Memory,' *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), pp. 91–107, p. 96.
6. 'This Ideal Chronicler would be gifted with the faculty of being able to give an instantaneous transcription of whatever happens, augmenting his testimony in a purely additive and cumulative way as events are added to events. In relation to this ideal of a complete and definitive description, the historian's task would be merely to eliminate false sentences, to reestablish any upset in the order of true sentences, and to add whatever is lacking in this testimony.' Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 145.
7. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.
8. The power of the internet to generate and influence such events is of course up for debate, but in terms of serving as a communicating and media tool in any such circumstances, it is without precedent. This is also a form of communications the authorities fear as Twitter and other such sites are often the first ones to be closed down or blocked by the authorities. A recent example is the protests in the early months of 2014 in Venezuela. A study by *The Guardian* and the London School of Economics into the 2011 London riots found that Twitter had not played a decisive role in spreading the word among rioters but had been an important tool for the media and in the clean-up that followed. See James Ball and Paul Lewis, 'Twitter and the riots: How the news spread,' in Reading the Riots: Investigating England's Summer of Disorder, *The Guardian,* 7 December 2011. http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/dec/07/twitter-riots-how-news-spread. For a comprehensive analysis of the possibilities of political

activism online see Joss Hands, *@ is for Activism* (London and New York: Pluto Press, 2011).

9. Geoffrey Bowker, 'The Past and the Internet,' *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture,* ed. Joe Karaganis (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2007), pp. 20–37, p. 26.
10. Paul Connerton, 'Seven types of forgetting,' *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 59–71, p. 65.
11. These questions and profile patterns are based on the form Facebook displayed in January 2016. As the site is constantly evolving, this might not be true at the time of publication.
12. David Kreps, 'My social networking profile: copy, resemblance or simulacrum? A poststructuralist interpretation of social information systems,' *European Journal of Information Systems* 19 (2010): 104–115, p. 112.
13. Robert Cover, 'Becoming and Belonging: Performativity, Subjectivity, and the Cultural Purposes of Social Networking,' *Identity Technologies*, eds. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), pp. 55–69, p. 55.
14. See Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: The Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Mariner Books, 2000), i.e. pp. 174–175.
15. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens,* p. 7. Paul John Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How we create identity in narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 68.
16. Eakin, *Living Autobiographically,* p. 2.
17. Antonia Harbus, 'Exposure to Life-Writing as an Impact on Autobiographical Memory,' *Memory Studies* 4.2 (2011): 206–220.
18. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, 'Introduction,' *Mediation, Remediaton, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, pp. 1–14, p. 2.
19. Nancy Thumin, *Self-representation and Digital Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 13.
20. Thumin, *Self-representation and Digital Culture*, p. 138.
21. Ugla Egilsdóttir, 'Bannað á Facebook,' *Fréttablaðið,* 2 January 2014, p. 38.
22. Thumin, *Self-representation and Digital Culture,* p. 142.
23. danah boyd and Alice Marwick, 'Social Privacy in Networked Publics: Teens' attitudes, practices, and strategies,' *A Decade in Internet Time. Symposium on the Dynamics of Internet and Society, September 2011.* Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1925128.
24. Laura Marcus, *Autobiographical Discourses: Theory, Criticsm, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 49.
25. The leaking of the NSA files by Edward Snowden was revealed in 2013. The unfolding of the story can be seen here http://www.theguardian.com/world/the-nsa-files.

26. Viktor Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete: The Virtue of Forgetting in the Digital Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 2.
27. Francisco Delich, 'The Social Construction of Memory and Forgetting,' *Diogenes* 201 (2004): 65–75, p. 69.
28. Bowker, 'The Past and the Internet,' p. 23.
29. Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading, 'Introduction,' *Save as… Digital Memories*, eds. Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1–26, p. 6.
30. Bowker, 'The Past and the Internet,' p. 24.
31. 'Acts of committing to the record (such as writing a scientific paper) do not occur in isolation—rather, they are embedded within a range of practices (technical, formal, social) that I define collectively as *memory practices*. Taken as a loosely articulated whole, these practices allow (to some extent) useful and/or interesting descriptions of the past to be carried forward into the future.' Bowker, 'The Past and the Internet,' p. 25.
32. A myriad of sites, companies, and books claim to offer a solution to this.
33. Her case was widely reported in the media; see for instance Carmen Maria Machado, 'The Afterlife of Farrenkopf,' *The New Yorker,* 27 March 2014.
34. Luis A. Castro and Victor M. González, 'Afterlife Presence on Facebook: a Preliminary Examination of Wall Posts on the Deceased's Profiles,' *Electrical Communications and Computers*, 2012, 22nd International Conference, 27–29 February 2012, pp. 355–360, p. 355.
35. Michael Massimi and Andrea Charise, 'Dying, Death, and Mortality: Towards Thanatosensitivity in HCI,' *Proceedings CHI 2009 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, pp. 2459–2468.
36. See for instance Wendy Moncur and Annalu Waller, 'Digital Inheritance,' *Digital Futures* (October 10–12, 2010). See also Cindy Wiley et al., 'Connecting Generations: Preserving Memories with Thanatosensitive Technologies,' *HCI International 2011 – Posters' Extended Abstracts,* ed. Constantine Stephanidis (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2011), pp. 474–478.
37. Information on the process, development, and reasoning can be found here: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/index_en.htm.
38. Tessa Mayes, 'We have no right to be forgotten online,' *The Guardian,* 18 March 2011: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2011/mar/18/forgotten-online-european-union-law-internet.
39. Mayer-Schönberger, *Delete,* p. 119.
40. A useful overview of this debate can be found for instance in Anne Whitehead's book, *Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 20–22.
41. Bowker, 'The Past and the Internet,' p. 27.
42. Gregory Crane, 'History, Memory, Place, and Technology: Plato's *Phaedrus* online,' *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture,* pp. 38–47, p. 39.

43. The Facebook Company has certain restrictions on what type of photographs can be displayed, usually those that in some way infringe their rules on pornography. This was hotly debated when images of breastfeeding mothers were removed by the site. Facebook has since modified its policy and explains that 'photos that show a fully exposed breast where the child is not actively engaged in nursing do violate the Facebook Terms.' https://www.facebook.com/help/340974655932193/.
44. My comments here are based on the pages of my 'friends' on Facebook and Instagram. Due to the semi-private nature of these sites, I will not be quoting verbatim from their profile pages. Another option would be to use examples of those who keep their profiles 'public,' but as those sites often have a different agenda—promotional sites in one fashion or another—they would probably not be representative of the behaviour of the 'average' user.
45. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 25.
46. Joanne Garde-Hansen, 'MyMemories?: Personal Digital Archive Fever and Facebook,' *Save as… Digital Memories*, pp. 135–150, p. 135.
47. Garde-Hansen, Hoskins and Reading, 'Introduction,' p. 5.
48. Claire Boyle, *Consuming Autobiographies: Reading and Writing the Self in Post-War France* (Leeds: Legenda, 2007)
49. Geoffrey C. Bowker, *Memory Practices in the Sciences* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), p. 226.
50. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson prove this point by providing an analysis of the elements of life writing in online self-presentation in their essay 'Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation,' *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*, eds. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), pp. 70–95.

PART II

The Past Recovered

CHAPTER 5

Excavating a Troubled Past: Spanish Memory Texts

Harald Weinrich claims in his seminal work on forgetting that 'Wars are orgies of forgetting.'[1] The Spanish Civil War is no exception, as from the end of the war, throughout Franco's dictatorship, and in the transition to democracy, the public treatment of the recent past in Spain was fraught with repressive silence and imposed forgetting. The politics of memory were highly contentious, by turns characterised by fierce debate or resolute silence, although much has changed in the twenty-first century. There are many reasons for this silence; civil wars are notoriously difficult to maintain in a nation's memory, and for some the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) only came to an end with Franco's death in 1975. Josefina Cuesta notes that everything the war brought with it—death, repression, disappearances, victims and victors, silence, censorship, the loss of liberties, military rule—was all prolonged during the forty years of dictatorship, which suppressed and 'managed' the memory of the war. Franco's regime imposed a 'national' truth and carefully and systematically made its mark on the calendar, street names, festivals, monuments, and school books, decided on the protagonists of history, and condemned the 'other Spain' to be forgotten: the victims, the exiled, the Republicans, the labour movement, and political parties. Cuesta argues that 'During the dictatorship, the civil war served as the foundation, the legitimisation, as the glorious past and a celebration.'[2] The ruling power was, thus, very aware of its role in creating and maintaining its version of the past in

G. Gudmundsdottir, *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59864-6_5

collective memory. The effects of the war were there for all to see, but, as Jordi Gracia explains, there was no language available to describe them as the people had no choice but to adopt the language of the victors, thereby '*forgetting the past constantly present*.'[3] Franco's legacy was also to influence the nature of the transition to democracy. There were no 'truth committees,' investigations or reckoning with the past; instead the so-called Pact of forgetting (*pacto de olvido*) came into being where the past was not to be used for political purposes, blame should not be laid, punishment metered out, or vengeance exacted. This was enshrined in law in 1977 with the laws of general amnesty and these two concepts are therefore joined, amnesia and amnesty. Weinrich explains how eighteenth century European efforts to forget and forgive previous conflicts are

> often described formally as "amnesty and oblivion" (French, *amnestie et oubli*), a technical phrase in which the word of Greek origin and the word of Latin origin mean the same thing, namely "prescribed forgetting." Put in legal terms, this clause formulates a duty, imposed on both parties to the treaty, to renounce all assignment of blame and punitive measures regarding past acts committed in the course of the war.[4]

Cuesta suggests that the use made of the memory of the dictator after his demise, and the tacit conflation in Spanish society of remembrance, forgetting, amnesia, and amnesty is in tune with the characteristics of the dictatorship: the slow and natural death of the dictator allowed important political groups to prepare, in secret, for a future without a dictator. This explains the silencing of memory of the dictatorship, according to Cuesta.[5]

The silence surrounding a troubled past requires some sort of societal collusion. 'If such public (and extending to private) "amnesia" is imposed by the authorities,' Luisa Passerini suggests, 'very often it requires some sort of complicity on the part of those who, not being in a position of power, accept and prolong an imposed silence.'[6] The 'societal collusion' was grounded in the circumstances surrounding the transition. Paloma Aguilar Fernández explains in her seminal work on memory and forgetting in Spain (which can lay claim to have been one of the texts which opened up this field of study) what informed the discourse on the past during the transition:

> On the one hand, the transition leads to the conclusion that the two sides that fought the war were equally guilty of barbarism. One was no more guilty than the other, because on both sides unjustifiable atrocities were committed. On the other hand, the assumption of the brutality of the past

> was possible thanks to the generalization of guilt that provided an interpretation of the civil war as "collective madness." Finally, the main lesson that the transition imparted is the constantly reiterated "never again."[7]

This chimes in with Alberto Reig Tapia's notion that the fear of war during the transition was one that the victors encouraged during the Franco era and which presented the dictatorship as the only guarantee for peace, and was therefore clearly a Francoist heritage.[8] Aguilar Fernández blames the obsession with peace, the systematic avoidance of questions of conflict, while at the same time there was a great profusion of discourse on '*patología amnésica*' (pathological amnesia) of the Spanish and a huge interest in its civil wars, not necessarily in an open and free discussion, but in literature, cinema, and later in historiography: 'The result was rather paradoxically that those who talked in the press of collective amnesia of the Spanish regarding the civil war, often complained of a saturation in literature and cinema of content related to the subject.'[9]

Hence, silence and forgetting was not necessarily the rule across the board during the transition, and Javier Cercas maintains in his book on the 1981 attempted *coup d'état*, *Anatomía de un instante* (2009; *Anatomy of a Moment*, 2010), that the pact of forgetting would just as accurately be termed the pact of remembrance:

> Speaking in general, the transition—the historical period we know by that misleading name, which suggests the falsehood that democracy was an inevitable consequence of Francoism and not the result of a willed and improvised series of chances enabled by the decrepitude of the dictatorship—was a pact by which the vanquished of the Civil War agreed not to settle scores for what had happened during forty-three years of war and dictatorship, while, in compensation, after forty-three years of settling scores with the defeated, the victors accepted the creation of a political system brought down by the war. That pact did not include forgetting the past: it included shelving it, avoiding it, setting it aside; it included agreeing not to use it politically, but it didn't include forgetting it.[10]

It is of interest for this study how the terms remembering/forgetting are used in this debate. Is Cercas right in maintaining that the pact of forgetting was a misnomer? That amnesty was certainly not conflated with amnesia? Yes, the past was in some sense locked away, but not forgotten. The *olvido* is thus a political forgetting, what Jay Winter would no doubt want to term 'silence' rather than forgetting. Winter defines the silence

surrounding war and violence thusly: 'silence is always part of the framing of public understandings of war and violence, since these touch on the sacred, and on eternal themes of loss, mourning, sacrifice and redemption. We term these uses of silence as "liturgical silences".'[11] As discussed in the introductory chapter, Colmeiro and Winter have pointed out that the political aspects of forgetting force us to re-examine the terms 'forgetting' and 'silence,' and differentiate between the two terms. Certain areas of the past we may be encouraged to forget, what Paul Connerton terms 'repressive erasure' and 'prescriptive forgetting' in his seven types of forgetting.[12] This would in Colmeiro's terms be more accurately described as 'desmemoria.'[13] The transition obviously encouraged silence, and in some quarters effectively so, but this did not necessarily include the cultural sphere. Aguilar Fernández mentioned the strong drive towards remembrance, for instance, in literature in the wake of the transition, a drive that some criticised and found to be a sign of an unhealthy obsession with the past. And if there was no consensus about forgetting the past, there was no consensus on how it should be remembered either.

Texts of Transition

Many different types of memory texts were published during the transition and with the lifting of censorship. There was a proliferation in the publication of memoirs, biographies, novels on the past, exile literature, which could finally be published in Spain, and more. One of the memory texts published during the transition in 1977 was a book based on interviews the journalists Jesús Torbado and Manuel Leguineche conducted with people who had been in hiding in Spain after the Civil War, some for as long as thirty years, and published in the book *Los topos: El testimonio estremecedor de quienes pasaron su vida escondidos en la España de la posguerra* (the Spanish subtitle was added in the 1999 edition. *The Moles: An Account of Courage and Tenacity in the Franco Years*, 1981). The work received a great deal of attention in Spain but even more so in the rest of Europe. All the main papers in Europe published interviews, excerpts and commentary, more 'moles' surfaced, and the book was translated into many languages. The Spanish were taken by surprise by this as they had not counted on the hunger there was for stories from Spain, the hidden Spain, the other side of the Franco era, in many countries around the world. Franco's seemingly endless death struggle had kept many waiting. The introduction to the 1999 Spanish edition recounts the response of one of the authors to the questions of a German journalist, who found the stories of people in hiding without

precedence. The author replied, however, 'Have you forgotten Anne Frank already?'[14] The horrors of people in hiding during World War II seem to have been completely forgotten by the German journalist, whereas at this time in history there was finally space to discuss them in Spain.

In the 1977 introduction the authors explain that it would be possible to publish many more volumes with similar stories, an encyclopaedia of moles, so to speak. It was a rare city, town, or pueblo which did not hide, at least for a period of time, one of its residents, either from the left or the right, fascists or reds. Those from the right who had been in hiding during the war came to light with the fascist triumph in 1939; most of the others who survived were assimilated into society, often after a spell in prison, in 1945, with the first very limited amnesty granted by Franco, and the last probably in 1969 with more general laws of amnesty.[15] It was in the wake of the laws of 1969 that the two journalists started on their collection, although it could not be published until after Franco's death. As Colmeiro points out, the texts were collected and published with great difficulty, where the people concerned had to confront their long held fears.[16] Colmeiro also claims that one of the book's major assets is at once the most basic and the most difficult: 'to break the law of silence,' the moles and their families offering their testimony to the collective memory—on top of the fear, the trauma, the fatigue, or the remorse.[17]

Breaking this law of silence is the theme of many of the stories told in the collection. The brothers Juan and Manuel Hidalgo España from the village of Benaque in Málaga province fought only for a few weeks with the Republican army but stayed in hiding for twenty-eight years after the war ended. They lived for most of that time in the same village but never saw each other. Their wives kept them hidden and they lived in unimaginable circumstances, hardly ever seeing daylight, never speaking above a whisper, and Manuel's daughter did not know who the man hidden away in their house was for a long time. Juan's wife did not dare to hang men's clothing out to dry so he wore dresses for almost thirty years. Manuel managed to get used to the life in hiding; he lived in a tiny room at the back of the house and kneaded dough for his wife to bake and sell. Juan had a piece of land which made his life more difficult—others wanted the land and persecuted his wife with threats and violence, which increased steadily once she had their child. The story is not easily told. The brothers, along with many of the other moles, were not necessarily keen to tell their stories; remembrance for them was not a particularly inviting option. The journalists often had to persuade their subjects, and they say of the Hidalgo brothers that

> Like so many others, they refuse to speak of the years in hiding, usually they summarize all these years in one feeling, a long dream that seems to have lasted only a short while. Again and again their lips tremble with the recollection. Sometimes they ask "Why should we speak of this? This is the past and that is all…" Their wives nod, but try at times to break down the walls of fear and tell of the blackness of these years. But even though they desire it, and even though they are not afraid to repeat the absurd, they do not open their mouths to discard the sour fruits of their lives.[18]

Not speaking also means not being heard and not receiving any justice for a lost past. The past should be forgotten, as the brothers did not demand to be heard, or to receive any recompense or rights because of what happened. The journalists ask,

> Should we honour them with medals or give them a veteran's pension for everyday heroism? It is better to forget everything. It is better to forget the trip to Arda, the heat of the battles, the horrors of the trenches, repression and vengeance towards the wives and themselves, the humiliation of not being able to work in daylight, to watch helplessly as beastly hatred met pure innocence.[19]

The unwillingness of the subjects to turn the past into narrative is juxtaposed with the 'need' for this narrative in a post-Franco world, which is at times characterised by an ahistorical response to the narrative, as in the case of the German journalist. All this highlights the ethical and political ramifications of memory and forgetting, of unearthing a hidden past. The common belief is that it is necessary to speak of such traumas, and not least, to listen to such stories, as the emphasis has been on the role of the witness in post-holocaust trauma theory and on the importance of the testimony as the literary expression of choice in narrating traumatic events, as I discussed in Chap. 2.

But perhaps forgetting is also a necessary force. In the wake of the Holocaust, much has been written about the duty to remember, Marc Augé points out, however, in his book on forgetting that

> A certain ambiguity is attached to the expression a "duty to remember," so often used today. First of all, those who are subjected to this duty are obviously those who have not been direct witnesses or victims of the events of which one intends to preserve the memory. It is very clear that those who survived the Holocaust or the horror of the camps do not need to be

> reminded of their duty to remember. On the contrary, perhaps their duty has been to survive the memory, to escape, as far as they are concerned, from the everlasting presence of an incommunicable experience.[20]

Again, we cannot easily escape the contradictions of forgetting. Some would claim that digging into these the stories of those whose lives were destroyed during the dictatorship threatens the consensus created which made the transition to democracy possible, and such was the rationale behind the pact of forgetting. The problem is that the forgetting that was supposed to make the transition from dictatorship to democracy as smooth as possible meant, as Michael Richards has pointed out, that 'the memories of those who suffered defeat and repression in the Spanish post-war years are shrouded in darkness and silence.'[21]

This is what Jay Winter would term political or strategic silences: 'silence is chosen in order to suspend or to truncate open conflict over the meaning and/or justification of violence, either domestic or transnational.'[22] Aguilar Fernández points out that after the Civil War a panorama of divided memory opened up, and many of these memories are held by others outside the country, in exile, or repressed through censorship, or because families want to protect their children from being associated with the Republican cause.[23] But, memory cannot be quashed or silenced for good, or eliminated, even by dictatorships, as is evident when such places are liberated as in the former communist countries.[24] Hence, even if the victims should be freed from the duty to remember, society should not.

Los topos can be categorised as life writing, and as we have seen, a cluster of literary genres many turn to when writing on a traumatic past. There are, however, more complex generic forms employed in writing on the past as well. During the latter half of the twentieth century postmodern novels on historical events were prominent, and Linda Hutcheon was to term them 'historiographic metafiction,' novels which deal with the past while 'problematizing […] the nature of historical knowledge' and 'openly assert[ing] that there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se,* just others' truths.'[25] Javier Cercas stretches the borders between fact and fiction when he tries to find out what happened in the attempted coup on 23 February 1981, in his aforementioned book *Anatomía de un instante*. In the book's prologue, entitled 'Epilogue of a novel,' he describes how he had written a novel on the events surrounding the military coup based on one historian's analysis of events, but after reading in a newspaper that a proportion of the British

public thought Winston Churchill was a fictional character he ditched the novel and started from scratch, thinking that fact was needed here, rather than fiction.[26] The result is what the cover describes as 'A chronicle, or a chronicle in essay form, it is not a fiction, it is an anatomy of a moment, the moment when Adolfo Suárez remained seated on the afternoon of 23 February 1981 while bullets flew around him in the Congressional chamber.'[27] This anxiety of turning the past into fiction or drawing factual accounts into the writing can also be seen in two seminal texts published during the transition by Carmen Marín Gaite (i.e., *El cuarto de atrás* 1978; *The Back Room,* 2000) and Jorge Semprún (i.e., *Autobiografía de Federico Sanchéz* 1977; *The Autobiography of Federico Sanchez and the Communist Underground in Spain,* 1979). What might be seen as postmodern formal conceits are in these texts emblematic of writings that uncover a hidden past in a culture where the understanding of the past is heavily proscribed, through subterfuge, masks, and pseudonyms, and therefore these elements have a deep political relevance.

