The Autofictional in Serial, Literary Works

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Other thoughts were coming up, the thoughts and calculations she had not meant to make, but they rushed forward, and there was something extraordinary behind them, something that was part of the sky, of her own particular sky as she knew it.
—(Richardson 1921, 13–14)

Reflecting on her mental processes, Miriam, the autobiographical protagonist of Dorothy Richardson's *PILGRIMAGE*¹ (first published between 1915 and 1935), recognizes something unique in her thoughts and likens it to “her own particular sky” (1921, 14). This description continues to present her perceptions as shifting till the sky “was just the flat sky of everyday, part of London; with nothing particular to say” (14), suggesting

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an introspective focus on individual subjectivity that is aligned with the purpose of representing a complex sense of self. Autobiographical and autofictional texts may both aim to do so, but Serge Doubrovsky, who coined the term *autofiction* in the 1970s, emphasizes complexity in the sense of lack of unity as specific to autofiction:

Unlike autobiography, which explains and unifies, which wants to get hold of and unravel the threads of someone's destiny, autofiction doesn't perceive someone's life to be a whole. It is only concerned with separate fragments, with broken up chunks of existence, and a divided subject who doesn't coincide with him or herself. (Doubrovsky 1999, back cover, translated by and quoted in Jones 2010, 176)

Doubrovsky's emphasis on a fragmented self that requires fictionalization is significant. As E.H. Jones notes in her article on the history of autofiction as a neologism, Doubrovsky proposes "a work in which author, protagonist and narrator all bore the same name, but which did not make the simple truth claims of conventional autobiography" (2010, 176). Doubrovsky's process of fictionalization emphasizes a distinction between content and form as, respectively, factual and fictional. In a slightly different manner, Gérard Genette describes the contradiction inherent in autofictional writing as "It is I and it is not I" (1993, 77), a paradox which attests to the play with homology and alterity at work in autofictional narratives. In disentangling these diverse approaches to autofiction, Jones stresses that "[a]utofiction, as opposed to autobiography, then, is highly attuned with an age in which the subject is no longer accepted to be a unified, simple whole" (2010, 177). In response to conventions of autobiographical unity, autofiction fictionalizes the narrated self and thus promotes a sense of unstable subjectivity. Crucially, this non-linear conception of the self, which constitutes what we call an autofictional sense of self, structures serially published life narratives. In this context, seriality is a largely understudied phenomenon: Nicole Stamant (2014) has investigated twentieth-century serial memoirs by American authors as enabling a textual space for self-archivization, and Ricarda Menn (2018) considers seriality in John Burnside's autofictions. Usually consisting of more than two installments, serial works disrupt demands on autobiographical singularity and textual closure. A sense of deliberate multiplicity in representing the self tends to emerge from more than two texts. Multi-volume self-narratives oppose a view of autobiography as "a genre of last words" (Gilmore 2001, 96) and

instead present the narrated self as potentially open-ended, subject to reinterpretation and contradictions. Autofictional and serial life narratives thus both transgress and experiment with autobiography's generic conventions.

Western autobiography has traditionally been the domain of "great men," telling their stories with claims to the significance of exemplary lives, invoking truth, confession, and the totality of the entire life (from childhood to old age). St. Augustine's *Confessions* (published between 397 and 401) is often regarded as a precursor of modern autobiography, but the term was coined only in the late eighteenth century (*OED Online*, n.d.). Individual spiritual accounts, such as conversion narratives, indicate autobiography's Christian roots in the practice of confession. Owing to the history of the autobiographical canon as adhering to formal conventions of non-fiction while representing the lives of prominent men, traditional autobiography has also had a privileged standing within life writing discourse and criticism. James Olney observes that "in the works of three authors one can trace the central line of life writing in the Western world. St. Augustine, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Samuel Beckett: each of them is crucial; no others are necessary" (Olney 1997, 554). This statement illustrates the canonical weight ascribed to dominant examples of white male autobiographical writing in the study of life writing. Many critics have asserted that the established canon of autobiography reflects hierarchies of power which neglect the voices of minorities, whose experiences differ from this pattern of telling a prominent man's exemplary life. As a form of representation that counters autobiographical norms and departs from autobiography's supposed unity and literary prestige, autofictional texts undermine established conceptions of autobiography. The same holds for serial forms of life writing. Autofictional, serial forms offer a discontinuous rather than unified sense of the self through the foregrounding of fictionality and by deferring textual closure with a serial exploration of the self.

