

## Letter from the Issue Editors

The third issue of LINGUACULTURE gathers papers read at the national conference with international participation *Expressions of the Self: Autobiography and Its Avatars*, organized in Iași in September 24-26, 2009. This conference, the next after *Shakespeare in Europe: Nation(s) and Boundaries*, was a new intellectual challenge and marked a shift of focus from a lionized writer, who has not ceased to appeal and to stir questions, to a genre which defies boundaries and labels. Since three years have lapsed almost unnoticed, the conference is now a memory to be re-traced through its records, just as the self is a memory which survives through story.

Showing that aspects of autobiography are protean, slippery and hard to pin down, the studies included in this issue contribute to a better understanding of a genre whose psychological freight may cast shadows of doubt about its literariness and throw it into serious question. It is precisely this problematic character of autobiography that sheds new light upon and reinforces the complexity of literariness and our need to permanently redefine it from various angles. Thus, whether we look at it from an angle in which the writer's self is fabricated through posing, as in Gertrude Stein's case, or through the projection of a fictionalized persona as Joyce did in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, universalizing his own experience, or through identity (re)construction in the ambiguous space of heterotopia, which is what Louise Erdrich does, or "inventing" the space of one's home through intertextualization in Norman Manea's fiction, the conclusion of all studies is that the self is a carefully constructed image.

The artistic selves explored in this volume take the shape of idiosyncratic expressions of the genius seen by Gertrude Stein as entity, for which "things that make you a genius have nothing to do with being living." Alternatively, their avatars may be James Joyce's irony, exaggeration and detachment in *Portrait*, which make Stephen dream of becoming Joyce and writing *Ulysses*. As the twentieth century progressed, other avatars found their embodiment in Bob Dylan's poetic identities, which can be approached as texts, and indeed Dylan has become "a planet to be explored." Louise Erdrich's self is tackled as the intersection of spaces of tension between the mainstream white American and Native American cultures. Norman Manea's native space becomes "autobiographical pretext."

In "Gertrude Stein's Autobiographical Poses: from Identity to Entity" **Sorina Chipier** argues that the presentation of the self in autobiography can be figured as a prolonged posing of the self. Exploring textuality and photography side by side, the author shows that the figuration of autobiography as posing reveals several sites of contact and similarity between autobiography and the art

of making (self) portraits. What is at stake in both portrait photography and autobiography is the representation of a person's identity, experience, typological belonging or uniqueness, as well as the attempt to defeat time, to fix images, events and characters in memory, and thus to acquire immortality.

“Autobiography as Fiction in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*” and “From Baby Tackoo to Sunny Jim: Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as Fictional Biography” tackle the fictitious nature of Joyce's record of the self. **Dana Bădulescu**'s approach to Joyce's *Portrait* focuses on the novel as a Künstlerroman, a revised version of the eventually abandoned manuscript of *Stephen Hero*. The author argues that Joyce was convinced that it was not his art that mirrored nature; on the contrary, it was nature that mirrored his art. Thus, the two studies meet on the grounds of the argument that Stephen is not merely a fictional projection of his author. Dana Bădulescu points out that Joyce the author is a figment of Stephen's mind: Stephen-the character projects himself as Joyce-the author. From this angle and in this light, the self and the world are generated by the text, which is a reinforcement of the self's constructedness, a recurrent idea in the volume. **Nicoleta Stanca** demonstrates that Stephen is not a daguerreotype of Joyce and that Joyce's “semi-biography” should be read as a creative product, a metaphor of the self, concerned with issues of self-definition, self-deception and the truth of self-narrating.

**Dana Doboş** looks into Bob Dylan's series of self-fabrications throughout a long career. Contrary to the deep-seated perception that Dylan is simply a folksinger who moved from folk to rock, the author contends that Dylan's undisputed verbal sophistication within a literary rather than a musical canon is now widely accepted. This is what makes the author's interest in Dylan, an artist who has been a nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature several years in a row for the last fifteen years, relevant to literary criticism. Dana Doboş probes into the controversy around Dylan's status as a poet with a remarkable arsenal of respectable publications. She shows that while some critics consider Dylan an unconventional poet whose talent matches any other poet's, and to some he is “more of a surrealistic poet than a folk singer,” others look beyond the contentious nature of the debate and argue that Dylan's artistic creation has led to a “repositioning of poetry itself, along with questioning of what it meant to be a poet, especially an American poet, in the middle of the twentieth century.” What is even more important than whether Dylan can be considered a poet or not is the huge impact of his music upon literary writers.

In “Louise Erdrich's Autobiographies: Spaces of Identity Re(construction) and Storytelling as Utopia in *Love Medicine*” **Cornelia Vlaicu** focuses on the characters of Erdrich's novel as tricksters and argues that in *Love Medicine*, as well as in her other writings, Erdrich relies on Western literary conventions of autobiography to make her narrative recognizable by the non-Indian, Western reader. However, Cornelia Vlaicu shows that Erdrich's understanding of self-

identification is fully Indian. Several chapters in the novel are narrated by different “autobiographers”, while others are in the third person. This multi-voiced narrative is what aligns the Native American author’s text with both the postmodern conventions and with the Indian oral tradition of storytelling at the same time.

In “Critical and Autobiographical Elements in Álvaro Cunqueiro’s Shakespearean Adaptations in Galicia” **Rubén Jarazo Álvarez** and **Elena Domínguez Romero** look at the adaptations of Álvaro Cunqueiro as pioneer works in the Shakespearean reception in his native community. Focusing on the relation between adaptation and autobiography, the authors argue that Cunqueiro’s versions of Shakespeare’s plays capture instances of the writer’s autobiography during Franco’s dictatorship. Thus, these adaptations become revisions of the Shakespearean works devised to bear upon Francoist Spain. What this challenging approach puts into perspective is a fascinating cultural dialogue in which the stage of Shakespeare’s plays is an intersection of history and autobiography. So close was Cunqueiro to the character of Hamlet that the Spanish writer’s official biographer suggested that both be seen as epitomes of fantastic dreamers.

**Irina Ghiorghiasa** looks at Norman Manea’s *The Hooligan’s Return*, a work difficult to classify as novel or autobiography, to demonstrate that the author’s search for the equilibrium of the native space, seen as a space of belonging and of individual affirmation, is a fundamental idea that structures the whole self-referential discourse.

The avatars of autobiography as a genre tackled in this issue of LINGUACULTURE are writers of outstanding status from several cultures and periods, who used writing as a projection and exploration of the self. Much as it stirs debates and even frowning, autobiography is a genre which sheds light both on the author’s self and on the process of the self’s creation, de-creation and re-creation through writing as a constructed self. The authors of the studies may have found their own selves reflected in the autobiography pages they read, and thus self-writing found a mirror in self-reading. Writing about one’s reading experience is a new reflection, which we hope will generate further reflections on a genre which will never cease to re-define itself.