In *The Back Room* Martín Gaite plays with the borders between genres to represent the silences and gaps which characterise the notions of the past prevalent at the time. Critics have written extensively on this novel, but here the discussion will be limited to a few examples of her discussion of memory and time in relation to the Franco era.[28] As Martín Gaite has written elsewhere, 'We were not only supposed to keep quiet about the effects of the war, even though the results were clearly visible in many torn families, burned villages, crowded prisons, reprisals, unemployment, hunger, exile, and a terrible economy. No, it wasn't enough to be quiet; we were supposed to be passionately quiet.'[29] In this novel she weaves together her memory of the war and post-war era in a fictional dreamlike formal experiment, while getting to grips with the dictatorship's overwhelming power over culture and memory. When Franco died, the narrator in the work describes not having believed it: 'all his years in power collapsed around me.'[30] 'Time melted. The man who was responsible for freezing it had disappeared' (137). 'It was then I realised I knew everything about that time' (138). And this knowledge prompts the narrator to write this metafictional account of the past. The narrator is full of doubt regarding all the memories surfacing during the transition and she claims, 'I lost interest in this. Other people's memoirs almost finished them off. You might have noticed how many memoirs have been published since Franco died. They are like a virus' (37). This is why she wants to try another form, to emphasise uncertainty, a dreamlike state, the strange nature of time. It is not only all the other memoirs that stop her, but also the difficulty in

breaking a long held silence, the question is inevitably, how do you start to speak? Sources are also scarce as the narrator says she has burned so much of her own archive—letters, diaries, poems (38)—because when you have handled them too often, they become empty, they stop being what they were once (39). The silence has repressed remembrance, the archive is partial at best, and in addition the narrator states, 'My memories of the war and the post-war era are all mixed up' (126).

Martín Gaite tries to come to terms with what so many contemporary authors attempted to deal with, the complex relationship between memory and self, narrative and past. We can see in the text a certain impatience with traditional methods, as memory and our sense of time is not necessarily linear and ordered phenomena. The other metaphor the narrator uses in describing her sense of time passing is the children's game 'red light,' where one child, turning his back on the group, counts to ten, while the others try to run towards him before he turns around again. The narrator's interlocutor, a mysterious stranger dressed in black who is visiting for uncertain reasons, asks, why is the past like 'red light'?

> Because that's how it is more or less, time creeps up on you so stealthily we do not notice, we do not see it pass. Suddenly we turn around and we see something that has moved behind us, frozen photographs without dates, like the silhouette of children playing red light who were never caught moving. That is why it is so difficult to bring order to the memories, to be sure of what happened earlier and what happened later. (114)

In Martín Gaite's narrative, memory is not the freeing power which will give us the past back and with it our true selves, but a disjointed and paradoxical, 'indeterminate heaps of stuff' where meaning is uncertain.

Some of the works written during the post-2000 memory boom, reflect on the time of the transition. Cercas in *Anatomía de un instante* examines his own role in the events—or his lack of one. He was 18 years old in 1981 when the coup took place and thought he should perhaps do something heroic, but as he explains no one became a hero that day. When he went to college in the evening, he found no one there except his girlfriend and two other students, just as calm and confused as he was:

> no one at the university where I studied—not at mine or any other university—made the slightest gesture of opposing the coup; no one in the city where I lived—not mine or any other city—took to the streets to confront the rebellious Army officers: except for a handful of people who

> showed themselves ready to risk their necks to defend democracy, otherwise the whole country stayed at home and waited for the coup to fail. Or to triumph.[31]

This inability to act, the inertia that caused people simply to wait, is here described as a national condition, a paralysis, or even submission to the unfolding of events. In this constant and repetitive iteration of the events of the coup, Cercas attempts a mosaic of political power struggle, interpretation, and sensations from the events. His work maintains the complex web of connections, ideas, power balance, motivations, hopes, and fears of the period by examining the events in minutiae from inside the congressional chamber, the palace, the military bases, the street, and not least the people involved, drawing a complex picture of the legacy of Franco and the transition which culminates in the coup. A partisan point of view always silences aspects from the other side, as Mary Vincent points out,[32] but with this incredibly close attention to detail the reader feels there is no silence left, no stone left unturned, all that was forgotten is now recorded.

The novelist Antonio Muñoz Molina wrote in *Ardor guerrero* (1995; Warrior's fervour) of his experiences as a conscript in the army a few years into the transition. He describes the similarities between the army and his Catholic school: the uniforms, the monotonous life, even the architecture and the sensation of moving back in time, where the dictatorship has not let go, where ceremonies and attitudes point firmly towards the past, and where his modern self, even his name, needs to be forgotten. Muñoz Molina describes the fear towards authority that permeated his adolescence and youth: 'I remember the peculiar texture of fear, its utter physical quality, with a pang of dizziness or nausea and a weight on the lungs, an instantaneous sum of all forms of fear of authority that one has known in one's life.' Among the experiences of authority he cites is his school, Franco, and 'the sensation in the neck a split second before a priest beat me on it with dry and closed knuckles' and later 'terror at night at the possible arrival of the police in an apartment I shared with communist militants in the winter between 1976 and 1977, when freedom was coming but receding at the same time even with the dictatorship gone.'[33]

The fear of terrorism, a military coup, or a new dictatorship was very real in these years, one that should not be forgotten and has its origin in complex societal circumstances and a precarious balance of power. Muñoz Molina emphasises, however, that what was in danger of being forgotten

during this time were the dead: 'Unlike us, the dead do not change or age, but slowly fade without us realizing it, and the unconsciousness with which we forget is the cruellest insult, the deepest wickedness we inflict on them' (247). What both authors describe is a state of uncertainty, of confusion, of fear: fear of terrorism and the military, and fear of authority, a legacy firmly in place after Franco—but also the haunting of a past that will not leave the present alone. This haunting, which Colmeiro claims to be constantly present in Spanish fiction and cinema, also echoes Roger Luckhurst's contention that the very common trope in popular culture of ghosts and haunted houses and other such phenomena is a representation of psychoanalytic ideas of the reappearance of a traumatic past in the present.[34]

The Millennial Memory Text

The workings of cultural memory change through time, as does the relevance and meaning of memory texts. What has been forgotten is brought to the surface, while other remembrances fade. The social anthropologist Francisco Ferrándiz has followed the exhumations of mass graves in twenty-first century Spain and published widely on the process. He also notes the use of ghosts many novelists employ as a metaphor for a past reawakened.[35] The figure of the exhumed body has had an extraordinary effect on the public consciousness recent years. Ferrándiz explains the impetus behind the exhumations is evident since 2000 when Spain has 'seen the emergence of a surprisingly strong social movement, loosely founded on the idea of "recovering historical memory".' He explains that the 'recovery movement,' which has never failed to spark controversy, mostly focuses on: '1) locating graves and exhuming corpses of the victims of Franco's repressive policies, both during the Civil War (1936–1939) and after Franco's victory, and 2) recording oral testimony from victims and relatives, mostly in digital video format.'[36] The exhumations have thus sparked controversy, debate, but the reappearance of these victims in the media through photographs has meant that 'the buried bodies the graves contain have turned into *mute protagonists,* but extraordinarily significant, in the process known as the "recuperation of historical memory" in Spain in the twenty-first century.'[37] The bodies have come back to haunt Spanish society, and thus opened up the past, and forced a new negotiation of remembering/forgetting. They cannot be denied; their 'visibility' has altered people's image of the past:

> Pictures of excavated mass graves with human bones have become an unmistakable sign of human rights violations. […] Their meaning far exceeds their factual nature, what they actually show. They have become metaphors […] whose intensely symbolic varnish overlays its referential information almost entirely. The fact that these sites are also entering the sphere of photo artistic expression shows this progression from document to icon, to memory-art that pleads for remembrance.[38]

The pact of forgetting or the strategic silencing has thus been disrupted in the last decade and a half, in a constant transaction of discourse between state and society; there are grassroots movements, state law, journalistic debate, visibility of the past on social media, all influencing the ongoing discourse. As Francisco Delich explains,

> The state can decree that we should forget […] Society *per se* cannot decide to forget like that, even if it accepts the state's decision. […] Society's memory is an unquiet memory, never finally settled, always searching in forgetfulness, like the labour of Sisyphus that preserves a significant action, a moment, a particular story. This dialectic between memory and forgetting is also a never-ending tension between state and society.[39]

Street names have been changed, history books rewritten, monuments toppled, and attempts have been made to purge some national holidays of their Franco-era significance. But where we see some of the most significant memory work being performed is in culture, not least in literature with the boom in Civil War and Franco-era fiction and other types of memory texts in the twenty-first century.

As Adam Phillips indicates in his essay 'Freud and the Uses of Forgetting,' there are episodes in our lives we can pretend to forget or have a frozen image of.[40] These can be desires, thoughts, stories, trauma, which psychoanalysis encourages people to work through, and which might not be in line with our image of ourselves. This is not easy and calls for a type of cooperation between memory and forgetting. But it also points to the close relationship between memory and narrative, memory and writing, and the issues that arise when writing memory. This is at the centre of any analysis of literature and memory. As Andreas Huyssen, in a quote I also referred to in the previous chapter, points out: 'The fissure that opens up between experiencing an event and remembering it in representation is unavoidable.'[41] However, this fissure can also be regarded as a source of creativity, and what separates memory from an inert archive or

systematic form of preserving the past—the creativity which has its origin in the ontological gap between memory, and the original event, and its representation.

Spanish novelists have grappled with the country's complex relationship with the past since the transition, but not least in the twenty-first century which has seen a veritable boom in writing on the Civil War and Franco's legacy. Novels, memoirs, historical accounts, and much else has been published and gained wide readership and popularity. As Hans Lauge Hansen and Juan Carlos Cruz Suárez point out, the novels were part of the memory discourse as evidenced in this period in historiography, journalism, and political debate.[42] They also stress that the novelistic discourse has particular qualities that need careful examination, oscillating as it does between postmemory and prosthetic memory.[43] The first best-seller of this period was undoubtedly Javier Cercas's *Soldados de Salamina* (2001; *Soldiers of Salamis* 2004), later turned into a film (David Trueba, 2003), a work that tells of the narrator, 'Javier Cercas's' search for the truth behind one event in the Civil War. Elina Liikanen maintains that there are three main categories that the novels of the Civil War fall into, and places Cercas in the category of the reconstruction of the past, where an investigation, bearing some hallmarks of detective fiction, takes place. The two other categories she terms the experiential mode—which represents the past as lived experience, usually in fairly traditional narrative form, and the dissenting mode, the most complex form which highlights the inherent problems in reconstructing the past.[44] As Astrid Erll points out, 'Literature is a medium which simultaneously builds and observes memory. Prominent "reflexive modes" are constituted by narrative forms which draw attention to the processes and problems of remembering.'[45] María Corredera González explains that the overwhelming response to Cercas' novel, the prizes and acclaim, but also the sharp criticism from some quarters, and the credulity with which some responded to the work, highlight the conflicting ideas of people in Spain (of different generations, of diverse sectors of society, and different parts of the country) on the past, but also the author's successful positioning of the work on the borderline between fact and fiction,[46] mixing factual and fictional accounts with a documentary style narrative.

What separates this work in particular from earlier works is the attempt made at examining the Falangists' motivations; characters from both sides are sympathised with to a certain extent—something this generation of authors is finally able to do. David Richter has suggested that the work

'presents a constant blurring of frames and a multiplicity of perspectives that make readers question their normal, or traditional, conceptions of reality and perception.'[47] Cercas' crisscrossing of generic borderlines and boundaries can threaten the status of each genre with historiography losing its grip on reality, so to speak, and fictional modes being undone by their insistence on a relationship to the real.

One of the notable texts among recent novels on the Civil War and the Franco era is *Les veus del Pamano* by the Catalan author Jaume Cabré (2004, The Voices of Pamano), where he traces the story of the imaginary Catalan village of Torena through the twentieth century, civil war, dictatorship, and the transition. As in *Soldados de Salamina*, we follow one character's search of the past, overwhelmed by a burning need to find the truth behind layers of forgetting, silence, false trails, and lies. Tina is a teacher in a small village school in Torena whose life seems to be unravelling, as she discovers her husband is having an affair and her son is leaving them to join a monastery, which they view as a betrayal of their post-Franco liberal values. For them it constitutes a 'forgetting' of the Church's history in the Civil War and during the dictatorship. In preparation for an upcoming exhibition celebrating the school's anniversary, she visits the ruins of the old school building and discovers diaries of a former headmaster, Oriol Fontelles, long considered a hero of the Falangists. The archival find, a very well-known trope in literature, is here used to reveal a different (and forgotten) side to the (silenced) past. The diaries tell of an extremely carefully hidden past and recount stories of betrayals in political and private life (mirroring Tina's own sufferings), lies, and repression. The story of the town's moneyed family, of the Falangist authorities, of the resistance, and the maquis, is told through Tina's reading of Oriol's diaries, and through the stories of the town's stonemasons, father and son, who make headstones for the local cemetery, a disputed site of conflicting ideas on the past. As the son says, 'I think the words we etch on the stones are a condensed history of a person's life.'[48] This way of telling the story of a life allows them to be chroniclers of a kind, but the cemetery is also the place where enemies are forced to stay together: 'A lot of war, a lot of rage, but everyone ends up here, side by side' (92). The same can be said of the small village, a perfect setting for a novel of this type, where enemies share the same town, forced into a cold, and silent, embrace.

The first chapter of the book tells of the symbolic ceremony of changing of the street names, which took place all over Spain after Franco's death, with the added importance here of the street names also changing

from Castellan to Catalan: The Carrer President Francesc Maciá replaces Calle Generalísimo Franco, and Carrer el Mig replaces Calle Falangista Fontelles (24). The reader, however, does not realise the significance of the last name change until much later in the novel. Tina becomes a witness to a hidden past and so does the reader, in the common literary method of the staging of the listening to another's testimony. It is curious to note that interest in the past is presented in many texts of this kind as an obsession, as an unhealthy interest, thus at times undermining the opening up of the past these works nevertheless participate in. But as they place the reader in the witness's shoes, Cercas by laying bare the research behind the work, or Cabré with Tina's quest, the reader ultimately takes part in a dialogue with the past. The emphasis is on the documentary evidence, the appearance of truthfulness. The novel corresponds to two of Liikanen's categories, on the one hand the experiential mode, which refers to a fairly traditional narrative form, but also as a reconstruction of the past, where the investigation itself plays a decisive role.

While the matron of the rich family, also Oriol's lover, attempts to get Oriol beatified by the pope, Tina reveals the story of Oriol's cooperation with the maquis. The novel examines the lives of the villagers through turbulent times, through battles, physical and psychological, through divisions between the 'two Spains,' and through the individual's relationship with the village's past, and by extension, the past of all of Spain. The one constant element in the life of the people is the power held by the landowners, the richest family in town. As Elisenda, the aforementioned matron of the family, says to her lackey, Valentí Targa, the Falangist mayor during the dictatorship, 'it is your time. But remember and do not forget that it is always my and my family's time. Always. Now, in the past and in a hundred years' time' (431). These words have a particular resonance in today's recession in Spain, where some protesters have blamed the overly cautious transition for the corruption and financial and political mismanagement that have exacerbated the current situation in Spain.[49]

Because some of the millennial memory texts published in Spain also contain autobiographical elements, this generation of writers have been called 'los nietos de la guerra' (the grandchildren of the war), and they ask questions about their family's experience of the war and what that experience means for themselves. Thus they write on the border between autobiography, biography, and fiction. 'In many cases, the investigative novels contain a game of autofiction,' Liikanen explains. 'This happens when in principal the author, narrator and main character is identified as

one and the same even though the characteristics of the latter two do not completely match the external referent.'[50] Johnnie Gratton posits in his essay on postmodern French fiction while discussing meta/auto/fictional texts such as Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975), Nathalie Sarraute's *Enfance* (1983), and Marguerite Duras' *L'amant* (1984) that 'one begins to find it regrettable that Hutcheon did not leave her definition of the postmodern novel more open, for the paradoxical/complex form we encounter most prominently in the contemporary French domain is not so much "historiographic metafiction" […] as a mode we could justifiably call "autobiographic(al) metafiction".'[51] One such text, a trilogy published in one volume as *La Guerra perdida* in 2012, is by the Mexican author of Catalan origin Jordi Soler, who traces his family's past, their war, their exile in Mexico—attempting to marry half-told stories, family rumours, and historical accounts of these events. Again we have a staging of the search for the past, this time at least partly an autobiographical search. In the first part of the trilogy, *Los rojos de ultramar* (2004; The Reds from Overseas) Soler, the semi-fictional narrator, the author's namesake, who shares many of his biographical details, but not all, describes several ways in which he was able to research his grandfather's story: through a manuscript his grandfather gave him, through interviews he taped with him in his later years, through research in archives such as the one kept in the attic of the Mexican embassy in Paris, and through visiting the sites he talked about, in particular the French seaside town of Argèles-sur-Mer, where a hundred thousand Spanish of the Retirada sought refuge in 1939. It is on this visit that the gap between events and the present becomes the most prominent and troubling:

> The truth is that it disturbed me as much to find traces, many or few, as not to find any; deep down I knew that my Argèles-sur-Mer was the one I inherited from my grandfather, that it wasn't a physical place but a memory, a memory more than 60 years old, and this memory, which I am attempting to reconstruct, is difficult to coincide with this physical place which is 60 years younger.[52]

The Mediterranean tourist town has no traces, it has no space to remember, its war time past does not fit in with the beaches, hotels, and camping grounds as he finds when he reads a brochure from the local authorities, of which the historical chapter on the twentieth century fails to mention the 100 thousand Spanish who sought refuge on that beach in 1939 and stayed, some for almost three years, in dreadful conditions, dying of

typhoid and other such diseases in very unsanitary conditions in the sand that is now cleaned with state of the art technology so it can fly the blue flag identifying it as a clean and healthy beach. A taxi driver tells him there is a monument in town, close to the beach, between two campsites. It is not very prominently displayed and the narrator walks by it a couple of times until he notices it, a small white, weather-beaten obelisk with a plaque at its foot. He is not carrying any flowers, so he digs in his pockets and all he finds is a biro. He kneels on the ground and buries it at the foot of the monument, thinking, 'Here I leave my trace and my presence' (162). His tool of the trade, his pen, being his homage to the dead, in a symbolic or perhaps literal re-enactment of the writing process: dedicating his pen to the suffering of others, or maybe giving up his pen in the face of the suffering of others. Soler describes that on hearing of his grandfather's manuscripts he felt he had to do something with them, to answer the call of the archive, to transform the archive's 'pure potential' as Aleida Assmann would put it, into 'a palpable object[s] that can be transmitted and received by future individuals who, in witnessing the witnesses, will themselves learn and know and remember.'[53] The narrator's grandfather became one of the owners of a coffee plantation, *el rojo* becoming part of the establishment he fought against, even going to mass in his later years. It is at once a betrayal of the past but also what propels his grandson to find out what happened which could transform a man who once plotted the assassination of Franco with his friends in Mexico into a conservative plantation owner.

In the last part of the trilogy, *La fiesta del oso* (2009; The Festival of the Bear), Soler, the narrator, finds himself reluctantly in Argèles-sur-Mer again, this time as the guest of an association of the descendants of the refugees of the Retirada. And what follows can in some sense be summed up by two photographs. A woman, whom he describes as down-and-out, comes up to him and hands him a stained photograph which on later inspection he discovers to be of his grandfather, his great-grandfather, and his great uncle who disappeared in 1939. A photograph matching the description is printed on the book's cover. The woman had been prompted by the publicity surrounding the first volume of Soler's trilogy to correct his family's belief that Oriol the great uncle had died attempting to cross the Pyrenees in 1939, which they had presumed from a letter they received from one of his travelling companions in 1994; up until then they had imagined him as a successful pianist somewhere in Europe or South America. The photograph prompts the narrator to search for this uncle

and takes him on a quest to a tiny village in the French Pyrenees, and in a fairy tale like account he meets a giant, who had helped people across the mountains, first Republicans crossing over to France and then Jews taking the opposite route later on. The giant confirms that Oriol survived the war, and after a long search to find out what happened to him after the war, another photograph surfaces, this time in an online police archive. The photograph is of a broken man, a convicted killer, a photograph the narrator has no intention of sharing with the family. Revealing that not any type of photograph can serve the purpose of giving us back the past, of uniting us in remembrance, but that some are unacceptable, do not fit in with the viewer's expectations. And this photograph in the police archive of a convicted robber and murderer reveals a glaring contrast with the family's history of him either as a dead war hero or as a successful pianist. The photograph is not printed in the book either. The promise of the photograph the woman gave him and the sadness of the police archive photograph frame this story of how the descendent of the exiles raids the family archive, attempts to bridge the divide in time and space, in order to bring order to the family's story. The narrator feels that searching for Oriol was a responsibility he owed to their story, but the findings are grim; the story does not unite them with a past they recognise, but with loss, and the horrendous effects of war and violence.

Through a variety of literary methods, time and again crossing generic boundaries and challenging conventional restrictions between historiography, life writing, and fiction, the authors address a past, the recovery of which has been highly contested. The forgotten or silenced is dragged into daylight, with some authors, such as Cercas and Soler, emphasising the provisional truths found there and the great difficulty involved in breaking a decades old silence. The effort in the end might not resurrect the past, or the dead, but only create new stories and raise more questions. Thus, attempts at unearthing the forgotten, of giving it voice, can only be partially successful, while still demonstrating the dynamic relationship between remembering, forgetting, and writing.

Notes

1. Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, trans. Steven Rendall (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 159.
2. Josefina Cuesta, *La odisea de la memoria: historia de la memoria en España. Siglo XX* (Madrid: Alianza, 2008), p. 337.
3. Italics in original. Jordi Gracia, *La resistencia silenciosa: Fascismo y cultura en España* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2004), p. 117.