We conceive of serial, literary autofictions as an experimental form of life narrative. In this context, the autofictional mode juxtaposes imagined and referential dimensions contributing to self-representation. Strategies of fictionalization and creative self-invention characterize different manifestations of the autofictional. As it is predominantly literary, professional authors who write and publish such texts, we argue that an insistence on the literary and aesthetic capacities for self-narrativization is integral to this mode of self-presentation. The use of multi-volume publication for doing

so entails a sense of self that is unfinished, contingent, and subject to revision.

As serial autofiction already encompasses a degree of experimentation in its serial representation of life and self as well as its crossing of autobiographical and fictional frames of reference, the additional qualification of literary serial autofiction might appear superfluous at best, and unnecessarily exclusionary at worst. Literariness, or the literary, invites similar criticism to autobiography in terms of its evaluative and possibly normative sense of innovation and value. This is not to say that all autofiction has to be literary or that non-professional authors who are less established or earn their living primarily from other ventures—such as celebrities including politicians, athletes, and actors—may not engage in aesthetically challenging forms of self-presentation. However, the combination of the serial, the literary, and the autofictional occurs dominantly with established authors. Melissa Schuh (2020) discusses the literary in autobiography along similar lines, considering expectations of innovation and late style in the works of established novelists. Autofictions are often written by established authors, which implies the literary in two dimensions. The first relates to the image and authorial performance of writers, who tend to fashion themselves and/or be styled by others as a professional author, thus evoking expectations of literary skill and value. The second dimension encompasses the degree and kind of experimentation that an autofictional text displays in order to communicate a particular autobiographical act. Seriality underpins both dimensions of literary life writing. Professional writers may use techniques of serialization to present narratively complex self-representations. This can include novels that contain only some autobiographical references or distinctly self-reflexive works that more explicitly evoke an autobiographical context and showcase their fictionality. The autofictional describes such literary endeavors of experimenting with the self and is enhanced by the serial publication of several installments.

The discourse surrounding serially expansive works of autofiction is dominated by male authors—exemplified by Karl Ove Knausgaard's *MY STRUGGLE* (first published between 2009 and 2011) serial spanning over 4000 pages—although women writers too (e.g. Rachel Cusk, Olivia Laing, or Sheila Heti) engage in both extensive and serial self-representation. To balance a discussion that tends to be weighted heavily toward male authors, we showcase serial, literary autofiction by women, specifically Dorothy Richardson, Doris Lessing, and Rachel Cusk. While Marcel Proust's canonical, semi-autobiographical novel *À LA*

RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU (first published between 1913 and 1927) continues to be named as a prominent example of autofiction, Richardson's *PILGRIMAGE* remains an under-discussed multi-volume modernist example of autobiographical writing. Nevertheless, recent scholarly attention has resulted in the publication of an *Oxford Edition of the Works of Dorothy Richardson* (2020), which foregrounds aesthetic inconsistencies within and across *PILGRIMAGE*'s volumes as part of Richardson's experimental style. This edition highlights *PILGRIMAGE* as an unfinished series of developing experiments but is not primarily concerned with its generic hybridity and seriality. Our consideration of *PILGRIMAGE* as a modern precursor to serial, literary autofictions will show how modernist techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness narration, can contribute to an autofictional sense of the self, namely, of the self as fictionalized, contingent, and complex. Although Lessing's fiction has garnered significant attention, most notably *The Golden Notebook* (1962) as a feminist and postmodern novel, her experiment with diverse serializing strategies in her autobiographically informed texts, which we will discuss as autofictional, has so far received less critical attention than the work of prominent male contemporaries also engaging in serialized and fictionalized self-writing, such as Philip Roth and J.M. Coetzee. While not completely on par with the fame of Knausgaard's *MY STRUGGLE* series, Cusk's *OUTLINE* serial has attracted ample attention as autofiction, but her experiments with subjectivity through externalization and her use of serialization have not yet been explored.

We illustrate generic and narrative specificities of literary, serial autofiction, and discuss diachronic precursors. By considering how serial publication enhances autofictional experimentation, we also show its unique narrative and aesthetic affordances. Specifically, we showcase the interconnection of serial publication and serializing narrative techniques. In doing so, we argue that serial, literary autofictions denominate a fruitfully distinct sub-category within the wider field of autofiction. Reading related works as serially connected rather than as individual, stand-alone texts has new ramifications for the study of such texts. It highlights overarching developments, including cross-connections and different degrees in shaping self-representation and fictionalization. Similarly, conceiving of the autofictional as a mode rather than a generic absolute enables a view on different constellations across an oeuvre, such as autofictional themes, autobiographical alter egos, strategies of experimenting with subjectivity, and changing perceptions of the self and its experiences. A focus on serial

and literary techniques and affordances offers a new approach to autofictional writing that acknowledges a writer's oeuvre as a dynamic site of self-expression rather than a unified and closed whole.

