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*The Routledge Introduction to Auto/Biography in Canada* is the most all-encompassing work I have ever read on the topic of biography. Not only does the book examine the historic and present ways of “doing” biography, but the authors also invite the reader to think about the future of the field. The four authors identify as “feminist scholars on Indigenous land known as Canada” (p. xii). This statement really sets the tone for the entirety of the book, as the authors truly take the time to interrogate their own privileged position as scholars who are benefiting from the theft and colonization of Indigenous lands. They encourage the reader to think of biography as a tool to reject dominant national narratives of Canada and instead to hear the stories of the unknown. In this context, the term “Canada” is a very contested idea. The authors encourage the reader to reside in this complicated idea of place and identity and move toward a more ethical relationship with this land and the people upon it.

The book is organized around several foundational questions about biography: What is auto/biography? How can it be read and analyzed? What is the context I need to interpret auto/biography in Canada? How can I teach biography? These questions are asked and answered throughout the book by examining the history and practice of biography, through detailed case studies, and with a tool kit in the final section, which sets out some of the ways a beginner in the field can get started writing life stories.

Part 1 of the book is focused on the question, “What is Auto/biography?” The authors explore the history of biography, and the move from older forms of biography that focused on the “personal narrative of an autonomous self” toward a modern idea of biography as a story of the “relationship self.” This shift represents a change in understanding the complexities of representing the “self” through multifaceted lenses and relationships. Part 2 shifts the focus from generalized ideas of biography to a closer examination of “Auto/biography in Canada.” The authors intend to “disrupt old narratives of ‘progress’ which assume a national growth of sophistication” (p. 29). In this
vein, the authors interrogate questions such as: What counts as Canadian, what is the role of settler colonialism, and where are people of color in the story of settler colonialism? To explore these questions, there are several case studies of “Canadian” life stories and how they can be interpreted through the lens of biography. This section encourages the reader to interrogate some of the previously assumed categories that have been taken for granted in the context of life stories in “Canada.” This includes understanding the competing and complex national, ethnic, and cultural identities that many “Canadians” hold—for example, Indigenous peoples and Metis peoples. They also encourage the reader to consider what purposes have compelled auto/biographical storytelling, such as for historically marginalized groups who have fought for their voices to be taken seriously in academic and historical discourse. The authors argue that the incorporation of a variety of perspectives has brought new mediums and methods of “doing” auto/biography, which have enriched the field.

This book does face some limitations, some of which the authors themselves acknowledge. For instance, while they problematize the use of “Canada” as a category, it is also one of the major categories they use to explore auto/biography in this book. Though they encourage the reader to look beyond Western academic ideas of borders, the latter are still defined in some ways by them. There are also limitations to the creative ways of “doing” auto/biography. This is a written text, which is a very traditional way of telling life stories. They are unable, in this format, to engage with more diverse forms of storytelling, such as through images, song, or even performance. Written texts present many limitations to “doing” auto/biography in the modern era.

Still, the greatest strength of this book is that the contributors do not pretend to have all the answers. Instead, they pose thought-provoking questions. That is to say, the authors provide their own ideas and interpretations, but they leave room for the reader to theorize about the complexities of telling the story of a life. Even the final part of the book, the “Toolkit for Studying Auto/biography,” is not simple “how-to” manual, but rather a set of questions to use as a foundation for any biographical study. This book is a must-read for everyone from biography beginners to bona fide experts in the field.