4. Weinrich, *Lethe,* p. 171.
5. Cuesta, *La odisea de la memoria,* p. 375. Francisco Espinosa explains one view that many have endorsed that under the weight of traumatic memory, and faced with new civil strife the drive was for a transition marked by forgetting the cycle 'republic—war—dictatorship.' Francisco Espinosa, *Contra el olvido: Historia y memoria de la guerra civil* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2006), p. 128.
6. Luisa Passerini, 'Memories between silence and oblivion,' *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts,* eds. Katharine Hodgkin, Susannah Radstone (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 2006), pp. 238–254, p. 241.
7. Paloma Aguilar Fernández, *Memoria y olvido de la Guerra Civil española,* (Madrid: Alianza editorial, 1996), p. 359.
8. Alberto Reig Tapia, *Memoria de la Guerra Civil: Los mitos de la tribu* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1999), p. 338.
9. Aguilar Fernández, *Memoria y olvido de la Guerra Civil española,* p. 20.
10. Javier Cercas, *The Anatomy of a Moment*, trans. Anne McLean (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 91.
11. Jay Winter, 'Thinking about silence,' *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 3–31, p. 4.
12. Paul Connerton, 'Seven Types of Forgetting,' *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 59–71, p. 51.
13. José Colmeiro, *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural: De la postguerra a la postmodernidad*, Memoria Rota: Exilios y Heterodoxias. Serie estudios 40 (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2005), p. 35.
14. Jesús Torbado and Manuel Leguineche, *Los topos: El testimonio estremecedor de quienes pasaron su vida escondidos en la España de la posguerra* (Madrid: El País, Aguilar, 1999), p. 14.
15. Torbado and Leguineche, *Los topos,* p. 29.
16. Colmeiro, *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural,* pp. 73–74.
17. Colmeiro, *Memoria histórica e identidad cultural,* p. 75.
18. Torbado and Leguineche, *Los topos,* p. 63.
19. Torbado and Leguineche, *Los topos,* p. 64.
20. Marc Augé, *Oblivion*, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 87.
21. Michael Richards, *A Time of Silence. Civil War and the Culture of Repression in Franco's Spain 1936–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 170.
22. Winter, 'Thinking about silence,' p. 5.
23. Aguilar Fernández, *Memoria y olvido de la Guerra Civil española,* p. 65.
24. Aguilar Fernández, *Memoria y olvido de la Guerra Civil española,* p. 66.
25. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 111 and 109.

26. Cercas, *Anatomía de un instante*, p. 13.
27. Cercas, *Anatomía de un instante,* back cover of 2010 paberback edition.
28. Many have written on Martín Gaite's treatment of history, fantasy, and narrative. See for instance Patricia Grace King, '"There's Always a Dreamed Text": Defying Mythologized History in Carmen Martín Gaite's "El cuarto de atrás",' *South Atlantic Review* 6.1 (Winter 2004): 33–60; Mario Santana, 'De *El cuarto de atrás* de Carmen Martín Gaite a *La meitat de l'ànima* de Carme Riera: Notas sobre la memoria histórica en la novella contemporánea," *Tejuelo* 10 (2011): 97–110; Colmeiro devotes a chapter in his study to the novel analysing it as a symbol of catharsis of personal and historical trauma, *Memoria histórica y identidad cultural*, pp. 156–176.
29. Carmen Martín Gaite, 'El cuento español de posguerra,' *Pido la palabra* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2002), pp. 165–176, p. 170.
30. Carmen Martín Gaite, *The Backroom,* trans. Helen Lane (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000), p. 133.
31. Cercas, *The Anatomy of an Instant,* pp. 6–7.
32. Mary Vincent, 'Breaking the Silence? Memory and Oblivion since the Spanish Civil War,' *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century,* eds. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 47–67, p. 66.
33. Antonio Muñoz Molina, *Ardor guerrero* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1995), p. 187.
34. José Colmeiro, 'A Nation of Ghosts?: Haunting, Historical Memory and Forgetting in Post-Franco Spain,' *452° Electronic Journal of Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature* 4 (2011): 17–34. Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 92 and 98.
35. Francisco Ferrándiz, *El pasado bajo tierra: Exhumaciones contemporáneas de la Guerra Civil,* Memoria rota. Exilios y Heterodoxias. Serie estudios 51 (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2014), pp. 52–53.
36. Francisco Ferrándiz and Alejandro Baer, 'Digital Memory: The Visual Recording of Mass Grave Exhumations in Contemporary Spain,' *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Online Journal) 9.3 (2008): Art. 35, par. 10. This public, political, and judicial interest in the past has been marked by certain stepping stones. The historian Omar G. Encarnación has called it 'Pinochet's revenge' in reference to Pinochet's arrest in 1998 at the behest of the Spanish courts. 'Pinochet's Revenge: Spain Revisits its Civil War,' *World Policy Journal* (Winter 2007/08): 39–50. In 2002, the United Nations reprimanded Spain for not facilitating the search for mass graves and a lack of respect of the victims. In 2007, the then PM José Luis Zapatero and his party, the PSOE, passed laws, the so-called 'memory laws,' which establish how the past should be examined, the victims identified, reparations paid, and so on, but they maintained the 1977 amnesty—those to blame should not be prosecuted.

37. Ferrándiz, *El pasado bajo tierra,* p. 36.
38. Ferrándiz and Baer, 'Digital Memory,' para. 11.
39. Francisco Delich, 'The Social Construction of Memory and Forgetting,' *Diogenes* 201 (2004): 65–75, pp. 66–67.
40. Adam Phillips, 'Freud and the Uses of Forgetting,' *On Flirtation* (London: Faber, 1995), pp. 22–38, p. 22.
41. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking time in a Culture of Amnesia* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.
42. Hans Lauge Hansen and Juan Carlos Cruz Suárez, 'Literatura y memoria cultural en España (2000–2010),' *La Memoria Novelada: Hibridación de géneros y metaficción en la novela española sobre la guerra civil y el franquismo (2000–2010)*, eds. Hans Lauge Hansen and Juan Carlos Cruz Suárez (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 21–42, p. 23. This is the first volume of three volumes of essays published on memory texts in Spanish during this decade followed by *La Memoria Novelada II: Ficcionalización, documentalismo y lugares de memoria en la narrative memorialista Española,* eds. Juan Cruz Suárez and Diana González Martín (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013) and *La Memoria Novelada III: Memoria transnacional y anhelos de justicia*, eds. Juan Carlos Cruz Suárez, Hans Lauge Hansen and Antolín Sánchez Cuervo (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015).
43. Hansen and Cruz Suárez, 'Literatura y memoria cultural en España,' p. 39.
44. Elina Liikanen, 'Pasados imaginados: Políticas de la forma literaria en la novela española sobre la guerra civil y el franquismo,' *La Memoria Novelada: Hibridación de géneros y metaficción en la novela española sobre la guerra civil y el franquismo (2000–2010)*, pp. 43–53, pp. 45–49.
45. Astrid Erll, 'Narratology and Cultural Memory Studies,' *Narratology in the Age of Cross-Disciplinary Narrative Research*, eds. Sandra Heinen and Roy Sommer (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), pp. 212–227, p. 221.
46. María Corredera González, *La Guerra civil española en la novela actual. Silencio y diálogo entre generaciones* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2010), pp. 105–107.
47. David Richter, 'Memory and Metafiction: Re-membering Stories and Histories in *Soldados de Salamina,*' *Letras Peninsulares* 17.2–3 (2004–2005): 285–296, p. 285.
48. Jaume Cabré, *Las voces del Pamano,* trans. Palmira Feixas (Barcelona: Ediciones Destino, 2007), p. 81.
49. See for instance, *CT o la Cultura de la Transición: Crítica a 35 años de cultura española,* ed. Guillem Martínez (Barcelona: Random House Mondadori, 2012).
50. Elina Liikanen, 'La herencia de une guerra perdida. Le memoria multidireccional en *Los rojos de ultramar* de Jordi Soler,' *Olivar* 14.20 (2013): 77–109.

51. Johnnie Gratton, 'Postmodern French Fiction: Practice and Theory,' *The Cambridge Companion to the French Novel: From 1800 to the Present,* ed. Timothy Unwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 242–260, p. 245.
52. Jordi Soler, *Los Rojos de ultramar* in *La Guerra perdida* (Barcelona: Mondadori, 2012), pp. 9–207, p. 156.
53. Aleida Assmann, 'History, Memory and the Genre of Testimony,' *Poetics Today* 27:2 (Summer 2006): 261–273, p. 271.

CHAPTER 6

Forgetting as Disguise: Memory Debates of Occupation

In the previous chapter I discussed how the Spanish Civil War and the four decades of Franco's dictatorship had a deep impact on the politics of memory in Spain. One of the causes of this is undoubtedly how the aftermath of civil wars raises questions of what should be remembered or forgotten. Foreign occupation of a country in war time is another type of seismic societal upheaval which can leave a nation or territory in constant questioning of collusion, guilt, responsibility, and thus in the grips of memory conflicts for decades to come. It is well known how the German occupation of large swathes of Europe during World War II left many countries in utter turmoil of reprisals and questionable justice in its wake. One of the countries affected was Norway, occupied by the Nazis during the war but in Tony Judt's summation, as France was, 'run by active partners in ideological collaboration with the occupier,'[1] one of whose leaders, Vidkun Quisling, has even given his name to all subsequent collaborators and traitors. Many other Norwegians were implicated before and since in the Nazi agenda, probably none of them more culturally powerful than a Nobel prize winning author and, up until the war, national treasure: Knut Hamsun. In Judt's writing on the aftermath of the war in Europe he suggests that 'most of occupied Europe either collaborated with the occupying forces (a minority) or accepted with resignation and equanimity the presence and activities of the German forces (a majority).'[2] It is doubtless safe to say that this was not the 'memory of occupation' endorsed in those

G. Gudmundsdottir, *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59864-6_6

countries after the war, but in Judt's estimation the 'Nazis could certainly never have sustained their hegemony over most of the continent for as long as they did, had it been otherwise.'[3] There have, of course, been many works in Norway which deal with this horrific period in the nation's history—in historiography, fiction, film, etc., most, in the early years at least, taking a familiar stance on life in occupied countries—with the main protagonists being the heroic resistance fighter and the evil Nazi. This depiction is in line with Judt's description of the myth propagated in many occupied countries that 'to be innocent a nation had to have resisted, and to have done so in its overwhelming majority, a claim that was perforce made and pedagogically enforced all over Europe.'[4] Here, however, I am interested in exploring a text which approaches the events from an unusual angle, or from the point of view of the alleged traitor: Knut Hamsun's memoir *Paa gjengrodde stier* (1949; *On Overgrown Paths* 1967). In it he describes the prosecution against him in the aftermath of the war. It is an unusual text, not only in its point of view, but also in its form and execution, as Anne Sabo explains: 'After the war, eighty-six-year-old Hamsun was considered a traitor and was prosecuted for the High Court. The traitor, however, stubbornly refused to give his countrymen the apology they expected until the bitter end, thereby intensifying the trauma.'[5] Thus the text offers no release or reprieve from the crisis of national identity suffered by Norway in those years; the apology which many readers and former admirers craved was not forthcoming.

Susanne Maerz has mapped how the discourse on the past has evolved in Norway through the decades, in particular in the four decades between 1965 and 2005. She explains that the discussion and debate usually flared up after a scandal came to light or a taboo was broken: 'Because of these taboos the occupation is represented as a trauma that needs to be worked through—even if those are processes which will never end. It is therefore fitting to describe it as a reworking of the past.'[6] Maerz believes each decade has a certain mode of working through the memory of the past and indicates that in the 1960s the emphasis was on maintaining a simple black-and-white image of the past, an image which supported an overarching feeling that a line should be drawn under the time of the occupation, it should be forgotten, speculations and investigations should come to an end. In the 1970s it was time for a revision of this image, and the 1980s saw a breakthrough for revisionism, but also disputes against such revisions, in line with the general swing to the right in those years. From the 1990s to the present day, the debate has gathered momentum, not least as regards

the treatment of the Jews and the so-called 'war children' (children born to Norwegian mothers and German fathers), and the demands for moral responsibility grew louder.[7] Bjarte Bruland and Mats Tangestuen further elaborate on the cooperation of the Quisling regime with the Nazis in the extermination of the Jews and explain the tendency after the war was 'to quietly forget that the Norwegian police had been the key perpetrator in Norway, and that German participation in the practical execution of arrest and transportation to Oslo was minimal, or even non-existent. The fact that other Norwegian bureaucratic organizations, and even private transport firms, were involved in anti-Jewish measures was never mentioned.'[8] Bruland and Tangestuen relate how there have been efforts in recent years to counter this silence or induced forgetting and take as an example of this the work of the Norwegian artist Victor Lind, who has created several works focusing on the regime's treatment of the Jews. Lind, in one performance piece, hired 100 taxis to take part in a life re-enactment of a particular episode in the transportation of the Jews. He also made a counter-monument of the wartime inspector of police in the Norwegian State Police, Knut Rød, dressing him in a Nazi uniform making the Nazi salute. In Bruland and Tangestuen's analysis 'Lind wants to demonstrate the role of Knut Rød in the extermination of Norway's Jews, but, even more, he wants to highlight post-war Norwegian society. In Lind's view, Norway's collective memory needs to be amended to include history's darker moments.'[9] They also point out that 'Many aspects of the destruction process has not yet been the focus of scientific scrutiny. The complexity of what happened during the war is often forgotten as views change and different interpretations take hold.'[10]

The difficulties the debate on the past runs into, the silence surrounding certain elements from this period that Maerz and Bruland and Tangestuen describe, can be thought of in terms of Jay Winter's analysis and typology of silence, especially as regards violent periods in history. Winter notes, as I discussed in the previous chapter, that 'silence is chosen in order to suspend or to truncate open conflict over the meaning and/or justification of violence, either domestic or trans-national. The hope here is that the passage of time can lower the temperature of disputes about these events, or even heal the wounds they cause. We term these practices as yielding "political" or strategic silences.'[11] This can certainly be said to apply to the Norwegian case, but here I would resist the exclusion of forgetting and hold that one can lead to the other, agreeing with Paul Connerton when he maintains 'forgetting' as the basic term, with silence playing a part within that concept. Thus, one of his seven types of forgetting can also be a relevant term here:

> This type of forgetting is certainly not solely, and may in large part be not at all, a matter of overt activity on the part of a state apparatus. It is manifest in a widespread pattern of behaviour in civil society, and it is covert, unmarked and unacknowledged. Its most salient feature is a *humiliated silence*. Perhaps it is paradoxical to speak of such a condition as evidence for a form of forgetting, because occasions of humiliation are so difficult to forget; it is often easier to forget physical pain than to forget humiliation. Yet few things are more eloquent than a massive silence. And in the collusive silence brought on by a particular kind of collective shame there is detectable both a desire to forget and sometimes the actual effect of forgetting.[12]

In Connerton's contention forgetting and silence are both part of the same process or field. Certain political conditions seem to call for such states of forgetting and silence, again calling to mind Harald Weinreich's words that 'Wars are orgies of forgetting.'[13]

As I mentioned above, the attitude towards Hamsun's role in the war and the occupation, and his attitude to the Third Reich in general, was a manifestation of the complex crisis of identity an occupied nation goes through. A much loved national writer, who had no small part in influencing Norway's cultural identity in the first half of the twentieth century, has betrayed them, abandoned them, and the reaction was at times contradictory and relied on strategic silencing rather than active truth seeking. The publication of Thorkild Hansen's semi-fictional biography *Prosessen mot Hamsun* (1978; The Trial against Hamsun) was highly influential in shaping a different viewpoint on this period in Hamsun's life. It is in a sense an apologia for Hamsun, the reasoning being that he was simply too great a man for his time and people. This understanding then underpinned Jan Troell's film *Hamsun* (1996) with Max von Sydow in the title role, which was strongly criticised for implying that Marie Hamsun, Knut's wife, was entirely to blame for his relationship with the Nazis. In Tore Rem's ground-breaking work *Knut Hamsun: Reisen til Hitler* (2014; Knut Hamsun: The Journey to Hitler) he strongly denounces these apologias for the author and claims that 'for such a narrative to work, one needs to manipulate large historical experiences, or leave them in silence, or radically adapt them or remove them. So what is left is unambiguous and simple.'[14] He claims that Hamsun's views were clear, that he never opposed any part of Nazi ideology, he had, as he saw it, found the truth, had no notion of what his relationship with Nazi Germany would do to him in later years, ignored all warnings, and thought a 'solution' to the 'Jewish problem' was needed.[15] Rem explains that one of the motives for his writing on Hamsun is relatively simple:

> so we will not forget. And we need memory, including collective forms of memory, for that to happen. Against remembrances which are simply repeated, we need remembrances that create. The latter ones can give us a new basis for our relationship with the past, and to move on. Forgetting can be good, something we need to carry on, to survive, as individuals, as a society. It can also be manipulative, shut out the unprocessed, or what constitutes a healthy discomfort for a culture. Then it prevents understanding, insight, freedom.[16]

We have seen in previous chapters that the call for remembrance is not always the overriding response to traumatic events; forgetting can be seen to provide solace and comfort when that is needed. Aleida Assmann addresses just such ideas, explaining that she wants to move away from the 'rigid polarity' between the terms of remembering and forgetting 'by showing that forgetting can be a cure, but it is by no means a cure-all. […] The decision whether it is better to favour the one over the other depends on the historical context and above all on the cultural values and general circumstances prevailing in each instance.'[17] She comments on the aforementioned myth-making which Judt described as prevailing at the end of the war, and she notes that 'at that time, forgetting was not conceived of as a repression of memory; rather, it was connected to a spirit of renewal and of openness towards the future.'[18] But as time progressed a transformation of the connotations of the terms could be seen to emerge:

> Whereas forgetting, as a strategy of renewal and integration, had had positive connotations within the context of cultural orientation towards modernization, it now became negatively associated with denial and cover-up. Remembering, in contrast, previously associated with a fixation on the past, hate, revenge, resentment and divisions, was now re-valued as a therapeutic and ethical obligation.[19]

These evolving attitudes to a violent past are in line with Maerz's timeline, and Victor Lind's and Tore Rem's views on national memory can be seen to reinforce Assmann's analysis as they clearly match the latter understanding of remembrance.

The problem one normally faces when considering forgetting in autobiography is that it must necessarily be a void, an absence, something that is not there, and therefore our discussion will always be speculative. In a text such as Hamsun's, however, the situation is altered. As his past is so well known, contemporary readers were in no doubt about what was

missing, as Sabo indicated above, which will inevitably influence the analysis. Autobiographical texts often reveal the complex relationship personal memory has to society's memory, and this is particularly so in texts which address a difficult historical past, and is very much apparent in postwar autobiographical works. Texts of that kind offer an interesting field to investigate these contested attitudes to remembering and forgetting.

Knut Hamsun's *On Overgrown Paths*

As mentioned above, Knut Hamsun was charged with treason after the war and was sent to a psychiatric clinic in Oslo to be seen by two doctors who were to determine whether he was fit to stand trial. As Sabo explains, 'On February 5, 1946, the doctors concluded their examination diagnosing Hamsun as a person of "varig svekkede sjelsevner" [permanently impaired mental faculties].' The attorney general decided, therefore, not to press charges 'thus sparing the country the embarrassment of putting Hamsun, the former national hero, in the dock. Instead, the proceedings were reduced to the lesser charge of membership in the Norwegian Nazi party for which Hamsun was sentenced to financially ruinous fines.'[20] Knut Hamsun's memoir, *On Overgrown Paths*, is for all the above reasons, a curious piece of writing. The period covered is the one from the end of the war, when Hamsun is arrested and until the verdict three years later. The narrative is clearly bookended by these two points in time. It begins: 'The year is 1945. On May 26 the chief of police of Arendal came to Nørholm and served notice that my wife and I were under house arrest for thirty days.'[21] And it ends on these words: 'St. John's Day, 1948. Today the Supreme Court has given its verdict, and I end my writing' (176). The narrative is more or less in chronological order and is reminiscent of a diary; this is a contemporary autobiography, if one can phrase it like that, with some digressions in material and time. He describes his stay in hospital and later in a retirement home where he remains under a type of house arrest, then his stay in a mental hospital, eventually moving again to the retirement home, this time of his own volition, although he does not mention this in the text, and then finally back to his farm.

The type of work we have here, i.e., the thoughts of a man waiting for the court's verdict, can take the form of confessional writing, where the author attempts to explain the crime, the events leading up to the crime, guilt or innocence, regrets and excuses. In these cases, the events are carefully considered and the question 'How did I get here?' addressed, but

this is only partially true of *On Overgrown Paths*. Hamsun does at least in part address the accusations made against him, though he never explains them in any detail, and he does not mention the verdict either, and his thoughts on his own actions are mainly limited to his speech from the trial which he includes in the memoir. In this respect there is a giant hole in the book—this narrative is certainly not about what it *should* be about. It first and foremost *forgets* the past and advocates and predicts that others will too. It has been said that the reason why there are not more Nazi memoirs (and there still are quite a few) is that the perpetrators had no compunction to remember, as the survivors had; first and last they wanted to forget.[22] As Judt suggests, it is 'understandable that former collaborators, or even those who simply sat it out, should have been happy to see the wartime tale thus retold to their advantage.' The question in Judt's mind, however, is 'why did the genuine resisters […] agree to retouch the past thus?' and he proposes that one of the reasons was 'to restore a minimal level of cohesion to civil society and re-establish the authority and legitimacy of the state.'[23] In Hamsun's case there is also a sense of willingness to believe his version of the past, his type of forgetting, as it would in some sense re-establish national and cultural identity. Often the call to remember emanates from victimhood, as despite the maxim that history is written by the victors, the victors are the ones who can afford to forget. Alan Rosen highlights that in criminal memoirs the perpetrator/victim dichotomy is often reversed, the perpetrator becoming the victim, and Hamsun is no exception to this.[24]

The tone in Hamsun's autobiographical text is first and foremost one of surprise at how the world has turned, and this is demonstrated by two seemingly opposite forces at work in the text: On the one hand, the narrator's sense of absurdity of the circumstances (as he seems quite blind to the present reality), and on the other, a sense of loss—a nostalgia for the country as he imagines it to have been before the war. He appears utterly confounded by what he sees as the nonsensical situation he finds himself in and the limits it sets him, turning his life on its head: 'Queer to think that I, who had never had anything to do with the police in any country, as much as I have seen of the world—indeed, having set foot in four of the five regions of the earth—, should now in my old age be a prisoner' (4–5). Another thread that runs through the work is his utter surprise at his countrymen's reactions toward him and the complete change in his status in society. Many of his anecdotes in one way or another demonstrate this. In one instance he asks a boy he sees in the street to assist him in posting

a letter. The boy does not acknowledge his presence and Hamsun assumes that he must have recognised him as 'a political prisoner':

> We have acquired political prisoners in Norway. It used to be that a political captive was only a character in Russian story books. […] But today we have one who does count; he is legion in the land of Norway and comes in forty, fifty, some say sixty thousand copies. And perhaps in many thousands more. Let that be as it may. People associate a political prisoner with something criminal: no doubt he goes around carrying a machine gun, … watch out for his sheath knife! … children and young people must be especially careful. (11–12)

His lack of understanding, his 'selective memory' toward his own past, has turned him in his own eyes into a caricature, something from a storybook, 'the bogie man,' who children fear, doubtless armed and dangerous. By intimating that political prisoners had only existed in Norway up until then in fiction, he also conveniently 'forgets' the fate of the countless political prisoners imprisoned in the country during the Nazi occupation, and their oftentimes horrific fate in prisons and camps. The old narrator thus makes light of other people's view of him; he never connects the horrors his nation faced in the war to himself; it is a mystery to him. Many of the incidents he recounts are not particularly clear; the reader cannot escape the feeling that they are deliberately vague, a vagueness he often blames on his failing hearing and eyesight. In another instance when describing people's reactions toward him he tells of a stranger who approaches him. Hamsun can hardly hear what he says, but thanks him anyway and says, 'my visitors are mostly the police these days; I am held captive, you know, a traitor …' (13). Again, his status is inexplicable, absurd, beyond his understanding. The same can be said when he responds to particular accusations, such as claims of anti-Semitism, and again, the idea seems preposterous: 'I make attacks on the Jews! I have had too many good friends among them for that, and these friends have been fine friends to me' (59). The claims are all groundless; with his actual failing eyesight, and his historical myopia, he can in no way connect his support of Hitler's Germany to attacks on Jews. But as Rem has elucidated, Hamsun never opposed the Nazi regime's extermination of the Jews or the Norwegian authorities' collaboration in it.