SERIAL CHAPTERS: DOROTHY RICHARDSON

Richardson's *PILGRIMAGE* comprises a sequence of 12 novels published during her lifetime: *Pointed Roofs* (1915), *Backwater* (1916), *Honeycomb* (1917), *The Tunnel* (1919), *Interim* (1920), *Deadlock* (1921), *Revolving Lights* (1922), *The Trap* (1925), *Oberland* (1928), *Dawn's Left Hand* (1931), *Clear Horizon* (1935), and *Dimple Hill* (1938). A 13th, unfinished volume titled *March Moonlight* was published posthumously in 1967. *PILGRIMAGE* is interpreted as incomplete; Adam Guy and Scott McCracken have described it as "consciously a work in progress" (2020, 112). The author herself considered *PILGRIMAGE*'s volumes as chapters of a whole rather than conventional installments in a series (as noted in Hanscombe 1979, 1 and Guy and McCracken 2020, 112). *PILGRIMAGE* recounts the experiences of Miriam Hendersen, who functions as an alter ego for Richardson. While Richardson herself resisted autobiographical interpretations of Miriam as an explicit alter ego by concealing personal biographical information about herself during her lifetime (Winning 1998, 215) and stating "I am not Miriam" to the editor Edward Garnett (Garnett 1924, 12, as quoted in Guy and McCracken 2020, 117), *PILGRIMAGE* has been read both as a novel and as a form of autobiographical writing. We propose that the blurring of recognizable autobiographical experience with fictional elements makes the novel sequence autofictional. Although the use of a differently named protagonist underlines the conceptualization of the text first and foremost as a novel, Miriam's life bears such an undeniable resemblance to Richardson's that critics have remarked on the importance of reading Richardson's life in combination with *PILGRIMAGE*. Gloria Fromm notes in her biography of Richardson: "it would seem that in Dorothy Richardson's case at least, the critic and the biographer must truly join forces" (1994, xvii). Joanne Winning posits that "the text of *PILGRIMAGE* is founded upon a fundamental slippage between autobiography and fiction" (1998, 213).

Reading *PILGRIMAGE* as an early example of autofictional experimentation entails an acknowledgment of how life and art are entangled in an ongoing process of writing and rewriting. Therefore, to see it as an experimental and incomplete work in progress is essential to its

interpretation. *PILGRIMAGE* has been perceived as experimental in terms of formal innovation from the time of its publication, and critics have remarked on the serial dimension of its formal experiments. As Guy and McCracken argue, *PILGRIMAGE* shows “the particularity of individual experiments rather than a vague essence of ‘experimentalism’” (2020, 111; original emphasis). Rather than being experimental for engaging in “modernist aesthetics in general,” *PILGRIMAGE* offers a series of different experiments in narrating Miriam’s experiences and self (111). Guy and McCracken’s emphasis on the plural and serial dimension of Richardson’s experiment with *PILGRIMAGE* supports a consideration of its serial strategies.

Autofiction is associated with a sense of innovation with regard to the representation of self, life, and authorship. In this context, it is significant that, as the first published English example of an exclusive stream-of-consciousness style of narration, *Pointed Roofs* (the first volume of *PILGRIMAGE*) renders Miriam’s experiences with an unprecedented commitment to the protagonist’s perspective. *PILGRIMAGE* as a whole reflects her views, thoughts, and perceptions, without the obvious intervention of an external narrator or other focalizers. The narrative adopts Miriam’s perspective through heterodiegetic third-person narration and internal focalization, and some sections exclusively narrate her thoughts:

It was a fool’s errand. ... To undertake to go to the German school and teach ... to be going there ... with nothing to give. The moment would come when there would be a class sitting round a table waiting for her to speak. She imagined one of the rooms at the old school, full of scornful girls. ... How was English taught? How did you begin? English grammar ... in German? Her heart beat in her throat. She had never thought of that ... the rules of English grammar? (Richardson 2002, 28)

On the train journey to starting work as a teacher at a German school in Hanover, Miriam is confronted by doubts about her undertaking. She imagines herself exposed to her students’ “scornful” ridicule in a classroom like those at her old school and voices insecurity about teaching English, particularly English grammar. Richardson’s use of incomplete sentences and punctuation to reflect ellipses in Miriam’s thoughts highlights the fragmented form of the protagonist’s train of thought typographically. The stream-of-consciousness narration privileges and individualizes Miriam’s perspective, and challenges the reader to follow

and make sense of Miriam's views without the guidance of a narrator's metaperspective.

