

Belarus Belaruś, and so forth. For Belarusian names, this is clearly appropriate. More questionable is the use of *Lacinka* when referring to non-Belarusians such as Harbačou and Elcyn in a text in English aimed for a North American readership.

Gimpelevich's account of Bykau's life and literature gives the reader a colorful and very personal perspective on the turbulent history of twentieth-century Belarus. The rich gallery of characters shows that Belarus is something more than just the gray, colorless, and subdued borderland often referred to as "the last dictatorship of Europe" in mass media. In fact, Gimpelevich transmits such a powerful narrative that she almost undermines her own gloomy picture of the Belarusian as submissive, appeasing, and distrusting. Gimpelevich's engaging book is a welcome addition to a sadly limited flora of books on Belarus, and a good introduction to its cultural history.

Marlene Kadar, Linda Warley, Jeanne Perreault, Susanna Egan, eds.

Tracing the Autobiographical

Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005. Pp. 240. \$32.95 (Pb)

Reviewed by Sunka Simon

The editors of this volume are to be commended for their daring inner- and inter-generic redefinitions of autobiography. "Tracing the Autobiographical" takes the navel-gazing of autobiographical genre criticism out for a cultural studies spin. In the midst of developments such as MySpace, YouTube, and the continuing dominance of reality-television programs—all of which thrive on and refashion the practice of performing, saying, and writing the self—traditional literature-centric approaches to autobiographical discourse often fall flat. This anthology seeks to remedy the general lack of theoretical discussions by emphasizing the importance of mediations, cross-media hybridization, or the automatic (the machinic, if you will, to follow Felix Guattari) in the production, reception, and classification of autobiographical acts. This volume is for those who are eager to rethink boundaries and to view the promised autobiographical traces themselves (rather than the monographic presumptions of the "Autobiography") as ongoing dialogues between, and hybrid practices of, engendering the self and other/Other, including those of the essayists. This volume delivers by performing the tension-riddled meta-generic discussions before the readers' eyes. While remaining astutely sensitive to gender, sexuality, and race constructions as part of the autobiographical process, the twelve articles collected here discuss autobiographical traces in various spaces, including memoir writing on the Internet (Helen M. Buss), personal home pages (Linda Warley), CBS's *Survivor* (Gabriele Helms), theatrical performance (Sherill Grace), domestic spaces (Kathy Mezei), anthropology (Susanna Egan), legal proceedings (Cheryl Suzack), wartime propaganda (Jeanne Perreault), multi-generational memoirs (Bina Toledo Freiwald), abused female bodies (Christine Crowe), an

exhibit of photographs (Adrienne Kertzer), and even deportation lists (Marlene Kadar).

All essays are refreshing and spot-on, particularly where they combine genre theoretical reflections with historically specific contextualization and close analytical readings. Cheryl Suzack accomplishes this task admirably in her analysis of law stories as life stories. She interweaves Mary Campbell's fictional autobiography *Halfbreed* with contemporary lawsuits that involve the arduous attempt of two aboriginal women to retain their aboriginal status after having married men from outside the tribal community. Suzack demonstrates not only how "gender identity gets constructed through institutionalized patterns of representation" (135) but also how, in the conflict between tribal law and federal law, gender gets raced and race gendered. Suzack thereby unearths the cracks in seemingly solidified constructs of both aboriginal and Canadian national identities.

Some articles fail to negotiate theory in and through the chosen texts, either because of limited inter-disciplinary expertise in the cross-over area ("Personal Home Pages") or because of a lack in attention to textual details and their theoretical implications—as if the shift to a different medium had relieved the essayist of her duty to textual analysis (as is the case in "Muriel Rukeyser" and, to a certain extent, "Domestic Space"). Unfortunately, the Introduction to the volume has to be mentioned as one of those disappointments. It is written in the spirit of a strangely militant defensiveness (regarding both the identification of the writers, though not the work, as feminist and their failure to address queer sexualities) that culminates in the apology for not (re)producing "a uniform vision of Canada" (7). In its awkwardness, the Introduction clumsily undoes what the articles are working through so diligently—the polyphonic and complicated negotiations between national, racial, ethnic, tribal, and gender facets of identity production across the media. I recommend that readers skip the Introduction altogether and proceed directly to the article that holds their interest.

In two articles, the authors' inclinations toward absolute statements stand in the way of an appreciation for their impressive analyses. Not surprisingly, both deal with an extremely difficult and painful subject: the Holocaust in autobiography. In themselves, if one so desires, these polemical bits play their own game of autobiographical tracing. However, the statement "The Nazi system was foolproof: no witnesses on the outside and no witnesses on the inside" oversimplifies a very complex situation. The statement is plain wrong, no matter how strictly one defines the act and ability of witnessing (Kadar, "The Devouring" 229). Similarly, Kertzer's declaration: "there is no way to link the statue [of Hitler as a schoolboy] and the photographs" in Ydessa Hendeles's 2002 exhibit (212), is out of sync with her project—and the book's project as a whole. For this precisely is what her and her coauthors' "circular journeys and glass

bridges" are all about; this is what the very notion of a "geography of postmemory" revolves around: the activity of linking seemingly blocked memory passages to live ones and to each other to create meaning, even if only for a moment, or for oneself.

All in all, I highly recommend this volume to anyone with an interest in changing their literary approach to the genre of autobiography. *Tracing the Autobiographical* is sure to reenergize the discussion of generic limitations, and I hope it will do more: encourage readers to problematize and theorize the relationships between selves, others/Others, and their myriad mediation practices in the age of New Media and postmemory.