On Overgrown Paths is thus full of silences, omissions, 'deliberate forgettings,' but there are many strands in the work which invite further study, not least when the reader has consigned himself to the fact that the work will not address regret, guilt, reckoning with a troubled past, and so

on. One of the peculiar stories that runs through the text is the story of a knife. Following his description of the political prisoner as a fantasy figure the narrator launches into a segue: 'As for sheath-knives, here is one that found its way to me, I don't know how: a fine knife […]. I ask the man who sweeps up outside, but it is not his. I will have to ask the head nurse' (12). So he is armed, after all. He describes how he had handed over his guns to the police when he and his wife were initially charged, but now, he is a dangerous political prisoner with a knife he has no idea how he got hold of. He continues looking for the owner and asks the casket maker, a regular at the hospital where death is always closed at hand, if it is his:

> "It wasn't you by any chance who lost a sheath-knife?" I ask. "A sheath-knife?" I think he says, for I see that he feels about him and then shakes his head. A stream of talk follows; he wants to know more about the knife: where was it? what did it look like? I go my way as though I have just remembered something to attend to at my office. (17)

During his stay in the mental hospital in Oslo, when he undergoes the psychological evaluations, his possessions are kept locked away, but once he gets out of there he goes through his things in an effort to reorganise his life, perhaps to reclaim it from the authorities, and comes across the knife again, and once more tries to find its rightful owner:

> I pulled myself together and had the sheath-knife sent off. Oh, that knife! I had not come by it dishonestly; it had attached itself to me at Grimstad hospital and then had lain together with my other things down in the cellar of the Clinic for four months. I sent it by mail to the hospital: Here is a sheath-knife; please take it away; I cannot stand seeing it any more; it is not mine. (51–52)

His attempt to get rid of the knife fails when the nurse from the hospital in Grimstad comes to visit and brings the knife back with her, as she claims it does not belong to them, which seems quite an excessive gesture on behalf of the hospital. A little later the truth comes to light:

> But I have at last got it figured out here on earth about the sheath-knife. That is something, at least. It was sent to me by Postmaster Erik Frydenlund in Aurdal a long time ago […]. But how had the sheath-knife come furtively to me at Grimstad hospital? A very simple story: Little Esben had come on a visit, and he had wanted very badly to get hold of that big, wonderful knife; there was nothing his mother could do but hide it on the bottom of the wood-box. (69–70)

So the knife was indeed smuggled to him, although inadvertently, the political prisoner, and by a child at that. It would verge on the melodramatic, the gothic even, to see the knife as a symbol of his guilt, of his politically criminal past continually coming back to haunt him, of his denial of any criminality and of eventual admission of guilt, though through no fault of his own. The knife keeps appearing in his possession, and he cannot get rid of it, realising finally that it is in fact his very own. 'Is this a dagger which I see before me?' Macbeth asks when he envisions the killing of Duncan. The symbolic import of many other aspects of the text can also be expounded upon: He is losing his hearing—he cannot hear the charges against him; his eyesight is failing—he cannot see the proof before his eyes. His is deaf and blind to the past, or as regards other people's version of the past, and old age leaves him with a deteriorating memory. The other feature of his complaints, his victimhood in the text, is that it represents him as having every other ageing person's problems, thus humanising him and emphasising how he is just like other people, while at the same time being above their laws. The text is at times very focused on everyday matters such as the state of his shoelaces and galoshes, which he describes in detail—they apparently date from World War I and he would like new ones, indicating, but not mentioning, the precarious financial state he was left in. Hamsun is, therefore, clearly the victim in the text, the victim of the utter lack of understanding by the authorities, but also the victim in a much more mundane fashion as he recounts his suffering as an old man in the minutiae of everyday life. He complains when he is not allowed to read the papers or take a walk, or when his nurses carry his meals to his private cottage on a hill above the hospital and they finally reach him, the coffee and the soup has splashed all over the tray; they 'are pretty,' he says, but 'badly brought up' (18).

Most dramatic weight, however, is given to the period he spends in a mental hospital in Oslo, locked up for four months and subjected to, what seem to him, endless psychological examinations, with a humiliating outcome. This is where the text veers away from strict chronology. He first describes his arrival there, but then breaks off the narrative claiming, 'perhaps there will be time later to come back to my stay at the Psychiatric Clinic, the friendly attendants, the genuinely good head nurse, Christmas 45, the patients, taking walks—it must all wait. I must regain my strength' (51). The stay there is the central trauma of his narrative—he has to 'forget' it for a while, the time for narrative has not come. Instead he includes the letter he wrote to the prosecutor where he complains bitterly about

being held in the mental hospital, convinced he suffers from no mental illness, but neither is he guilty of any of the charges. In the letter he writes, 'I knew that I was innocent, deaf and innocent' (56). He eventually returns to this period in the narrative, but telling is not easy, the deep trauma is apparently resistant to narrative:

> I promised a little while back, I think, that perhaps I would return to my time in the Psychiatric Clinic. I made no hard and fast promise, but I should have promised nothing at all nor even mentioned it. Even now I have reminders of my stay there destroyed for me. It cannot be measured; it has nothing to do with weight and measure. It was a slow, slow pulling up by the roots. (91)

It is clearly indicated that he does want to recall and recount this time, a period that he would prefer to forget, along with the psychiatrists' ignominious conclusion that he was of 'permanently impaired mental faculties.' Nevertheless he carries on: 'I shall now jot down a few chance occurrences, random recollections from the Men's Ward of the Psychiatric Clinic. I will include a couple of serious things which have bobbed up on their own, though I will recall them with great distaste' (92). The 'serious things which have bobbed up on their own' echo the repetitive nature of trauma in memory. He is not a willing narrator but believes it necessary to tell of his time there, as, ironically, he thinks the treatment he received there by the order of the court should not be forgotten.

Through the whole work he describes his sensation of standing outside society, having been turned into an outcast in some sense, and isolated from any real interaction. None of this is of his own doing; this is mainly due to society's inexplicable behaviour towards him, and the result of his physical problems as he constantly emphasises how his deafness isolates him. One day a young woman visits him in hospital. She is very patient with him, on his side, so to speak, a fan, and she breaks his isolation, as she wants to learn how to talk to him. At the end of that episode he writes, 'A wonderful visit for me. An audible silence after her departure. […] There is nothing like feeling the breath of real life' (26).

The meandering and in some ways fragmentary nature of the text has often been commented on. One of several digressions and breaks in chronology include the stories the narrator tells of Marteinn his neighbour and the Irishman Pat he meets in America. The stories told of other people in autobiographies are often illuminating, not least when the people in

question are not close relations or friends and seemingly have no close connection to events. The question automatically arises, why are they there? In *On Overgrown Paths* Marteinn, Pat, and a Russian man he meets in a bookshop in Finland all share the trait of being wanderers or travellers of one type or another, and to be suffering from homesickness, and additionally, Marteinn and Pat also suffer from unrequited love. Marteinn travels around and speaks at religious events. Hamsun comes across him on one of his walks, and Marteinn asks him to read his autobiography, and it is implied that this could have been Hamsun's story, his alternative life story, if he had not succeeded as a writer. Pat's story comes toward the end of the memoir. They had been friends in America when they were young, both homesick, singing the praises of their home countries and promising to return. Pat lost his way, ended up travelling, never to return, Hamsun went back home. As the shop assistant in the bookshop says of the Russian, 'He is painfully homesick' (85). The homesickness, the nostalgia, the love for one's country described in these encounters highlight the narrator's own feeling of being unmoored, of being uprooted, cast out, and a longing for a country that has ceased to be. Hamsun wonders about the changing nature of all things, and that time spares no one:

> But indeed there are few things that endure […]. But one thing is still worse, even to talk about. I had thought that I stood in well with children. They used to come now and then with their little books for me to write my name in, and they bowed and thanked me and we were all pleased. Now I am used to frighten children. Let that be as it will, too. In a hundred years, perhaps less, the children's names will be as much forgotten as my own. (20–21)

The world where he was admired and venerated has disappeared; in its stead have come strange, unfathomable changes, accusations of treason, and a diagnosis of mental illness. And what can one write about when the world has gone astray but the simple everyday:

> These are trifles that I write about, and trifles that I write. What else can they be? I am a remanded prisoner housed in an old people's home, but even if I sat in prison I would not have greater things to write about then there, maybe lesser. All prisoners can only write about the eternally everyday occurrences and wait for their doom; nothing else is left them. Silvio Pellico sat in an Austrian jail and wrote about the little mouse he had adopted, his foster mouse. I write something of that sort—for fear of what could happen to me if I wrote of something else. (104)

The minutiae of everyday life replaces the bigger questions, as is common in old age; he is prevented from writing about anything else; these everyday details then constituting a certain forgetting of other issues. Ageing, deafness, blindness, his struggle with the everyday environment—this becomes the focal point. For some reason, he still considers himself a prisoner, although at this time he is writing now of his own volition in the retirement home.

Another element of the text is his defence speech he gave in court, which is included in the work and in many aspects echoes the emphasis of the rest of the memoir. Hamsun stresses the absurdity of the charges against him in the speech: 'What tells against me, strikes me to the ground, is wholly and solely my articles in the newspapers' (140). And even though he thinks them inconsequential, he stands by his own words, 'as before and as I always have' (140). Nevertheless, he also makes excuses for them, claiming he had been surrounded by Germans and therefore could not criticise them in print. He claims not to be defending his actions, only explaining:

> And no one told me that it was wrong that I sat there and wrote, no one in the whole country. I sat alone in my room, thrown back exclusively on my own resources. I did not hear; I was so deaf no one could have much to do with me. […] And what I wrote was not wrong. It wasn't wrong when I wrote it. It was right, and what I wrote was right. (142)

Repeatedly, deafness explains his isolation, it excuses him from the world. The phrase 'no one in the whole country' reads uncomfortably in the light of the collusion of many Norwegians with the Nazi regime. 'It was right' what he wrote as he claims that with it he had been trying to save the Norwegians from a horrible fate, tried for instance to write letter to get people out of prison camps:

> Never mind what all those eyes and hearts now want to charge me with. It is *my* loss which I have to bear. And in a hundred years it will all be forgotten. Then even this honourable court will be forgotten, totally forgotten. The names of everyone present here today will be obliterated from the earth in a hundred years and it will be remembered no more, named no more. It is our fate to be forgotten. (145–146)

Nearly seventy years after the publication of *On Overgrown Paths* this shows no sign of being erased and forgotten—far from it. Forgetting here should release him from blame, his actions are inconsequential in the larger

scheme of things, and the court is of no consequence in the bigger picture, and will not be remembered either. These years when he waited for the verdict have taught him nothing, he knew nothing, he is deaf, locked in himself, destitute, but strong, healthy, innocent, and in good spirits, according to the memoir. The charges do not agree with his understanding of the world, and therefore he displays no remorse or regret. Toward the end of the memoir Hamsun writes, 'It is three years today since I was arrested. And here I sit. It has not mattered to me, not bothered me. It has gone by as though merely one more event, and I take care not to say more of it than that. I have had practice in keeping quiet' (174).

Monika Žagar in her analysis of *On Overgrown Paths* addresses various critics' reception of the work and indicates that they have been fooled, or lulled into submission, by the writer:

> *Paa gjengrodde stier* is not a book about "trifles," as Hamsun disingenuously states and as Carl Anderson, the English translator of the memoir repeats. Neither is it a book from "the other side of the author's life" as Kittang has called it, nor merely a Taoist-like book of reflections as Ferguson has suggested. Instead, it is a deliberate defence written for posterity, with the goal of persuading the reader that Hamsun's activities during the war were in fact patriotic acts. Many scholars have followed Hamsun's "instructions" on how to read the book and concluded that his last work is "delightful." If nothing else, he effectively refutes professors Langfeldt and Ødegaard's diagnosis.[25]

As Žagar suggests, Hamsun 'builds upon his victim status. […] He does not offer "the truth and nothing but the truth," but rather approximations and ambiguities. It is precisely this strategy that leaves the door open for later interpretative confusion and generous apologies.'[26] She also points out that Hamsun insinuates that 'the judicial system has stifled his writing. The irony, of course, is that *Paa gjengrodde stier* is a testimony that the opposite is true and that Hamsun's literary discourse has won out over the legal and psychiatric arguments.'[27]

The verdict Hamsun received based on the psychiatric evaluation, which meant he only served a short time in hospitals and retirement homes and under house arrest, has often been described as a way out for the authorities, signalling the authorities' great reluctance of sending a former 'national treasure' to prison, and Judt explains that all over Europe governments had to grapple with the very thorny issue of who should be prosecuted and how: 'How do you choose whom to punish and for

which actions? Who does the choosing?' and his conclusion is 'that under almost any conceivable good faith response to these questions the postwar response proved tragically inadequate.'[28] The Hamsun affair is undoubtedly an example of this, and in part, Judt blames events like this on a lack of a peace treaty: 'Until such a treaty came along, Europeans (governments and people alike) postponed any collective effort to come to terms with the memory of the war it would have rounded out. When it never happened, they simply left the matter unresolved, buried, neglected, and selectively forgotten.'[29] As Hamsun's case shows, this has meant an ongoing debate, constant revisions and rewritings of the past, and in the last two decades a concerted effort against forgetting.

Notes

1. Tony Judt, 'The Past is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe,' *Daedalus* 121.4 (Fall 1992): 83–118, p. 85.
2. Judt, 'The Past is Another Country,' p. 85.
3. Judt, 'The Past is Another Country,' p. 85.
4. Judt, 'The Past is Another Country,' p. 89–90.
5. Anne Sabo, 'Knut Hamsun in *Paa gjengrodde stier*: Joker, *Übermensch,* or Sagacious Madman?' *Scandinavian Studies* 71.4 (Winter 1999): 453–474, p. 453.
6. Susanne Maerz, 'Okkupasjonstidens lange skygger,' *Nytt Nordisk Tidsskrift* 24.4 (2007): 365–377, p. 365.
7. Maerz, 'Okkupasjonstidens lange skygger,' pp. 366–372.
8. Bjarte Bruland and Mats Tangestuen, 'The Norwegian Holocaust: Changing Views and Representations,' *Scandinavian Journal of History* 36.5 (2011): 587–604, p. 593.
9. Bruland and Tangestuen, 'The Norwegian Holocaust,' p. 593.
10. Bruland and Tangestuen, 'The Norwegian Holocaust,' p. 598.
11. Jay Winter, 'Thinking about silence,' *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 3–31, p. 5.
12. Paul Connerton, 'Seven types of forgetting,' *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 59-71, p. 67.
13. Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, trans. Steven Rendall (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 159.
14. Tore Rem, *Knut Hamsun: Reisen til Hitler* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2014), pp. 26–27.
15. Rem, *Knut Hamsun,* p. 145.
16. Rem, *Knut Hamsun,* pp. 356–357.

17. Aleida Assmann, 'To remember or to Forget: Which Way Out of a Shared History of Violence?' *Memory and Political Change,* eds. Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 53–71, p. 57.
18. Assmann, 'To remember or to Forget,' p. 59.
19. Assmann, 'To remember or to Forget,' p. 61.
20. Sabo, 'Knut Hamsun in *Paa gjengrodde stier*,' p. 454.
21. Knut Hamsun, *On Overgrown Paths,* trans. Carl L. Anderson (New York: Paul S. Eriksson, 1967), p. 3.
22. Alan Rosen, 'Autobiography from the Other Side: The Reading of Nazi Memoirs and Confessional Ambiguitiy,' *Biography* 24.3 (Summer 2001): 553–569, p. 555.
23. Judt, 'The Past is Another Country,' p. 90.
24. Rosen, 'Autobiography from the Other Side,' p. 556.
25. Monika Žagar, *Knut Hamsun: The Dark Side of Literary Brilliance* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), p. 216.
26. Žagar, *Knut Hamsun*, p. 217.
27. Žagar, *Knut Hamsun*, p. 222.
28. Judt, 'The Past is Another Country,' p. 92.
29. Judt, 'The Past is Another Country,' p. 95.

CHAPTER 7

The Inheritance of Forgetting: Narratives of Postmemory

As I discussed briefly in Chap. 2, investigations of trauma have provided great insights into the relationship between memory and narrative. Anne Whitehead discusses in her book, *Trauma Fiction*, how novelists use diverse methods to reflect traumatic memories in their texts: 'Novelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection.'[1] Another method which can be seen in trauma fiction is the staging of a witnessing of another's testimony. Testimony is, of course, of vital importance in any discourse on trauma and narrative; it has a particular status, and the act of listening carries in itself a responsibility to the teller.[2] The narrator in W.G. Sebald's much acclaimed *Austerlitz* (2001) listens to another man's testimony and attempts to come to grips with it, to pin it down, and in some sense to take on his burden, as the act of listening can entail. Thus, the transactional character of trauma testimony is underlined. There are other types of significant transactions of trauma and memory, for instance when traumatic memory is passed down the generations, and this has been the focus of Marianne Hirsch's work and what she terms postmemory. I believe a foray into texts of postmemory can provide us with a valuable understanding of the manifold manifestations of forgetting in memory texts and its intricate connections to generational memory. Hirsch has emphasised the role of postmemory in a variety of memory practices, not least in artistic and imaginative ones:

G. Gudmundsdottir, *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59864-6_7

> Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy reconstruction and exceed comprehension.[3]

Hirsch, in her analysis of Sebald's works, has explained that it displays what she describes as 'affiliative postmemory,' an 'intragenerational horizontal identification that makes that child's position more broadly available to other contemporaries' as opposed to 'familial postmemory,' which refers to the literal second generation (child-parent).[4] The texts that I am concerned with in this chapter are of the second type: Lisa Appinganesi's *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* (1999) and Linda Grant's *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (1998). Two women who write when their mother's memory starts to fail in order to capture the past before it disappears. Both texts have also several connections and references to cultural memory, as among the subjects they have to contend with are the Holocaust and migration. Postmemory, in its relation to other people's memory, and in all its gaps, silences, and complexities, must be relevant to our discussion of the presence of the forgotten in memory texts and life writing.

Traumatic experience can be forgotten, or more to the point, we might like to forget traumatic events. Björn Krondorfer suggests that 'Oblivion, in contrast to the totality of memory, helps the rawness of trauma to take on *forms* of remembrances that are manageable by survivors and recognizable by secondary witnesses.'[5] Again, the importance of form is emphasised, the ordering, the telling, the transmission, that will negotiate a new relationship between remembering and forgetting in relation to the traumatic event according to Krondorfer:

> It is often only through the reiterative performance of what at first is an untellable memory (Blanchot's "un-story") that a recognizable story emerges. Repeated public performances of traumatic experiences in the form of tellable stories have a cathartic effect. As repetitions, they erode, channel, and control the totality of memory. Such reiterative performances of remembrance are acts of oblivion—and they allow the primary witness to live in the present without being a prisoner of unrelenting despair.[6]

Forgetting, thus, touches trauma again and again at different moments in its aftermath, letting it in or hiding it, in the act of telling and listening.

Blanchot's terms, which Krondorfer alludes to, are stated thusly: 'Passive: the un-story, that which escapes quotation and which memory does not recall—forgetfulness as thought. That which, in other words, cannot be forgotten because it has always already fallen outside memory.'[7]

Both Appignanesi and Grant have to contend with the oscillation between remembering and forgetting, both in a personal sense and in the culture at large. The time of their writing is no coincidence, at the height of the millennial memory boom, where in Jan Assmann's terms 'communicative memory' of World War II is giving way to 'cultural memory.' His theories on how memory is transformed over time have been very influential; the progress of memory from 'communicative memory' which 'comprises memories related to the recent past' and through time, 'once those who embodied it have died, it gives way to a new memory': 'cultural memory' which 'transforms factual into remembered history, thus turning it into myth.'[8] Hirsch, however, believes that this does not 'account for ruptures introduced by collective historical trauma, by war, Holocaust, exile, and refugeehood: these ruptures would certainly inflect these schemas of transmission. Both embodied communicative memory and institutionalized cultural memory would be severely impaired by traumatic experience.'[9] Both texts considered here describe such ruptures, though to a different degree of severity, and the writers are faced with a complex task in trying to reorder and recast events that are difficult to corroborate or verify, but which carry with them profundity and weight the writers have inherited, and they attempt here to put these events into narrative form.

Lisa Appignanesi's Investigation of the Forgotten

Lisa Appignanesi writes in *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* on her attempts to put together her parents' story during World War II. She gives a brief summary of the different ways in which the war is used in memory debates across Europe and beyond at the time of her writing and concludes, 'in its own small way, my family story touches on this whole complex tangle of remembering and forgetting. What measure is due to each in that tricky dance of time which is the making of a life?'[10] Her parents were Polish Jews, who managed to survive the war, and emigrated first to France and then Canada. Appignanesi is aware of the extreme difficulty she faces in trying to tell their story, but is driven by a strong need, which is not only particular to her, but very much part of her generation and the millennial memory boom:

> In the shadow of the millennium, it seems we are all preoccupied by memory. To construct a future, we need to unearth new narratives of the past. Pasts which have been buried by repressive regimes and left to fester or pasts transformed by Cold War politics; or simply pasts relegated to the limbo of latency because they were too painful to think about. (167)

Susan Rubin Suleiman in her 1999 American Comparative Literature Association's presidential address notes the same trend: 'The millennium, it would seem, will reach us from behind, our heads turned firmly in the other direction.'[11] As Andreas Huyssen has termed it, this is the time of twilight memories: 'The obsessions with memory in contemporary culture must be read in terms of this double problematic. Twilight memories are both: generational memories on the wane due to the passing of time and the continuing speed of technological modernization, and memories that reflect the twilight status of memory itself.' This status, of being of the twilight is both an indication of things to come but also the very time of memory: 'Twilight is the moment of the day that foreshadows the night of forgetting, but that seems to slow time itself, an in-between state in which the last light of the day may still play out its ultimate marvels. It is memory's privileged time.'[12]

With head firmly turned backward, in memory's twilight, its privileged time, Appignanesi goes in search of her family's past, an endeavour which is fraught with doubts and difficulties. She examines her own memories, her family's, and travels to Poland in search of concrete answers about her family's origins. Unearthing such a difficult and violent past is not without its ethical dimensions, as becomes abundantly clear to her when on a visit to Warsaw she finds the building the Gestapo used as headquarters during the war and where her father was interrogated and tortured: 'Do I want to will this mute stone into speech?' she asks (171). Telling the story is not necessarily what is always right, what is always needed; sometimes silence is the correct response, especially as regards memories of violence, as I discussed for instance in Chap. 6. What prompted Appignanesi's search at this moment in time, however, was her mother's failing memory—a common trope in family memoirs, as we shall see below in the discussion of Linda Grant's text. Appignanesi describes in a preamble to the work with the title 'Legacies' that her mother 'can only return and return again to what she has already told me, scraps of unruly experience which refuse the consecutive shape of story' (7). The writer's response is then, of course, to write, to make sense of it all: 'It is to anchor myself against

the rudderless ship of her mind, that I finally decide to write all this down. Writing has to entail some kind of order, even if the voyage into the past is always coloured by invention. Memory is also a form of negotiation' (7). We see here the familiar metaphor of memory as a body of water or a ship, discussed in more detail in the Coda, and the image of a delving into the past as a journey, and the emphasis that memory is not a hard and fast fact but a negotiation with the writing down which is 'coloured by invention.' But writing the family's story down is also an attempt at being a better daughter, more dutiful, more responsible, as she 'would like to give my mother's past to her, intact, clear, with all its births and deaths and missing persons in place. The task, I know is impossible. The dead are lost. But maybe, none the less, it makes a difference if by remembering them, we lose them properly' (8). Writing down their memories is a form of combatting forgetting, raising them a 'portable monument' in Ann Rigney's terms.[13] And while this is certainly one of the aims of the work, Appignanesi is also interested in finding out what happens when memories haunt the descendants of those who experienced the events, what she calls 'transgenerational haunting' (8): 'Memory, like history, is uncontrollable. […] It cascades through the generations in a series of misplaced fears, mysterious wounds, odd habits. The child inhabits the texture of these fears and habits, without knowing they are memory' (8). It is this 'unruly experience' which she has set herself the task of putting down in orderly narrative for an understanding of how they work, all those 'traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension,' in Hirsch's words.

A central figure in *Losing the Dead* is Appignanesi's mother. Not only is the writing partly motived by her memory loss, as an effort to restore her memory, to give her the past back, she is also the family's saviour (at least in her own version of events): her looks, her cunning, and not least her lies, saved the family during the war. They emigrate eventually to French-speaking Canada as they had originally fled to Paris from Poland, and her mother believes them to be safe with cosmopolitan Francophones. She had not known of the Catholic Church's stranglehold on Québec and the provincial and conservative attitudes prevalent in the small towns on the outskirts of Montreal. She, therefore, routinely implies in her stories, and by any other means, that they are not Jewish. She uses the name of Borens (instead of Borenstein), claims her daughter was born in Paris, and changes many other details about the family, all in an attempt to fit in with the society around them. No human contact is without complications of

this sort. Her storytelling constantly multiplies, as she tries to control the fictions about the family and their fate with ever more stories and carries on this constant flow of varying versions of their past well into her old age, even when her memory starts to fail. Appignanesi describes the effects the stories had: 'it dizzies the listener, makes him forget solid ground, while all the while attempting to seduce. My mother's ideal interlocutor is always and ever the Gestapo officer' (34). The seductions, the lies, are all, of course, attempts at hiding the family's true origin; the interlocutor is always hostile and needs to be seduced into 'forgetting' where they come from, to the point that the family itself has problems untangling the fictions from the facts. This induces a certain kind of oblivion, the original story of their past becoming a lost version, covered up, silenced, and ultimately forgotten. Appignanesi also describes another process by which the events of the past become blurred or settle into something different from the original story; in this case when official history takes on a set image, when the Holocaust has become synonymous with the images from the camps, other stories are silenced, and forgotten:

> The stories my parents and their friends told were both more particular and more diverse. They wore jagged marks of individual memory which often won't fit neatly into the grand historical narrative. Once that second, collectively sanctioned narrative of an iconic Holocaust had achieved coherence and was paid tribute to—once they were all publicly recognised and memorialised as victims—their own storytelling began to fizzle out. (60)

The image that the Holocaust has taken on in its passing from communicative memory to cultural memory therefore replaced the individual, unusual narrative; the many varied stories of horror that this period in history left in its wake.

In Appignanesi's mother's narrative it is her looks and feminine intuition that save the family. She is blonde and not very 'Jewish'-looking, she is a consummate liar, fearless, but her father is dark, frightened, and insecure:

> When I pause to consider the differences between my parents, which in my childhood always seemed to coalesce under the two headings of blonde and dark, fearless and fearful, I can now see how they bore the stamp of internalised Nazi ideology. Blondeness meant everything that was desirable, strong, powerful; darkness was weak, shameful, uncertain. Since she was blonde power itself, my mother's narrative about her life was never one of fear, either in the past or in the present. (57)

In her story her looks save her, she does not need to hide; instead she changed her name, moved out of the Jewish ghetto, took her son with her, and hid her husband in a small room behind a wardrobe, with the grandmother playing the role of a maid. The traditional Jewish home was turned on its head. Her husband lived in constant fear of being caught—his looks gave him away and his body, as his circumcision could expose him at any time. Later in Appignanesi's childhood home where her mother's stories grew one on top of the other, she says, 'Largely, my father remained silent. His gestures, his displaced outbursts of rage, spoke for him' (129). He became ever more silent as her mother continued to be a 'fantastic spinner of intricate webs' (30), and Appignanesi conjectures, 'Perhaps his increasing silence was based on a fear of exposing her, simply by forgetting the network of little lies' (31). Thus, as in many other scenarios I have discussed in this study, silence and forgetting become conflated. As her father is silenced by the constant flow of stories from her mother, so his story is untold, forgotten.

One of the ways in which memories are transmitted to the next generation is when children overhear a tale not meant for them. For the children, the context is often missing, and the stories stand out as fragmented morsels of memory they have to make sense of. Appignanesi describes such a scene when other survivors visited: 'The worst stories are told obliquely, in hushed voices, usually when their principal subject has left the room. "They operated on her, you know. One of their crazy experiments. She can't now. No children." But when the woman with the blue jottings on her arm comes back into the room, she is smiling. And everyone else smiles too' (21). Snippets of conversations, unexplained, and perhaps unremarkable at the time, are left in the child's mind, and as with postmemory in general, efforts at understanding comes later: 'It was only retrospectively that I understood that these stories were poignant, often tragic' (21). But when she was younger, she wanted nothing to do with these stories: 'I longed to bury the past and its traces' (61). Her mother's endless stories of evasion and white lies are, however, ultimately dissatisfying. She cannot accept this absence of memory even though she is, as Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helm suggest, conscious of the fact that 'the past is a "trace" in the present that haunts the second generation with the presence of the absent memory, an amnesia in which the only memory is of not remembering anything.'[14]

The journey back in time and space might not necessarily provide the answers she hopes for, it might not restore the forgotten or the silenced,

as Victoria Stewart highlights: 'The journey is a means of repairing the breach which emigration caused, but it becomes apparent that just as one cannot revert to one's usual way of life after a period in hiding, there is no easy way to forge a new attachment to the old culture.'[15] And this does not come as a surprise to Appignanesi: 'In my case, I am all too aware that my parents' past is a narrative in a foreign and forgotten language' (81). The 'breach' will never be healed, only investigated, interrogated, and rewritten by the next generation. Time is of vital significance in this search, as her interest starts growing when the memories fade—a familiar and perhaps an unavoidable set of circumstances, and out of this imbalance, a narrative springs forth. By the time she shows interest in them her mother's stories have 'congealed into a series of tableaux' (81). They have taken on

> brighter and brighter colours, painted over the horrors of the War from which they emerged. Increasingly, she denied what she didn't want to know or chose to forget. Only the grim set of my father's face, the occasional interjection of a shattering comment, punctured her gilded balloon and forced it to land amongst the shattered lives of the ghetto or the camps. But my father didn't particularly want to remember either. He kept his silence. (81)

He is locked in his own silence, perhaps protected by it, with no particular wish to recall and recount the past. On Appignanesi's visit to Poland she describes her ambivalent feelings toward the country and the changing perspectives of the past in Poland, through its own political upheavals: 'Like shifting tectonic plates, the nation's remembering and forgetting heave and grind against each other to the rhythms of political change. History is there to be written over. And over' (85). Visiting an archive she is able to learn some concrete details about her family's past: 'From the cards, I also learn the names of maternal great-grandparents. Bits of family history begin to take on a specificity they never before possessed as narrative and recorded fact coalesce' (97). But some searches are fruitless and frustrating, a visit to her mother's hometown is one such journey: 'Personal memory apart, there is no trace of my maternal family's existence in Grodzisk' (106). This proof of absence, of annihilation, is horrific in and of itself, the 'Final Solution' being indeed 'final' in many such towns. There is nothing to dig up, to recover; all is completely forgotten. Appignanesi uses all available material to dig the family's past, visiting archives and towns and cities in search for the past. One of the materials she has access to is a Survivor Interview with her mother taken

by a research team at McGill University in 1991. She describes how her mother looks thrilled to be in front of the camera, and in her version of the past she emphasises that there were 'good people everywhere, good Germans and brave Poles' (82). This leaves huge gaps in the narrative: 'Oddly, my father is almost written out of the story. I don't mind her forgetting his grimmer war. Forgetting is as necessary as remembering. I am happy to see her like this. It makes me forget the way she is now' (82). The endless embrace of remembering and forgetting continues, with forgetting being represented as a glossing over; a way to live with the past; or a betrayal of the lived past.

Appignanesi in her account has to face the ruptures in her family history caused by a horrific event, and Hirsch explains how the term of postmemory is helpful in coming to grips with this: 'The structure of postmemory clarifies how the multiple ruptures and radical breaks introduced by trauma and catastrophe inflect intra-, inter-, and transgenerational inheritance. It breaks through and complicates the line the Assmanns draw connecting individual to family, to social group, to institutionalized historical archive.' This means in Hirsch's estimation

> That archive, in the case of traumatic interruption, exile and diaspora, has lost its direct link to the past, has forfeited the embodied connections that forge community and society. And yet the Assmanns' typology explains why and how the postgeneration could and does work to counteract or to repair this loss. Postmemorial work, I want to suggest […] strives to *reactivate* and *re-embody* more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression.[16]

This is true of Appignanesi's text, both her stated motivation in the preamble, and also what transpires in the text. The individual is foregrounded; complicated 'memorial structures' are revisited and reconsidered; the family's memory and stories are viewed through the prism of larger historical events; concrete research in archives is engaged with; and re-imaginings of the family's life during the war performed. The concept of postmemory proves, therefore, extremely useful in describing what happens when ruptures and catastrophes disrupt the linear progression from communicative to cultural memory. As Hirsch points out, the Assmanns' typology is still of use; cultural memory is not least helpful in describing the ways in which memory (not necessarily traumatic memory) is 'inherited.' As Ann Rigney

suggests, 'Cultural memory […] is arguably always vicarious in the sense that it involves memories of other people's lives that have been mediated by texts and images: inherited.'[17]

Hirsch and Rigney both emphasise in their elucidations of these two different types of 'inherited' memory the importance of reworking, recreating, and reengaging with memory. Rigney argues that since 'memories are not flies in amber, which are passed on in pristine state from one person or generation to another like a baton in a relay race, we can expect that in the course of time, the content of what is remembered will also change.' Thus, it will alter through time, parts of it will be forgotten, as she explains that 'recent years have also seen increasing interest in the various forms of memory loss and cultural amnesia as the inevitable correlative of cultural memory.' Just as a family's story will disappear if no one pays attention to it, so will cultural memory: 'Behind this view of memorial dynamics is the idea that "being remembered" is more than a matter of being recorded in some archive—what is stored in an archive is merely a "latent" form of memory, and as long as no one pays any attention to an account of the past, it is effectively forgotten.'[18] Thus, as we discussed in Chap. 3, the archive can be 'passively forgotten' and what matters are imaginative reworkings and reengagements, but with them the content of the memory is transformed, and other versions forgotten. But in Appignanesi's terms writing on memory is still meaningful as we then can try to lose the dead 'properly.'

Linda Grant and Countering Memory Loss

The memory dynamics at work in families come in a variety of constellations. In Linda Grant's text *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* she is prompted to write, as Appignanesi was, by her mother's memory loss. Grant's mother suffers from a serious form of dementia, she is of Jewish immigration stock, and Grant finds herself compelled to write before the past disappears completely: 'I don't know if it is a tragedy or a blessing when Jews, who insist on forgiving and forgetting nothing, should end their lives remembering nothing. My mother, the last of her generation, was losing her memory. Only the deep past remained, which emerged at moments, in bits and pieces.'[19] The text is, in part, a detailed account of her mother's illness and of her two daughters' experience of trying to care for her, at once grappling with the emotional weight of her continuing descent into dementia and with the practical dealings with the UK welfare system—and the text tells of the great difficulties involved on both

fronts. The other strand of the work recounts the family's past, origin, and history, where Grant attempts to reconstruct an elusive past, and to understand the stories she inherited from her parents—all made the more difficult by her mother's failing memory:

> *This* moment, the one she is really living in, is lost from sight as soon as it happens. And the long-ago memories are vanishing too. Only fragments remain. So nearly a century of private history with a cast if not of thousands then of dozens—enough to mount a Broadway musical—is reduced to a shrinking lump of meat weighing a pound or two through which electrical impulses pass. Certain areas of it are permanently turned off at the mains. (15–16)

In Grant we see again a writer looking to make sense of the rumours and overheard conversations, the hidden pasts of immigrants who are extremely reluctant to share their histories openly and directly. Grant is constantly confronted with fragments of the past she is left with, pieces of half-told stories, which are there as frustrating but also tantalising hints to the family's past lives:

> So I was enticed and maddened by these fragments of the secret past where my grandparents lived and someone had been raped over and over again and the family gathered around and committed infanticide on the child born of the atrocity. Or had it ever happened? Was it a game of Chinese whispers or even something from a film or a book that she had read and was jumbled up with what had really been? Two generations were as remote to each other as the lives of nomadic people of the Australian desert are to me. (27)

Her regret is, as in Appignanesi's case above, of not having asked about any of these stories earlier, describing a familiar condition of the young who are utterly uninterested in their parents' memories: 'When I was younger I was bored stiff with my parents' reminiscences. I had no curiosity. I was living in a time when the past was going to be abolished. Born in 1951, I was part of the first generation put on earth, we fatally imagined, to be young and stay young forever. With pity and scorn we condemned our parents' youth to oblivion' (27). But now, with age, it all changes, and a deep-seated need to fill in the gaps of the past makes itself felt, not only as a familial or autobiographical responsibility, but also as a cultural responsibility:

> It is my fate now […] to scramble among the ruins of my mother's memory in search of my past, of who all of us are. To have grown up as a Jewish daughter into an insistence of the importance of memory, knowing that without it, we are animals. In a hundred years there will be no one left alive who remembers her, who can tell you who she was. Some of us are haunted by our memories, others abide in their comforting refuge. People say, "I only lived for the present, *in* the present." Or "The future is what matters." But without the past we're nothing, we belong to nobody. (28)

As I mentioned above this feeling of being left alone to reconstruct a disappearing generation's past was common at the end of the millennium. As Appignanesi puts it, 'The familiar biological irony of all this doesn't escape me. This is the ultimate generation game. All my friends are playing it. We are suddenly interested in our parents' past which we feel are linked with our own buried ones' (81). Grant's search for this past is constantly impeded by her particular family background—the fact that her family was not very truthful in their accounts of the past. They were divided as immigrants between two worlds, as Grant explains of her mother: 'And it was precisely because she was so divided that we were never able to trust what she said in the first place and so memory, in our family, was always a tricky business' (31). Her sister Michele is her fellow sufferer of these double truths:

> Sometimes Michele and I discovered by accident that we both held all our lives as fact quite contradictory versions of family history: "No, it's true, Dad said." "Well, that's not what Mum told me." It was not a household which valued the truth. There was always the let-down, when you thought you knew, finally, what had really happened, and then, later, when my mother changed her story, she would admit, under duress, "I just said that." (46)

This is a point she comes back to repeatedly: 'I grew up in a family where the past was shifting and untrustworthy, where people's memories and what they said they couldn't remember were not necessarily to be trusted. My family had simply re-invented itself for the twentieth century and a new land, shedding the past which like a skin was left to decompose and die' (49). The past that was left behind, the stories told, the constant mythmaking, the unreliability of the family's memories had its own contrast, however: 'Always in our minds was the consciousness of what would have happened if they had not emigrated. It's odd that while there is such confusion about what *was,* there is absolute certainty about what might have been. I have only to pick up a book' (32). All the Jews who did not

emigrate from the region where the family came from were killed in the massacre of Babi Yar. So the alternative story, which normally in autobiography is one of supposition and conjecture, is here the ground for solid truth; a certain death was the alternative, the lived experience, however, was shrouded in uncertainty and disguise. Escaping the fate of their fellow Jews, coming to the UK, and leaving the past firmly behind has left them with a strong suspicion of authorities and Grant explains this as the common immigrants' experience, whatever their origin:

> Don't tell anyone our business, they said. Not because they were reticent, private people, but because they were only just managing to control the contradictions themselves, never mind expose them to the 500-watt attention of others. All immigrant families are like this, whether they come from India or Jamaica or Mexico or the Philippines. All of them have to make a new identity out of a past they no longer have any access to and even if they go back, time has moved on. They can never return to the place they came from. The Russian-occupied Poland in which my father was born has not existed for so long that it is now just a collection of documents for historians to study, not a place at all. And if your personal history is inaccessible, is it surprising that all you can engage in is the manufacture of myths? (48)

This, of course, also makes her own account untrustworthy, her attempts at re-creating the past are doomed to failure, as the fragments that have survived in the generational memory are of dubious origin. The place where her father came from even being 'not a place at all'—making any return impossible: 'Can I confirm that everything I told you is true? I can't. I only know what lives and sings in the oral tradition that is the history of every family. For all I know it could be a pack of falsehoods, fairy tales to send the children and grandchildren to sleep at nights. So we all lie, staring into the darkness, trying to conjure up the dead' (52).

Salman Rushdie describes what immigrant writers have to contend with when attempting to write on their country of origin:

> It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge—which gives rise to profound uncertainties—that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.[20]

For the second or third generation of immigrants, this loss has become an 'inherited' loss, a postmemory, that is characterised by great uncertainties, and blank spots, in the family's background, which the writer feels compelled to remedy. This is well known in the studies of diasporas, the sense of the home country as a non-existent place.[21] Julia Creet conjectures that 'Possibly, migration is the condition of memory, psychically and physically the only measurable thing, since the point of origin is lost entirely, and though entirely real in its effects, of little matter to the mechanisms of memory.'[22] The inheritance is complex, traumatic, characterised by deep ruptures and upheavals as Grant elucidates:

> Buried in the hearts of the parents of all my generation are untold traumas of destruction and loss. They are damaged people. When they began their families after the war was over they thought they were beginning the world, but the world they knew was over, finished. The people of the 1950s were aliens among the washing machines and jukeboxes and vacuum cleaners. They were mutilated, bits of them scattered across the battlefields of the world or sunk in the deepest oceans with the dead of planes and ships. (66)

In their broken state, they tried to protect the next generation from the multitudes of stories which tell of this inheritance of death and destruction: 'Of course they had something to conceal. Of course when they said, "I can't remember," they remembered all too bloody well' (68). In some sense the text is a continuation of the ritual of prayers for the dead at Yom Kippur, as Grant describes it: 'Those who remain offer their own individual prayer for their dead relatives, their mother or father, husband or wife. So we cast our chain of memory down through the generations and link ourselves with all the forgotten ones of the past who have nobody left to mourn them' (162). The problem now is that her mother faces having to invent herself all over once again, as she has no memory of day-to-day occurrences; she attempts to retain 'a coherent identity and daily history […] My mother presents a fictitious person for inspection, hoping it will pass muster' (156). Thus the loss of memory mirrors the earlier loss of homeland; a new self needs to be invented for a new reality, in this case out of physical necessity, rather than out of the constraints of culture in the immigrant's life. Grant explains both the personal and the cultural ramifications memory loss can have: 'It's like being thrown out to sea. So the whole thing about memory is that it's not just one member of a family losing their memory. And for the Jewish community it's even more

complex because while all cultures are to do with memory, none more so than the Jewish community in which everything is about what was' (269). She contemplates how this memory or non-memory will be passed on to the next generation in a description that recalls the transformation of communicative memory into cultural memory: 'What I know is that as long as I live I will remember my parents and that the memories I have of them will be transmitted to the next generation, until they erode away into myth, nothing but stories, and when they do they will exist in another kind of recollection' (288). The next generation, in her case her nephew, will inherit these stories: 'I'll survive in his memory, as mother and grandma will, endlessly re-imagined and re-invented each time he thinks or speaks of us' (295). And not everything will be passed on: 'The century of the Ginsbergs and the Hafts comes to an end; they were twentieth-century inventions. My nephew goes into the new millennium and we'll be forgotten, too. The memory of almost everything is lost in the end. My mother, my sister and me. All equal. Yet we try to buck our fortune. What memories! What stories!' (296) As ever, the autobiographical effort is mounted to counteract the forces of forgetting, to delay the past's ossification and remoteness, to remember in writing, while being very aware that what is written is constantly 'coloured with invention.'

Some of the problems Grant faces in coming to terms with her mother's dementia point to the importance of memory for our sense of being, our sense of self. Personality changes are well known in dementia patients and Grant has to ask herself: 'But it isn't just about what she can or can't remember for I have to ask myself, which bit was the illness and which her own real personality? And how could you tell them apart?' (104) She tries to find ways to restore her mother to herself, and while looking for a place for her in a nursing home, she imagines taking her back to Liverpool where she spent most of her life: 'Here in Liverpool my mother will also be more herself, she will exist, as she has not done for so many years, in the context of her old friends and her own beginnings. She will be replanted back in the earth she came from, a wandering Jew no more' (227). A sense of place will be restored to her, and with it a sense of self. At the same time she realises that this is a utopian vision; her mother is already lost, and where she lives will not change that.

In trying to reconstruct her family's story, Grant is acutely aware of the limitations of memory and the effects of forgetting on our life stories: 'Because we do not remember everything that has ever happened to us, because we must filter and select and edit the experiences and information

that enter our senses every day and transform it into meaningful narrative, our lives are essentially stories. Starting out to find out the "facts" about my mother, I always had to bear in mind that in the end all I was going to have was a fable' (293). The effect this has is that the story she reconstructs only has a marginal basis in historical or verifiable facts, such is the inevitability of forgetting in the writing of postmemory:

> My family's story is no less a mythology than the tales of the heroes that sailed the Mediterranean and met with Cyclops and Scylla and Charybdis and fell victim to the Sirens. And whatever I sat down here is no less the work of my memory and imagination. If memory is about story-telling so the talkative Ginsbergs, with their tales exaggerated or half fictionalized or made up on the spot to suite an exigency, were all Homer's in their way. (294)

Thus the task of postmemory is trying to make sense of these stories and come to terms with the fact that so much has been forgotten, through various processes of silences, reinvention, and storytelling. In an afterword Grant describes that the form she needed for this was life writing; fiction would not do: 'I had been struggling for some months to write a novel based on my family. I felt that the fictional characters I was creating were in some bizarre way robbing my relatives of their own biographies' (298). Familial responsibility to their stories means, for both Grant and Appignanesi, holding on to the referential, the real, in a double move to unearth the forgotten and write it down to prevent it from being forgotten, but also with constant awareness that what is dug up and given narrative form is only partial and provisional, that the 'true' story is not there to be found.

Notes

1. Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 3.
2. I discuss this further in relation to 'fake' testimonies in 'Fake Autobiography and Postmemory: The Aftermath of the Wilkomirski Scandal,' *Life Writing: The Spirit of the Age and The State of the Art*, eds. Meg Jensen and Jane Jordan (London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. 112–122.
3. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 5. Hirsch's initial discussion of the concept can be found in her book *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

4. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 36.
5. Björn Krondorfer, 'Is Forgetting Reprehensible? Holocaust Remembrance and the Task of Oblivion,' *Journal of Religious Ethics* 36.2 (2008): 233–267, p. 243.
6. Krondorfer, 'Is Forgetting Reprehensible?' p. 247.
7. Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), p. 28.
8. Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 36–38.
9. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 33.
10. Lisa Appignanesi, *Losing the Dead: A Family Memoir* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 7.
11. Susan Rubin Suleiman, 'Reflections on Memory at the Millenniu,' *Comparative Literature* 51.3 (Summer 1999): v.
12. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.
13. Ann Rigney, 'Portable Monuments: Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans,' *Poetics Today* 25.2 (Summer 2004): 361–396, p. 363.
14. Susanna Egan and Gabriele Helms, 'Generations of the Holocaust in Canadian Auto/biography,' *Autobiography in Canada: Critical Directions*, ed. Julie Rak (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), pp. 31–52, p. 43.
15. Victoria Stewart, *Women's Autobiography: War and Trauma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 160.
16. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 33.
17. Rigney, 'Portable Monuments,' p. 363.
18. Rigney, 'Portable Monuments,' pp. 367–368.
19. Linda Grant, *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (London: Granta, 1998), p. 15.
20. Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands,' *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1992), pp. 9–21, p. 10.
21. See for instance James Clifford's chapter on 'Diasporas' in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 244–278.
22. Julia Creet, 'Introduction: The Migration of Memory and Memories of Migration,' *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies,* eds. Julia Creet and Andreas Kitzmann (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 3–28, pp. 6–7.

CHAPTER 8

Coda: *Aide de memoire* or *aide d'oubli*: Forgetting with Photographs

One of the characteristics of the memory texts on the Spanish Civil War I discussed in Chap. 5 is the prominent use of historical black-and-white photographs on their covers. When walking into a bookshop in Spain during the last decade or so (in recent years there has been a tailing off of the memory text publishing boom as the recession has overshadowed other subject matters), the browser was immediately made aware of the dominance of fiction on the Civil War, as the photographs quickly caught one's eye. The effect of using photos in this way was to place the texts firmly on the borderline between historiography and fiction. The referential status of the photograph means that it has a particular meaning when used in memory texts, whether it is in fiction, as in the Spanish case, to alert the reader to the historical dimension of the text, or in life writing, where its use is, of course, ubiquitous. Photography has become an inseparable part of life writing since it came into common usage, being one of the documents and *aides-memoire* the autobiographer refers to, whether they are printed in the text or only described. Whatever the use may be, they form part of the material memories an autobiographer has access to. Photographs can provide fixed points in memory's constant transformations, serve as an anchor to our fluctuating memories, or replace them, depending on our viewpoint. At times they seem to promise more than they can deliver, and despite their referential nature we need to keep in mind that our views of these material memories are very much dependent on time and circumstance, and that a photograph's meaning can be elusive

G. Gudmundsdottir, *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59864-6_8

at best. Linda Haverty Rugg suggests that one view of photography in autobiography sees it as underwriting 'the authority of the autobiographer,' but 'the suspicious, deconstructive reading of photographs in the autobiographical context gleans a different tale. In that reading, photographs perform as the world's most effective masks.'[1]

Photography has since its inception, and in particular since its development as an everyday medium, been an integral part of how we record our lives and, by extension, how we form and preserve our memories. As a result, it is one of the main documentary sources autobiographers rely on, and more to the point, *display*, in their work. Photographs are, in other words, among the few sources of autobiographical writing, along with occasional letters and diary entries, that appear in the works, and which the reader, thus, has direct access to. The effect of having such documents available to the reader does perhaps at first glance seem to offer a connection to the world outside the text and to represent the past by affirming the presence of people and places. But photography is a deceptive medium, its documentary value, although often taken for granted, shifting and questionable, and, in the case of autobiography, one should not disregard the reader's (and author's) complex response to images. Timothy Dow Adams explains the longevity of the 'old notions that photographs never lie' seems to have survived 'in a history remarkably similar to that of autobiography' despite the ample demonstrations of theorists of photography 'that photography is equally problematic in terms of referentiality.'[2] For, as we shall see in our discussion below, when we attempt to pin down the meaning of a particular photograph within a text, we are often caught between two diverging sensations: on the one hand, the photograph clearly provokes a documentary impulse; on the other hand, it solicits an emotional response that might be at odds with its factual stance. Furthermore, the highly varied treatment of images within the text must influence the reader's reaction to the photographs printed, as the photographs' relationship with the text itself, and, more broadly, with memory and the form of autobiography, is far from stable. The use of photographs in autobiography often emphasises particular aspects of autobiographical writing; in general terms, of course, it highlights the referential aspect of the genre, but more particularly it can also depict moments of trauma, be a source of consolation, or at times, disappointment to the writers. Thus, these carriers and preservers of memory can equally portray, or bear witness to, the forgotten. In addition, many photographs in autobiography are from the family albums, archives which infrequently depict trauma, as

family photography is there to record 'happy' occasions, in direct contrast to, of course, photojournalism.

Autobiographers often resort to some sort of *aide-memoire* in their writing. Stendhal famously made sketches of everything and anything when writing his *La Vie de Henry Brulard* (1890), a selection of which is regularly printed alongside the text. They are sketches of houses, rooms, routes, towns, streets, and even particular events. They offer a fascinating insight into the remembering mind as they literally attempt to trace the past. The complex nature of photographic truth has been discussed widely, but it seems that although we are very much aware of the problems of the fake, photoshopping, misrepresentations, etc., we still view photographs as in some ways having a more direct connection to the real world than most other forms of media. W.G. Sebald makes use of this belief in many of his texts, texts that continually straddle the borderline between history, fiction, and life writing. A central theme in his works is indeed memory, but perhaps more to the point, absence and difficulties with reminiscences, as his characters seem either to be hiding their origins or are alienated from them, thus working ever toward forgetting. Carol Bere describes how memory appears in Sebald's works:

> The significant issue for Sebald is not memory in an overall generic sense, however, but the point at which the cost of not remembering supersedes protective strategies for survival, the moment later in life when early, often horrific repressed knowledge or experience move center stage in a person's life. The early memoires of the displaced European Jews of *The Emigrants* are intensified, overpowering, as they reconstruct their pasts, recognize the "tightening ties to those who had gone before," and know that they will always be alienated.[3]

In an account in the above mentioned work, *Die Ausgewanderten* (1993; *The Emigrants* 1996), of a character called Paul Bereyter, many photographs are printed which, by the way they are placed in the text, imply that they depict this person. On closer inspection, however, the photographs are too blurry or taken from such a distance that it becomes impossible to come to any definite conclusion; indeed it is not easy to establish if they are in fact all of the same person—all they seem to have in common is that a man in glasses appears in them.[4] This most referential of forms in texts that are continuously, but elusively, referential seem to tie the text back to some world outside the text, to something that 'happened

earlier', as Roland Barthes once put it,[5] but continually disrupts any direct links the reader automatically makes at first glance.

James Ellroy's 'Kid in the Picture'

The use of photographs as a way of revisiting, reworking, and rewriting a childhood trauma can be seen in James Ellroy's suitably subtitled *My Dark Places: An L.A. Crime Memoir* (1996), where in a hybrid text he combines journalism, crime writing, and confessional writing to explore his past. Ellroy's initial motive is to search for his mother's killer and solve the case once and for all. This takes him on a journey through Los Angeles of the 1950s; his childhood and dysfunctional adolescence, characterised by addiction and voyeurism; his obsession with crime and crime writing; and finally, on an unexpected detour through his mother's life. In his investigation of the decades-old murder case (Ellroy was 10 years old when his mother was murdered), with the help of a semi-retired detective, Ellroy reviews the original investigation in minute detail, working through every possible lead and every eyewitness statement, many of which are printed in full in the book. This then, is truly an autobiographical quest which relies not only on memory and the family archive, but on various and unusual public archives.

One of the matters of interest in this text is the narrator's voice. The work is divided into four parts and at the beginning of the first part, as in so many crime novels, a body is found. This part is told in the third person, at first in style and tone similar to that of crime journalism. It describes the murder scene and the initial police investigation in a terse, unsentimental fashion, with no emotional engagement. The first mention of Ellroy himself occurs when the police meet father and son for the first time to tell them the news: 'The victim's son was pudgy, and tall for 10 years old. He was nervous—but did not appear in any way distraught.'[6] The information in this section is reconstructed from the police file, the phrasing and wording reminiscent of Ellroy's crime fiction, but the distant journalistic tone is at times shot through with phrases such as 'Armand Ellroy hugged his son. The kid hugged him back. They both looked relieved and strangely happy' (13). This hard-boiled style is by turns thrilling and disturbing, and Ellroy's mother is first and foremost a murder victim in the story, a dead body, by turns called 'The Redhead' or 'The Jean Ellroy job.' When examining his mother's police file, Ellroy comes across crime scene photos of his mother's body. One of these is printed on

the title page of the first section: she is partly clothed, face down on the ground, with her hands tied behind her back. Her hair blends in with the leaves on the ground, so it takes some moments for the viewer to decipher the image, but slowly one is hit by the reality of this horrific photograph. The mother is the violated victim, murdered, faceless, and nameless as the chapter heading 'The Redhead' confirms, and the photograph forms part of the forensic evidence.

Each of the four sections of the book is prefaced with a photograph, and the second section entitled 'The Kid in the Picture,' a chapter on Ellroy's childhood and adolescence, starts with a photograph of a young boy, who in his chequered shirt and 1950s haircut, is very much the all-American kid. The title of this section has several connotations: the phrase is reminiscent of Ellroy's habitual references to the cultural memory of 1950s American tabloid slang, and the narrative moves from the criminal investigation to an investigation of the inner life of the child caught up in this crime—the kid in the picture. The photograph itself constitutes one of the most unusual finds in this kind of writing. It is of Ellroy himself, and it was taken by a policeman moments after 'the kid in the picture' is told of his mother's death: 'A man with a camera walked me back to [the landlord's] toolshed. He put an awl in my hand and posed me at a workbench. I held on to a small block of wood and pretended to saw at it. I faced the camera—and did not blink or cry or betray my internal equilibrium' (81). The portrait of the young boy taken at such a time is perplexing at best, and when we learn of the context of what looks like a highly ordinary picture, that could well belong in any family album, it seems to exist outside the norms of the family album, crime scene photography, and photo-journalism. It does, however, form part of a police file on a murder case and was released to the papers that published it with the story of the murder (23), and is now printed in an autobiography, thus making an entrance into all these forms. The photograph shows no evidence of the trauma experienced; the boy seems in fact to radiate innocence and ignorance of the recent crime. Our expectations of what it should look like, after we learn of the circumstances, are clearly not met. Not only is the pose and backdrop odd, the boy's lack of a sign of emotion, his calm, is chilling. A moment of trauma is depicted by the lack of any evidence of it. The trauma is displaced, it is not in the picture, and as Ellroy explains, the boy hardly experienced the event as such until much later, and the photograph, thus, for Ellroy, mirrors the child's feelings. In its uncanny relationship to the events, it seems to forget or erase the trauma.

The surprising presence of this unusual photograph, along with the passage above, foreshadows the concerns of the section. The boy wanted to get away from his mother, he wanted to get away from where they lived, El Monte, and go and live with his father. Her death makes this possible: 'I hated her. I hated El Monte. Some unknown killer just bought me a brand-new beautiful life' (83). The sense of guilt that these sentiments provoke saturates the whole work. The root of it lies in his parents' bitter divorce and custody battle. Ellroy explains that the judge 'sentenced me to a bifurcated life divvied up between two people locked in an intractable mutual hatred' (87). His father's opinions were what mattered to him, and he copied them without hesitating. His mother had been criminalised before her death, as his father calls her a 'Lush and a Whore' (87), and she therefore deserved to be killed. Not only does she somehow deserve this fate, Ellroy describes unflinchingly how he had fantasies about killing her himself: 'I could brain her with an ashtray and negate her size advantage. I would scratch her face and ruin her looks so men wouldn't want to fuck her. I could smash her with a bottle of Early Times bourbon' (91). The tone is a curious blend of hard-boiled prose of the crime writer and the lyrical, confessional tone of the autobiographer. Ellroy occasionally addresses his mother in the text; this occurs initially at the start of 'The Kid in the Picture' in a section where he writes, *'I thought I knew you. I passed my childish hatred off as intimate knowledge. I never mourned you. I assailed your memory'* (80). What is at the centre here are his feelings toward his mother as he admits, 'I knew her only in shame and loathing. I plundered her in a fever of dream and denied my own message of yearning. I was afraid to resurrect her and love her body-and-soul' (153). All she is at the start is a faceless, nameless body for Ellroy to make use of in his fiction, in his publicity stunts, in his confusion of hatred and desire. The memory of the dead—so central to our understanding of memory/forgetting, and our need and desire for memory—is here perverted. The mother is denied memory, not only when she is killed, but repeatedly by her son's actions. Forgotten, buried, or silenced emotions are here excavated, examined, and declared.

In the last section of the work, the photograph of the boy gathers still new meaning, as Ellroy claims it was this picture that compelled him to write:

> I knew it was time to confront her. An old photograph told me why. My wife found the picture in a newspaper archive […] You can't discern my state of

> mind. I might be bored. I might be catatonic. I'm not giving anything up. It's my life at ground zero. I'm too stunned or relieved or lost in calculation to evince signs of simple grief. That picture was 36 years old. It defined my mother as a body on a road and a fount for literary inspiration. I couldn't separate the her from the me. (206)

Again here, writing is a response to trauma, and a photograph seems to reveal that trauma by hiding it. The feelings that have been misplaced, misdirected, and abused need to be confronted, and the photograph is the proof of that. His wife's find brings the photograph home; a scene of recognition, an addressing of the forgotten, is called for.

The image Ellroy presents of himself in this text is one that reveals many facets. On the one hand he is the avenging son, on the other, the disloyal, uncaring one. In one sense he is the classic detective-hero righting a terrible wrong; on the other he is the helpless son who felt relieved at his mother's death. In the text he discusses his need for saving his mother, but also admits to having had no compunction in using her death for publicity. Another portrait of the author, this one a classic author's portrait printed on the dust jacket, can illuminate this dichotomy. Ellroy strikes a carefully relaxed pose, with a slightly bored expression, wearing a blazer and a shirt with the top buttons undone, as if he is just about to sail away on his yacht. He rests his arm on a chair, and in the chair a dog sits, presenting its profile to the camera. Here we have the famous tough-guy crime writer, in control, in authority. The dog is slightly intimidating, but its pose denotes Ellroy's sense of humour, Ellroy's dapper clothes indicating his sophistication. He is not a hapless victim of a police photographer, forced into an unnatural pose for a terrible occasion. However, the confessional tone of the autobiography has somewhat eroded the sophisticated image presented by the author's portrait, so the reader instinctively turns again to the photo of the boy, as if it still contains some elusive and forgotten truth.

In the third section on Ellroy's helper and mentor, detective Stoner, Ellroy has found his alter ego and father figure combined, the picture of Stoner even bearing a faint resemblance to Ellroy. Stoner attempts what Ellroy's father never tried, to find the mother's killer, to avenge and protect, both constant themes underlying the machismo ideal continually cropping up in this work. Vulnerable women are everywhere; they are victims, who need saving from men, even from Ellroy (as he describes his voyeuristic tendencies in his troubled adolescence). Stoner is an idealisation of a part of Ellroy, who after all did not become a cop, did not save

women, but wrote about them instead. Seeing women as victims that need saving is in Ellroy's childhood always tainted by a suspicion that they in fact somehow deserve their fate. The way in which his father criminalises his mother's behaviour urges him on in his voyeuristic tendencies as his father instructs him to find some evidence against his mother that would lose her custody: '[I] became my father's full-time spy' (90). Ellroy's search for his mother's killer is therefore overlaid with guilt. The text is a quest for emotions that he always denied or hid or forgot. Crime fiction had somehow supplanted his true memories and feelings: 'It was a literary formula preordained directly for *me*. It let me remember and forget in equal measure. I ate those books up wholesale and was blessedly unaware of the internal dynamic that made them so seductive' (95).

The crime scene photo of his mother turns the reader into a voyeur. We share in Ellroy's feeling of guilt as we are gripped with morbid fascination. Ellroy comes to realise that he does not know much about his mother's life at all, and this lack of knowledge is symbolised by his lack of photos: 'I had no family photographs. I had no pictures of her at 10, 20 and 30. I had pictures of her at 42 and on her way down and pictures of her dead' (317). Gradually, Ellroy realises that he is on the wrong track; the murderer is not important, it is his mother that he should be searching for: 'I had to know her life the way I knew her death' (323). The fourth and last photograph in the book illustrates this change of direction. The picture is a revelation, a find. The elusive woman, the Redhead, suddenly appears in a completely different context, sitting on a fence, smiling to the camera, young, attractive, alive, and seemingly in control. Again the title is significant, 'Geneva Hilliker,' the Redhead's full maiden name, before she became the mother and the victim. Ellroy finally examines her background, and pays attention to her in life and not only in death. The last page of the text reads as an admission to the falseness of his initial premise: he did not find her killer, but he found her, the photograph serving as 'evidence' of her life, while the crime scene 'evidence,' the proper legal evidence, has been found to say nothing. She is no longer a body, and instead of reconstructing the crime, as proper crime fiction does, Ellroy attempts finally to reconstruct her forgotten life. Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister point out that in instances where 'authors use photographs as means to return to a moment or place in the past that troubles their own memories,' is not always successful, as 'in such attempts to return, photographs do not always disclose clues, nor lead us to the sites we imagine, nor release us from what lies in the silences and the ambivalent traces imprinted onto

their surfaces.'[7] The original photograph has thus not been the key to the investigation, but has led Ellroy to other photographs where he believes to have found clues to the deliberately silenced and forgotten.

The photographs in this text are, as we have seen, carefully chosen, placed, and titled. They call into question what we think of as reliable documents, as evidence, and photography's relationship to memory. The two photos of Ellroy's mother are stark in their contrast, and the boy in the picture invites speculation, the seeming innocence and ignorance proving a mirage. But Ellroy has no memory of either photo, they are his only documents, and prove that photographs can obscure or hide meaning in their apparent visibility. As Thomas Docherty contends, 'Photography made it clear that observable phenomena were not necessarily positive facts; and the world suddenly becomes in some sense hardly observable at all, endowed with the rather shimmery mobility which photography revealed.'[8]

For the reading of a photograph, the archival practices surrounding it are significant. One of the peculiar attributes of Ellroy's photographs is the place they come from: not from the family album but from a police file. There are certain cultural processes at play in the way in which photographs are archived—or not—and who has access to them and is able to make use of them in particular contexts. Barbie Zelizer in her book on photographic strategies surrounding the Holocaust emphasises the cultural practices behind visual memorialisation:

> Discussion of visual memories […] becomes at some level discussions of cultural practice—of the strategies by which images are made and collected, retained and stored, recycled, and forgotten. By definition this connects visual memories with a culture's socially, politically, and economically mandated and sanctioned modes of interpretation, with how certain uses of images are set in place, challenged, and legitimated.[9]

Zelizer is here referring to photography's role in our collective memory and cultural practices, rather than in private albums and personal records, but these cultural practices impinge on our personal narratives as well. And these processes and strategies change through time. It is clear, for instance, that the photograph of Ellroy taken by the police and released to the papers at the time and then kept in the police file of the unsolved case would be unthinkable today. Papers do not routinely print photographs of children of murder victims, at least not in the way this one was. It is

thus important to note the way in which photographs are kept and passed on for later use, often in very different contexts. Luisa Passerini takes the photograph as an example of how memory can be passed on in silence, without verbalisation, in her analysis of silences connected to remembering rather than forgetting:

> I have been thinking of memories transmitted without verbalization, such as those incorporated in gestures, images and objects: the transmission of how to cook (by imitation, not on the basis of recipes), the memories of the body—of both traumas and pleasures—the memory of laughter, the memory conveyed through family names given to the newborn. One can think of photographs, portraits, letters. Or of the custom of keeping a minute of silence in order to commemorate somebody who has died. Or of silences in a psychoanalytic session. All these are examples of silences which are connected with remembering, not with forgetting.[10]

These silent acts of memory are often part of the autobiographical process, what precedes it, at times serves as the impetus behind it, or makes its presence felt in the narrative in one way or another.

Sally Mann's Treacherous Photograph

Photography's connection with memory has often been commented on, and as Douwe Draaisma points out 'perhaps no technology has been deployed with such enthusiasm against forgetting as photography, yet none contains so many paradoxes in its relationship with memory.' As we saw in the discussion on archives in Chap. 3, documents from the past hold out a promise of reversing forgetting, and perhaps none more so than photography, but Draaisma concludes that

> Our hope is that photographs will underpin our memories, but sooner or later we notice that they are in fact starting to replace our memories, an effect that is particularly marked in the case of portraits. When a loved one dies, a photograph slides in front of our memories of them. Why do our brains not retain both photograph and the memories? Photography has been called "a mirror with a memory," but how much faith can we have in a memory prosthesis that makes us forget so much.[11]

We tend to think of photographic portraits of family and friends who have passed away as mementoes of the dead, rather than as replacements

of our memory of them. But this effect of photography Draaisma focuses on is very much akin with photographer's Sally Mann's contention in her memoir. As we discussed in Chap. 3 one of the elements of her work is her unpacking (literally and figuratively) of her family archive. In it, as is the case for most of us, photographs are perhaps the documents available in most abundance. She describes that before she ventured into the family archive, she investigated her own: 'So, before I scissored the ancestral boxes, I opened my own to check my erratic remembrance against the artefacts they held, and in doing so encountered the malignant twin to imperfect memory: the treachery of photography.'[12] This treachery lies, in her opinion, in its effect on memory:

> Photography would seem to preserve our past and make it invulnerable to the distortions of repeated memorial superimpositions, but I think that is a fallacy: photographs supplant and corrupt the past, all the while creating their own memories. As I held my childhood picture in my hands, in the tenderness of my "remembering," I also knew that with each photograph I was forgetting. (xiii)

And later in the work she contends, 'I believe that photographs actually rob all of us of our memory' (137). Draaisma points specifically to portraits as being the chief culprits in replacing our memories, and Mann's examples reflect that. She describes memories of two important men in her life who have passed away. The first is the artist Cy Twoling: 'I am convinced I can remember him so clearly and in such detail because I have so few pictures of him' (300). The other man is her father, who she has plenty of photographs of:

> Because of the many pictures I have of my father, he eludes me completely. In my outrageously disloyal memory he does not exist in three dimensions, or with associated smells or timbre of voice. He exists as a series of pictures. When I think of him, I see his keen, intelligent eyes cast askance at me, his thumb lightly resting on his cleanly shaven chin […]. But… here is the thing: It's a picture, a photograph I am thinking of. I don't have a memory of the man; I have a memory of a photograph. (301)

In her estimation photography is not an *aide de memoire* but an *aide d'oubli*. It does not remind us of a particular lived experience, but only refers back to itself; it is an artificial memory. Mann contends that our memories worked differently before the invention of photography, that

then 'significant moments in the flow of our lives would be like rocks placed in a stream: impediments that demonstrated but didn't diminish the volume of flow and around which accrued the debris of memory, rich in sight, smell, taste, and sound.' Our memories were richer and broader in their scope, and photography has robbed us of this: 'No snapshot can do what attractive mnemonic impediment can: when we outsource that work to the camera, our ability to remember is diminished and what memories we have are impoverished' (300–301). This echoes familiar theories on technology's effects on our memory, such as Plato's views on writing and later elaborations of the subject we discussed in the Introduction and Chap. 4. The value of photographs as mementoes of the past is questioned and undermined, as Mann concludes: 'It isn't death that stole my father from me; it's the photographs' (302).

Despite these doubts and anxieties over photography's effect on our memory, it plays a decisive role in Mann's memoirs. Not only does she include many photographs, as the title suggests, she also devotes long sections on ruminations on her career as a photographer: how she became one, the controversies some of her work created—specifically her photographs where she uses her children as models, which she happened to exhibit when paedophilia was being brought out to the open. Mann describes people's responses to her work and how those who wrote to her all presumed some knowledge of her and her life which they claimed to glean through these *artistic* photographs of her children; that is, these are *not* family snapshots, but carefully thought out and posed artistic creations. In some of the letters she received the writers stated their certainty that her father had abused her and that she was 'unconsciously working out some kind of psychic pathology in [her] photographs' (136). People *read* the photographs of semi-naked children as evidence of abuse, in the literal fashion photography is often met with. Mann had told a journalist that her father 'had taken "terrible art pictures" of me in the nude' (136). On closer inspection of this memory, i.e., in sorting through the family archive, in all the available photographic material in an effort to shed light on this question she had been so forcibly asked—was it art or incest?—she discovers that

> It was neither. Not incest, not art, and it turns out, not even nudity. I have now organized and scanned all my father's large-format negatives […] and am chagrined to report that they contain not a single nude photograph of me—an impressive feat of discretion on my father's part, given how much

> time I spent naked as a kid. I have no idea why I said that to [the journalist], and I'm resigned to present-day readers making what they will of the apparent fact that I *falsely remembered* being photographed nude. (136–137)

In the reception of these photographs she is surprised at people's inability to interpret photographs, of their lack of awareness of photography's mediated nature and asks, 'How can a sentient person of the modern age mistake photography for reality? All perception is selection, and all photographs—no matter how objectively journalistic the photographer's intent—exclude aspects of the moment's complexity. Photographs economize the truth; they are always moments more or less illusory abducted from time's continuum' (151). All this shows her awareness of the very provisional truth a photograph tells us of its subject; this does not mean she is not dedicated to it, or does not take it seriously. It also does not mean that she discards the use of photographs as part of the family archive. Indeed, some of the photographs she prints or discusses in her work are precisely there for their documentary value, for what they tell her about the past. In one instance Mann describes how she has been told time and again of her 'refusal to wear a stitch of clothing until I was five. Family snapshots seem to bear this out' (17). More often than not, however, she queries their possible documentary value. She says of the only photograph she has seen of her great-grandfather, that she has to avoid reading too much into it: 'Catch a person in an awkward moment, in a pose or expression that none of his friends would recognize, and this one mendacious photograph may well outlive all corrective testimony; people will study it for clues to the subject's character long after the death of the last person who could have told them how untrue it is' (307). The question is, however, whether such 'false' or 'misleading' portraits of people will also work as replacements of memories, with the possibility of any correction eliminated fairly soon after the subject's death, or does the accuracy of the portrait matter for the effect it has on our memories?

What is clear is that photography has a particular relationship with the past that is not possible to discount, but neither is it straightforward or easily explained. Draaisma emphasises how memory is a necessary component of the photograph: 'A photograph needs memories in order to mean anything.'[13] Linda Grant in her work, *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (1998), focuses in part on her mother's battle with memory loss, and comments on some of the peculiar aspects of the workings of memory which come to light in dementia. One of these is how certain things can be

brought back into memory through sight, but once out of sight they are completely forgotten again. The finality of forgetting is thus provisional in some instances. What is certain is that the here and now is instantly forgotten, which can be a great challenge for everyone. The constant repetition her mother is prone to is a source of frustration, and Grant explains how removing certain objects makes them completely disappear from memory: 'Every time she sees the spoons in their cardboard box she remembers that she wants me to have them. Each time she asks, she forgets again. Only by taking them out of her sight can the recollection of them cease' (114). This apparent power of the visual in bringing the forgotten to light has meant that photographs, as Grant recounts, are often deployed to try to stir the memory of those suffering from dementia: 'People who labour with the old value the use of photographs as if they were a switch that can turn on a light in a darkened room. We could, if we wanted, remember everything.'[14] And in contrast to Mann's contention that our memories were richer before the invention of photography Grant finds some new possibilities for memory in the photographic archive: 'I have rummaged through the box of loose photographs that constitutes the main record of our family's history. Who were we before the invention of the camera which democratized the preservation of the human face? We were nothing, a void' (21). Photography seduces us, draws us in, but can also leave us longing for more, as Grant describes her reaction to one particular photo of her parents that becomes in the text emblematic for a lost world:

> It did not matter to my mother, but it did to me, that with her memory, that vast house, was passing away a whole world which when it was gone would be finally beyond any recall, the life that existed on one summer day in 1950 when she and her husband and brothers- and sisters-in-law sat on the lawn of the garden of my aunt's house in Leeds. Sometimes I dream of walking through the paper surface into that photograph, of sitting unseen among them and listening to what they say. Whispering in their ear that they tell me all their secrets. (24–25)

The ultimately thwarted promise of the photograph still has a powerful draw. Marianne Hirsch quotes from Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* where in response to an old photograph it is said that it is as if photographs have memories, 'something stirring in them,' and Hirsch finds this to be 'the clearest articulation of what we fantasize and expect of surviving images from the past: that that memory tells us something about ourselves, about

what/how we and those who preceded us once were; that they carry not only information about the past but enable us to reach its emotional register.'[15] In this fashion, photography has a particular resonance with memory and a search for the past; it is not only a replacement, or a poor substitute of our own powers of recall but also an often fascinating piece *of* the forgotten past, brought back to awaken our curiosity and seduce us into drawing conclusions and exerting meaning about emotions and atmosphere in the past.

Kuhn and McAllister explain the complex 'information' a photograph can mediate and suggest 'the way that the photograph mediates our distance from the past invokes uncertainty about what it is possible to know from the images. As such, the photograph evades the closure of complete(d) knowledge.' This leaves us in a slight predicament: 'As viewers, if we can not be certain about what happened in the past, then neither can the photographer be certain about how her or his photographs will be read in the future. This uncertainty instils hope, an openness to what is yet to come: that the future is not determined by the past.'[16] The photograph is thus a zone where negotiation between present and past takes place, between remembering and forgetting.

The ideas and thoughts on photography and memory I have discussed here perhaps reveal also the discourse in general on memory and forgetting. Andreas Huyssen contemplates our attitudes toward memory and forgetting and some of our mistaken beliefs in the power and possibility of both. He claims that it does not 'make sense to oppose memory with forgetting, as we so often do, with forgetting at best being acknowledged as the inevitable flaw and deficiency of memory itself?' His answer to this, and I believe photographs are proof of this: 'Paradoxically, is it not the case that each and every memory inevitably depends both on distance and forgetting, the very things that undermine its desired stability and reliability and are at the same time essential to memory itself?' What we see in this is that given 'a selective and permanently shifting dialogue between the present and the past, we have come to recognize that our present will inevitably have an impact on what and how we remember.' He explains that it is 'important to understand that process, not to regret it in the mistaken belief that some ultimately pure, complete, and transcendent memory is possible. It follows that the strongly remembered past will always be inscribed in our present, from feeding our unconscious desires to guiding our most conscious actions.'[17]

To Conclude with Inevitable Metaphors

Photographs are the main visual components of memory texts, with their strong reference to the world outside the text and their close, but contested, connection with memory. Another type of imagery which is also a constant companion in memory texts is the use of metaphors in the writers' thoughts on remembering and forgetting. As we saw in Harald Weinrich's discussion of forgetting, metaphors abound in all discussion of memory.[18] Draaisma has also focused on metaphors because, as he explains, 'When contemplating memory, we think in metaphors. There is no other way.'[19] He goes on to say that

> What all these metaphors have in common is that they focus on conservation, storage and recording. In essence, metaphors of memory are museological constructs, encouraging us to imagine memory as the ability to preserve something, preferably everything, wholly intact. That this seems utterly logical is precisely the problem. Because in truth memory is dominated by forgetting.[20]

As we have seen in some of the examples in the previous chapters, some autobiographers are reluctant to accept the domination of forgetting in their life stories and instead celebrate the prowess of memory. Here I want to examine particular instances of memory discourse in the texts, the memory work laid bare, celebrated or doubted, and the constant and prolific use of metaphors in all such discourse. In Mary Antin's *The Promised Land* (1912) memory is often a subject. At the end of a chapter on her origins and her family background she explains,

> I have now told who I am, what my people were, how I began life, and why I was brought to a new home. Up to this point I have borrowed the recollections of my parents, to piece out of my own fragmentary reminiscences. But from now on I propose to be my own pilot across the seas of memory; and if I lose myself in the mists of uncertainty, or run aground on the reefs of speculation, I still hope to make port at last, and I shall look for welcoming faces on the shore. For the ship I sail in is history, and facts will kindle my beacon fires. (64)

The use of the sea as a metaphor for memory is very common as I mentioned in Chap. 7. The search for the past is a journey, and the ship is history; in some other cases, the ship is memory. Linda Grant often

reverts to metaphors when describing her mother's condition: 'She's here, with me, but here memory is on a boat that has had its moorings cut and is gone beyond the horizon' (14). Blurred or fragmented memories have their own set of metaphors, for instance when Antin describes her earliest memories: 'I want to string together those glimpses of my earliest days that dangle in my mind, like little lanterns in the crooked alleys of the past, and show me an elusive figure that is myself, and yet so much a stranger to me, that I often ask, Can this be I?' (65) The past self has become so far removed from the immigrant's life in the present that it does not invite recognition or mirroring, but alienation. The earliest memories are only 'little lanterns,' and the alleys are 'crooked,' the imagery all emphasising the treacherous journey back, and the possibly fruitless search for a recognisable self.

Janet Frame in the second volume of her autobiography, *An Angel at My Table* (1984), describes in the first chapter called 'The Stone' her vision of what happens to memory over time, which is precisely what all autobiographers have to come to grips with in one way or another:

> The future accumulates like a weight upon the past. The weight upon the earliest years is easier to remove to let that time spring up like grass that has been crushed. The years following childhood become welded to their future, massed like stone, and often the time beneath cannot spring back into growth like new grass: it lies bled of its green in a new shape with those frail bloodless sprouts of another, unfamiliar time, entangled one with the other beneath the stone.[21]

Childhood memories, according to Frame, stand alone, and are not as easily crushed by later events as later memories that become one lifeless mass, where the present and future have exerted an irrevocable influence upon it. This period thus cannot be remembered again in its original form; it is forgotten (and dead, another common metaphor for forgetting), while the childhood memories retain some of their freshness. 'Children are not to be found in memory,' Draaisma posits, 'it is at best the place where they are engendered afresh.' Childhood memories are elusive, 'they are dug up, often with great difficulty.' This is not the end of it as they 'then need to be subjected to literary adaptation, since a collection of memories from childhood is not the same thing as the story of a childhood.' Antin's little lanterns need to be ordered and put into form for us to make sense of them for a story of childhood to emerge, for as Draaisma notes,

'Descriptions of childhood that are convincing, that seem authentic, that cause the reader's own childhood memories to resonate, are the product of literary craftsmanship and in that sense far removed from a child's experience.'[22] Frame's fresh grass, will not form a narrative or a subject, without literary devices, such as metaphors; only then does it become recognisable as a story of childhood.

Michael Sheringham discusses the metaphors of the forgotten that Stendhal employs when he describes memory as a fresco:

> First: sudden reapparitions of past scenes which are compared to the surviving portions of a fresco because, along with what is remembered, comes an acute sense of what has been forgotten, just as the luminous patches of detail in a fresco subsist beside blank areas which time seems to have destroyed. Stendhal calls these apparitions *images*: they are discontinuous, undated, acausal, visual, emotional.[23]

As such they do not become a narrative; they are 'images' first and foremost, blank spaces alongside areas of vibrant memory.

The Australian writer Robert Dessaix wrote a memoir of the days he spent in hospital after a brush with death caused by a massive heart attack. *What Days Are For* (2014) is told mostly from the point of view of the man lying in his hospital bed trying to make sense of what has happened, trying to gather together his life, his sense of self, trying to remain alive, or keep the days going, or live in time: 'Like most people I know, I've spent most of my days trying either to ignore time's passing or to weave intricately patterned tapestries out of the years and decades (as you probably have to do when you're younger).'[24] What he concludes is that the way to live is to be aware of the layers of memory and forgetting in your days:

> if I have succeeded, as I say, in living in my succession of days, it's because underneath all that dailiness, I've glimpsed cluster after meshing cluster of experience—whole chasms of them, down, down, down they go into the depths of memory, criss-crossing and feeding into each other until they fade from view in the murk of my unconscious—and now and again tumbled down into them, somersaulting wide-eyed into their depths. Layers, that's the key, as I putter—indeed, sputter—towards death, I think to myself. Layers are the new geometry: thickly layered days in which I am my own master. (Loc 934)

The presence of the past can thus be maintained with an awareness of the layers of the past all around us. He explains this using the city as metaphor:

> Here I am looking out at the city, for example, yet beneath the prosaic city beyond my window there's a layering of other cities, invisible exactly like those ancient oasis towns lost for centuries beneath the featureless sands of the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts. Out there beneath the everyday are the buried grids of earlier cities I was born and lived out my life in, cities of the mind, or perhaps, more accurately, now I come to think about it, cities I've given my heart to over the years, crammed with glowing treasures, like those cities in Chinese Turkestan. These are layered webs of affection, though, each with its own geometry—they are not just middens of haphazard memories. (Loc 951)

Memory has a geometry, a shape, and layers as metaphor can account for both remembering and forgetting. A sense of the past is visual in this way, and he describes standing with his partner at the window of the hospital contemplating the view of Sidney: 'We stood there at the window in the sun for quite a while, Peter and I, looking out across the city, hardly speaking, just remembering. The future's a bit foggy, but the past is a panorama. I can even see quite clearly what was never there' (Loc 1880). The layered city makes the past visible, even an imagined past. But working in this way with memory, gathering the past together is laborious; as we have seen in some previous chapters, it requires effort and concentration: 'Seneca says the trick is to bring all the different times together in one moment: to embrace the past in recollection, to use the present wisely and to anticipate with pleasure what is to come. It's a lot to ask. Do I have the strength?' (Loc 2290)

It seems in Dessaix's formulation remembering and forgetting can be kept together, and the false opposition between the two terms Huyssen mentioned above can be dissipated. What is certain is that better attention needs to be paid to the forgotten as Guy Beiner suggests:

> A sustained focus on forgetting would require visiting many of the sources associated with memory and rigorously interrogating gaps, omissions and absences in the narratives. […] In its conciliatory sense, forgetting can play a role in assuaging the lingering wounds of aggrieved memories. These are surely pertinent issues for our times. When re-examining the relationship of narrative and memory, let us remember not to forget about forgetting.[25]

In this study I have attempted to do just that, to not to forget about forgetting. We saw in the first part of the book the way in which it is possible to locate scenes of forgetting in autobiographical writing, from traditional autobiography to social media websites, both in the authors' comments, asides, admonitions to the reader in introductions and other paratextual material, and in the way in which they approach the tantalising, but always incomplete, family archive. In our world online, it is as if forgetting does not fit in the digital world without special disposition, through concerted efforts or even by legislation. At the same time, however, the online archives of our selves and lives are incomplete, partial, and shot through with absences which will ultimately lead to forgetting. In the second part the societal aspects of forgetting in memory texts, fictional and autobiographical, with special emphasis on cultural memory and forgetting, was foregrounded. The complexities involved in breaking the silence—be it the silence of nations over traumatic events or familial silences or fragmented family histories that need reordering and retelling—has spurred authors to find creative ways to write on the past, contesting generic borders while exploring the dynamics of memory. The chapters highlighted the varied methods and strategies writers employ when writing the forgotten, as I maintain that forgetting is a constant companion in any memory text and plays a decisive role in the memory work performed in the texts.

It only came to my attention at the end of the writing how prominent migration is in the texts chosen for this study, perhaps not surprising when it is one of the most pressing issues of our world today, but it also highlights that the crossing of cultural boundaries is a fundamental aspect of this study. It is not a coincidence that many of the texts analysed were written in the decade between 1995–2005, at the height of the millennial memory boom, where questions of remembering and forgetting were foregrounded in literature and culture in such myriad (and well documented) ways, perhaps to a larger extent than ever before. I believe these texts are, however, not only representative of this particular time in history, but as they are so preoccupied with memory, they can cast a light on memory in literature in general. I mentioned in the introduction the transnational nature of the subject matter, of the choice of texts, and the transnational aspect of particular texts, and one of those works seem to haunt my discussion, as I find myself returning again and again to Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*. Published a century before most of the texts analysed, I have found its ruminations on memory and migration

a consistently helpful marker in this discussion of forgetting, indicating, I hope, that my discussion of forgetting can be extended to other texts, and other forms of culture, and is not limited to the concerns of memory at the millennium.

Notes

1. Linda Haverty Rugg, *Picturing Ourselves: Photography and Autobiography* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), p. 14
2. Timothy Dow Adams, *Light Writing and Life Writing: Photography in Autobiography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 3. I devote one chapter of my book *Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) to this subject.
3. Carol Bere, 'The Book of Memory: W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants* and *Austerlitz*,' *Literary Review: An International Journal of Contemporary Writing* 46.1 (Fall 2002): 184–192, p. 184.
4. W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants,* trans. Michael Hulse (London: Harvill Press, 1996), pp. 46–56.
5. Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (Paris: Cahiers du cinema, Gallimard, Seuil, 1980), p. 14.
6. James Ellroy, *My Dark Places: An L.A. Crime Memoir* (London: Arrow Books, 1997), p. 12.
7. Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister, 'Introduction,' *Locating Memory: Photographic Acts*, eds. Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), pp. 1–20, pp. 1–2.
8. Thomas Docherty, *After Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), p. 79.
9. Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 7–8.
10. Luisa Passerini, 'Memories between Silence and Oblivion,' *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts,* eds. Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), pp. 238–254, p. 252.
11. Douwe Draaisma, *Forgetting: Myths, Perils and Compensations,* trans. Liz Waters (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 8.
12. Sally Mann, *Hold Still: A Memoir with Photographs* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2015), p. xiii.
13. Draaisma, *Forgetting,* p. 215.
14. Linda Grant, *Remind Me Who I Am, Again* (London: Granta, 1998), p. 18.

15. Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 52.
16. Kuhn and McAllister, 'Introduction,' p. 15.
17. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 250.
18. Harald Weinrich, *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*, trans. Steven Rendall (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 15.
19. Draaisma, *Forgetting*, p. 1.
20. Draaisma, *Forgetting*, p. 2.
21. Janet Frame, *An Angel at My Table: Autobiography 2* (London: Flamingo, 1993), p. 2.
22. Draaisma, *Forgetting*, p. 11.
23. Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, p. 68.
24. Robert Dessaix, *What Days are For* [Kindle version] (Sidney: Knopf, 2014), Loc 918.
25. Guy Beiner, 'In Anticipation of a Post-Memory Boom Syndrome,' *Cultural Analysis 7* (2008): 107–112, pp. 110–111.

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DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59864-6

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Index[1]

A
Ackerley, J.R., 42, 43, 46n44
Active forgetting, 57. *See also* forgetting
Adams, Timothy Dow, 148, 167n2
Aguilar Fernández, Paloma, 92–4, 97, 109n7, 109n9, 109n23, 109n24
Amis, Kingsley, 54
Amis, Martin, 17, 54–6, 66, 67n25
amnesia, 4, 9, 14, 92, 93, 135, 138. *See also* forgetting
amnesty, 92, 93, 95, 110n36
anamnesis, 3. *See also* memory
Antin, Mary, 10, 14, 21n35, 41, 46n42, 56, 57, 62, 67n26, 162, 163, 166
Appignanesi, Lisa, 18, 131–40, 144, 145n10
archive, 13, 17, 40, 47–68, 71, 76, 79–81, 83, 99, 102, 106–8, 136–8, 149, 150, 152, 156–60, 166
  family, 17, 40, 47–68, 76, 108, 150, 157–9, 166
Assmann, Aleida, 57, 59, 62, 68n28, 68n33, 68n37, 107, 112n53, 117, 128n17–19
Assmann, Jan, 131, 137, 145n8
Augé, Marc, 1, 9, 11, 12, 19n1, 20n15, 21n30, 21n37, 28–30, 44n13, 44n17, 78, 96, 109n20
Auster, Paul, 8, 21n28
autobiographical memory, 3, 29, 44n1. *See also* memory
autobiographical pact, 16, 32, 33. *See also* autobiography
autobiography
  autobiographical pact, 16, 32, 33
  autofiction, 105
  conversion narrative, 10
  immigrant, 10, 21n34, 40, 41
  literary, 2, 28, 34, 54
  postwar, 118
autofiction, 105. *See also* autobiography

[1] Note: Page numbers with "n" denote notes.

G. Gudmundsdottir, *Representations of Forgetting in Life Writing and Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59864-6

B
Babi Yar massacre, 141
Baer, Alejandro, 110n36, 111n38
Ball, James, 84n8
Barnes, Julian, 31, 32, 45n21, 79
Barthes, Roland, 150, 167n5
Beer, David, 84n1
Beiner, Guy, 165, 168n25
Bellos, David, 53, 67n19
Benedetti, Mario, 2, 19n5
Benjamin, Walter, 12, 21n42
Bere, Carol, 149, 167n3
Bergsson, Guðbergur, 38, 39, 45n35
biography, 60, 74, 82, 105, 115
Blanchot, Maurice, 130, 131, 145n7
Boelhower, William, 21n34
Bolter, Jay David, 84n3
Borges, Jorge Luís, 8, 9, 43, 48
Bowker, Geoffrey C., 71, 75, 76, 82, 85n9, 86n28, 86n30, 86n31, 86n41, 87n49
boyd, danah, 74, 83n1, 85n23
Boyle, Claire, 31, 34, 45n18, 45n19, 82, 87n48
Bradley, Harriet, 63–5, 68n38–41
Brockmeier, Jens, 19n3
Brooks, Peter, 28, 44n10, 44n12
Bruland, Bjarte, 115, 127n8–10

C
Cabré, Jaume, 18, 19, 104, 105, 111n48
Caruth, Cathy, 26, 44n3, 44n4
Castro, Luis A., 77, 86n34
Cercas, Javier, 18, 93, 97, 99, 100, 103–5, 108, 109n10, 110n26, 110n27, 110n31
Charise, Andrea, 78, 86n35
childhood memories, 30, 52, 53, 56, 163, 164. *See also* memory
Churchill, Winston, 98
Clifford, James, 145n21
Codrescu, Andrei, 9, 11, 21n31
collective memory, 4, 17, 18, 49, 81, 92, 95, 115, 155. *See also* memory
Colmeiro, José F., 1, 3, 13, 19n5, 22n44, 94, 95, 101, 109n13, 109n16, 109n17, 110n28, 110n34
communicative memory, 131, 134, 143. *See also* memory
Connerton, Paul, 4, 20n13, 25, 44n2, 71, 85n10, 94, 109n12, 115, 116, 127n12
Conrad, Joseph, 35, 45n29
conversion narrative, 10. *See also* autobiography
Corredera González, María, 103, 111n46
Costeja Conzález, Mario, 78
Cover, Robert, 72, 85n13
Crane, Gregory, 80, 86n42
Creet, Julia, 142, 145n22
Crownshaw, Richard, 13, 21n43
Cruz Suárez, Juan Carlos, 103, 111n42, 111n43
Cuesta, Josefina, 14, 22n45, 91, 92, 108n2, 109n5
cultural amnesia, 14, 138. *See also* forgetting
cultural forgetting, 58. *See also* forgetting
cultural memory, 15, 19n3, 59, 73, 101, 130, 131, 134, 137, 138, 143, 151, 166. *See also* memory

D
Damasio, Antonio, 12, 72, 85n14, 85n15
death, 4, 5, 7, 9, 41, 59, 63, 64, 77, 78, 91, 92, 94, 95, 104, 121, 133, 141, 142, 151–4, 158, 159, 164
Delich, Francisco, 75, 86n27, 102, 111n39

dementia, 18, 138, 143, 159, 160
de Montaigne, Michel, 9, 21n32
Derrida, Jacques, 8, 13, 20n26, 21n43, 51, 65
desmemoria, 13, 14, 94. *See also* forgetting
Dessaix, Robert, 164, 165, 168n24
diary, 70, 83, 118, 148
digital memory, 75, 78, 80, 82, 83, 86n29, 110n36. *See also* memory
digital technology, 5, 75–7, 79, 83
Docherty, Thomas, 155, 167n8
Draaisma, Douwe, 1, 19n3, 27, 44n7, 57, 65, 66, 67n27, 68n43–5, 156, 157, 159, 162, 163, 167n11, 167n13, 168n19, 168n20, 168n22
Duras, Marguerite, 106

E
Eakin, Paul John, 12, 20n24, 21n34, 21n40, 21n41, 33, 45n23, 45n24, 72, 73, 85n15, 85n16
Eco, Umberto, 8, 21n27
Egan, Susanna, 135, 145n14
Eggers, Dave, 17, 43, 46n46, 49–51, 53, 67n13
Egilsdóttir, Ugla, 85n21
Ellison, Nicole B., 83–4n1
Ellroy, James, 18, 150–6, 167n6
Encarnación, Omar G., 110n36
episodic memory, 25, 44n1. *See also* memory
Erll, Astrid, 2, 3, 19n2, 19n6, 20n10, 39, 45n37, 68n28, 73, 84n5, 85n18, 103, 111n45
Ernaux, Annie, 59
Espinosa, Francisco, 109n5
essentialist silence, 4. *See also* silence
Esterházy, Peter, 65
Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind, 6, 7
European Union, 78

F
Facebook, 69, 72–4, 76, 77, 80–2, 85n11, 86n34, 87n43, 87n44. *See also* social network sites
family archive, 17, 40, 47–66, 76, 108, 150, 157–9, 166. *See also* archive
Farge, Arlette, 65
Farrenkopf, Pia, 77, 78, 86n33
Ferrándiz, Francisco, 101, 110n35, 110n36, 111n37, 111n38
forgetting
  active, 57
  amnesia, 4, 9, 92, 93
  cultural, 58
  cultural amnesia, 14, 138
  desmemoria, 13, 14, 94
  oblivion, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9–11, 14, 36, 59, 92, 130, 134
  passive, 58, 79, 83
  prescriptive, 4, 94
  repressive erasure, 4, 94
Foster, Jonathan K., 29, 34, 44n1, 44n14
Foucault, Michel, 65
Frame, Janet, 163, 164, 168n21
Franco, Francisco, 13, 91–5, 98, 100–5, 107, 113
Franco's dictatorship, 9, 113
Frank, Anne, 95
Freud, Sigmund, 31, 102, 111n40
Frow, John, 20n18

G
Garde-Hansen, Joanne, 76, 82, 86n29, 87n46, 87n47
Genette, Gerard, 32, 33, 45n22, 48, 51, 53, 57, 67n3–5, 67n11, 67n21
genre, 2, 16, 27, 32, 33, 39, 40, 43, 52, 57, 70, 73–5, 80, 97, 98, 104, 148

geographical memory, 25, 41. *See also* memory
Gilmore, Leigh, 21n31, 49, 50, 52, 54, 67n8, 67n10, 67n16, 67n24
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang, 37, 45n32
Gondry, Michel, 6, 20n20
González, Victor M., 77, 79, 86n34
Google Corporation, 78
Gracia, Jordi, 92, 108n3
Grant, Linda, 17, 18, 41, 46n43, 58, 61, 68n31, 130–2, 138–44, 145n19, 159, 160, 162, 167n14
Gratton, Johnnie, 106, 112n51
Greek mythology, 8
Grusin, Richard, 84n3
Gunnlod, 7

H
Halbwachs, Maurice, 30, 44n16, 81, 87n45
Hamsun, 116
Hamsun, Knut, 18, 113, 114, 116–27, 127n5, 127n14–16, 128n20, 128n21, 128n25–7
Hamsun, Marie, 116
Hands, Joss, 85n8
Hansen, Hans Lauge, 76, 82, 86n29, 87n46, 87n47, 103, 111n42, 111n43
Hansen, Thorkild, 116
Harbus, Antonia, 28, 44n1, 44n11, 73, 85n17
Hávamál (Sayings of the High One), 7
Helms, Gabriele, 145n14
Herzberger, David, 2, 19n5
Hidalgo España, Juan, 95
Hidalgo España, Manuel, 95
Hirsch, Marianne, 60, 68n35, 129, 131, 133, 137, 138, 144n3, 145n9, 145n16, 160, 168n15
historiographic metafiction, 97, 106
holocaust, 13, 14, 17, 21n43, 26, 27, 96, 130, 131, 134, 144n3, 155
Hoskins, Andrew, 70, 76, 82, 84n5, 86n29, 87n47
Human-Computer Interaction, 78
Hutcheon, Linda, 97, 106, 109n25
Huyssen, Andrea, 14, 19n4, 22n47, 70, 84n7, 102, 111n41, 132, 145n12, 161, 165, 168n17

I
identity, 1, 4, 11, 12, 25, 26, 59, 62, 64, 69, 72, 76, 79, 80, 83, 87n50, 114, 116, 119, 141, 142
Illes, Judy, 6, 20n21
immigrant autobiography, 21n34, 40, 41. *See also* autobiography
immigration, 17, 59, 60, 138
Instagram, 71, 87n44. *See also* social network sites

J
Judt, Tony, 113, 114, 117, 119, 126, 127, 127n1–4, 128n23, 128n28, 128n29

K
King, Patricia Grace, 110n28
Kreps, David, 72, 85n12
Krondorfer, Björn, 130, 131, 145n5, 145n6
Kuhn, Annette, 154, 161, 167n7, 168n16

L
Langer, Lawrence L., 15, 22n50
Laub, Dori, 26, 44n5
Laxness, Halldór, 39, 40, 46n40

Leguineche, Manuel, 94, 109n14, 109n15, 109n18, 109n19
Lejeune, Philippe, 11, 21n36, 33, 45n24
Lethe, 5, 6, 10
Lewis, Paul, 84n8
life writing, 15, 16, 18, 19n7, 32, 37, 44n1, 47, 58, 59, 70, 74, 76, 83, 87n50, 97, 108, 130, 144, 144n2, 147, 149
Lifson, Martha R., 50, 53, 54, 67n9, 67n20, 67n23
Liikanen, Elina, 103, 105, 111n44, 111n50
Lind, Victor, 115, 117
literary autobiography, 28. *See also* autobiography
liturgical silence, 5, 94. *See also* silence
Lledó, Emilio, 4, 5, 20n14
Luckhurst, Roger, 27, 44n9, 101, 110n34
Lyotard, François, 15, 22n50

M

Machado, Carmen Maria, 86n33
Maerz, Susanne, 114, 115, 117, 127n6, 127n7
Mann, Sally, 17, 18, 29, 30, 36, 38, 44n15, 59, 62–5, 68n28, 68n32, 156–61, 167n12
Marcus, Laura, 75, 85n24
Martín Gaite, Carmen, 18, 98, 99, 110n28–30
Marwick, Alice, 74, 85n23
Massimi, Michael, 78, 86n35
Mayer-Schönberger, Viktor, 8, 21n29, 75, 79, 86n26, 86n39
Mayes, Tessa, 78, 79, 86n38
McAllister, Kirsten Emiko, 154, 161, 167n7, 168n16
McCarthy, Mary, 17, 49–54, 58, 64, 67n7, 67n9
memoir, 29, 39, 40, 42, 50, 59, 114, 118, 119, 124–6, 130, 131, 150, 157, 164. *See also* autobiography
memorials, 14, 15, 36, 77, 137, 138, 157
memory
  anamnesis, 3
  autobiographical, 3, 28, 29, 44n1
  boom, 14, 27, 99, 131, 166
  childhood, 30, 52, 53, 56, 163, 164
  communicative, 131, 134, 143
  cultural, 15, 19n3, 59, 73, 101, 130, 131, 134, 137, 138, 143, 151, 166
  digital, 75, 78, 80, 82, 83, 110n36
  episodic, 25, 44n1
  geographical, 25, 41
  groups, 81, 83
  historical, 13, 101, 110n34
  mémoire involontaire, 13
  metaphors, 4, 5, 7, 18, 102, 162–4
  mnemonic drugs, 8
  mnemonic techniques, 8
  post, 18, 21n43, 60, 103, 129–45
  potential, 71
  prosthetic, 103
  recovered, 26
  repressed, 14, 26, 97, 99, 149
  semantic, 25, 29, 44n1
  studies, 5, 16, 44n1, 111n45
memory boom, 14, 27, 99, 131, 166. *See also* memory
memory groups, 81, 83. *See also* memory
memory metaphors, 4, 5, 7, 12, 18, 99, 101, 102, 133, 162–5. *See also* memory
memory studies, 5, 16, 20n10, 44n1, 44n2, 45n37, 68n28, 85n10, 85n17, 109n12, 111n45, 127n12, 145n22. *See also* memory
memory texts, 2, 4, 15, 16, 18, 19n6, 33, 54, 91–112, 129, 130, 147, 162, 166

Middleton, Peter, 27, 44n8
migration, 2, 130, 142, 145n22, 166
Mill, John Stuart, 36, 45n30
mnemonic drugs. *See also* memory
mnemonic techniques, 8. *See also* memory
Mnemosyne, 8, 37
Moncur, Wendy, 86n36
Muñoz Molina, Antonio, 100, 110n33
MySpace, 69. *See also* social network sites

N
Nabokov, Vladimir, 17, 37, 38, 45n33, 58, 60, 61, 68n30
narrative, 2, 3, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19n3, 19n7, 26–36, 40, 42, 43, 44n1, 47, 50, 51, 53, 55–7, 59, 61, 63, 65, 66, 69–73, 75, 80, 83, 84n6, 96, 99, 102, 103, 105, 110n28, 111n42, 116, 118, 119, 122, 123, 129–45, 151, 155, 156, 164, 165
  identity, 12
Nazi occupation of Norway, 17
Nicol, Bran, 51, 52, 67n12, 67n15
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 34, 45n25
Norse mythology, 7

O
Odin, 7
Ondaatje, Michael, 61, 68n36
online self-expression, 5, 17, 72, 73, 75

P
pact of forgetting, 92, 93, 97, 102
Pálsson, Sigurður, 38–9, 45n36
paratext, 32, 33, 48, 51, 54
Passerini, Luisa, 14, 22n46, 92, 109n6, 156, 167n10
passive forgetting, 58, 79, 83. *See also* forgetting
Perec, Georges, 17, 52–4, 67n17, 67n19, 106
peritext, 48
pharmakon, 8
Phillips, Adam, 102, 111n40
photography, 21n43, 71, 81, 147–9, 151, 155–61
Pinochet, Augusto, 110n36
Plato, 8, 20n26, 29, 31, 79, 158
political silence, 4, 14, 17, 91–4, 97, 100, 104, 115, 116, 120, 136. *See also* silence
postmemory, 18, 21n43, 60, 68n35, 103, 129–45, 168n15. *See also* memory
postwar autobiography, 118. *See also* autobiography
potential memory, 71. *See also* memory
prescriptive forgetting, 4, 94. *See also* forgetting
privacy, 17, 74, 78, 79
prosthetic memory, 103. *See also* memory
Proust, Marcel, 12, 13, 21n42
PSOE, 110n36

Q
Quisling, Vidkun, 113, 115

R
Radstone, Susannah, 22n46, 26, 44n6, 109n6, 167n10
Reading, Anna, 86n29, 87n47
recovered memories. *See* memory
referentiality, 16, 148
Reig Tapia, Alberto, 20n14, 93, 109n8
Rem, Tore, 116, 117, 120, 127n14–16

repressed memories, 14, 26, 97, 99, 149. *See also* memory
repressive erasure, 4, 94. *See also* forgetting
Richards, Michael, 97, 109n21
Richter, David, 103, 111n47
Ricoeur, Paul, 2, 8, 19n8, 70, 84n6
right to be forgotten, 78, 79, 86n38
Rigney, Ann, 3, 20n9, 73, 84n5, 85n18, 133, 137, 138, 145n13, 145n17, 145n18
Rød, Knut, 115
Rosen, Alan, 119, 128n22, 128n24
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 28, 34, 36, 38, 45n26, 51
Rugg, Linda Haverty, 148, 167n1
Rushdie, Salman, 141, 145n20

S
Sabo, Anne, 114, 118, 127n5, 128n20
Said, Edward W., 40–2, 46n41
Santana, Mario, 110n28
Sarraute, Nathalie, 106
Sebald, W. G., 21n43, 129, 130, 149, 160, 167n3, 167n4
self, 1, 5, 10–12, 15, 17, 20n24, 28, 30–6, 40, 43, 52, 53, 55, 56, 63, 64, 69–87, 99, 100, 142, 143, 163, 164
semantic memory, 25, 29, 44n1. *See also* memory
Semprún, Jorge, 98
Sheringham, Michael, 9, 11, 12, 21n33, 21n38, 38, 39, 45n34, 46n39, 47–9, 52, 54, 58, 59, 65, 67n1, 67n2, 67n6, 67n14, 67n18, 67n22, 68n29, 68n34, 68n42, 164, 168n23
silence
  essentialist, 4
  liturgical, 5, 94
  political, 14
Sinclair, Ian, 15, 22n49
Singer, Isaac Bashevis, 39, 40, 46n38
Smith, Sidonie, 43, 46n45, 87n50
Snowden, Edward, 75, 85n25
social media, 15, 74, 102, 166
social network sites, 69–87
Soler, Jordi, 18, 106–8, 111n50, 112n52
Spanish Civil War, 13, 17, 91, 110n32, 113, 147
Spanish transition to democracy, 17, 91, 92, 97
Stendhal, 34, 35, 45n27, 149, 164
Stewart, Victoria, 136, 145n15
Suárez, Adolfo, 98
Suleiman, Susan Rubin, 132, 145n11

T
Tangestuen, Mats, 115, 127n8–10
testimony, 26, 33, 58, 84n6, 95, 96, 101, 105, 126, 129, 159
thanatosensitivity, 78
Third Reich, 116
Thumin, Nancy, 73, 74, 85n19, 85n20, 85n22
Torbado, Jesús, 94, 109n14, 109n15, 109n18, 109n19
transnational, 2, 97, 166
trauma, 9, 13–15, 18, 26, 27, 95, 96, 102, 110n28, 114, 122, 123, 129–31, 137, 148–51, 153
Troell, Jan, 116
Trueba, David, 103
truth committees, 92

U
United Nations, 110n36

V
Vincent, Mary, 100, 110n32
Von Sydow, Max, 116

W
Waller, Annalu, 86n35
war children, 115
Watson, Julia, 43, 46n45, 87n50
Weinrich, Harald, 5, 6, 20n16, 20n19, 20n22, 91, 92, 108n1, 109n4, 127n13, 162, 168n18
Whitehead, Anne, 5, 20n18, 20n25, 86n40, 129, 144n1
Wiley, Cindy, 86n36
Winter, Jay, 3–5, 12, 14, 15, 20n11, 20n12, 20n17, 20n24, 21n36, 21n39, 46n45, 93, 94, 97, 109n11, 109n22, 110n28, 110n32, 110n36, 115, 127n5, 127n11
Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia, 21n34
Woods, Tim, 27, 44n8
Woolf, Virginia, 31, 32, 45n20
World War II, 13, 95, 113, 131

Y
Young, James E., 14, 22n48

Z
Žagar, Monika, 126, 128n25–7
Zapatero, José Luis, 110n36
Zelizer, Barbie, 155, 167n9