Guy and McCracken suggest that "Richardson's aim was for an open design marked by gaps and silences that grant the reader a collaborative role in the creation of the narrative" (2020, 113). Similarly, Annika J. Lindskog argues that Richardson elicits "the reader's cooperation" in the creation of the literary work, so "that the ellipses and commas function as visual components of the literary work, representing and illustrating thought-processes and states of mind that are essentially non-verbal" (2014, 7). *PILGRIMAGE*'s experimental style encourages readerly engagement with the representation of a mind—and, by extension, a life—and showcases the narrative construction of lived experience as a difficult and ongoing process. As exemplified in Richardson's use of ellipses, Miriam's experience is complex and challenging to follow. Her perspective is represented through a fragmented, associative narrative structure, suggesting that a life should be perceived in its fleeting and jarring facets, thus differing from traditional autobiographical tropes of unity and coherence. Furthermore, the displacement of this perspective onto an alter ego and the fictionalized representation of impressions and thought processes contribute to the autofictional dimension of the novel sequence. This combination of experimental renderings of individual perspective and fictionalization of autobiographical experience constitutes an autofictional approach to self-presentation.

This autofictional strategy of experimentation and fictionalization is furthered by *PILGRIMAGE*'s conception as a series of chapters. John Mepham has remarked on how Richardson's style in *PILGRIMAGE* was perceived as "unreadable" by contemporaries owing to its experimentation, suggesting that her formal experiments might have been received more in line with other modernist classics, such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), had the first three volumes been published as "a separate work" (2000, 451). In comparison to Joyce's and Woolf's more generally experimentalist writing, Richardson undertakes an explicitly autofictional series of experiments with *PILGRIMAGE*. The shifts in style between volumes reflect how the perspective on a life may change, depending on the writing moment, creating in these serial parts an autofictional sense of the self as contingent, changing, and multi-faceted. This autofictional sense of the self relies on the creative use of fictionality to enable an ongoing invention and re-invention of the self. Rather than simply reflecting the broader experience and

perception of modern life, *PILGRIMAGE* renders an autofictional self through fictionalization and serial, ongoing, and incomplete experimentation.

PILGRIMAGE contains self-conscious reflections on truth and the process of writing, which is a common characteristic of much autofiction, and especially prominent in literary autofiction. In *Deadlock*, Miriam observes gender-based differences in thinking, speaking, and writing:

These afterthoughts always came, answering the man's phrase; but they had not prevented his description from coming up always now together with any thoughts about the house. There was a truth in it, but not anything of the whole truth. It was like a photograph ... it made you see the slatternly servant and the house and the dreadful looking people going in and out. Clever phrases that make you see things by a deliberate arrangement, leave an impression that is false to life. But men do see life in this way, disposing of things and rushing on with their talk; they think like that, all their thoughts false to life; everything neatly described in single phrases that are not true. Starting with a false statement they go on piling up their books. That man never saw how extraordinary it was that there should be anybody, waiting for anything. But why did their clever phrases keep on coming up in one's mind? (Richardson 1921, 5)

Miriam judges men's "clever phrases" as deliberately arranged and "false to life." She compares a man's description to a carefully composed photograph, suggesting that the resulting impression contains some truth "but not anything of the whole truth." *PILGRIMAGE*'s representation of Miriam's mind and experiences provides a countervoice to the male discourse that Miriam criticizes here. Instead of offering "everything neatly described in single phrases," Miriam's thoughts are represented in a seemingly unedited stream, shifting back and forth between impressions, associations, and topics:

Some clue had been missed. There was something incomplete in the thought that had come just now and seemed so convincing. She turned back and faced the self that had said one ought to meet everything in life with one's eyes on the sky. It had flashed in and out, between her thoughts. Now it seemed alien. (Richardson 1921, 13)

Although Richardson arranges Miriam's perspective just as deliberately as the male discourse described in this passage, the emphasis of this

construction is on fragmentation rather than unity. Miriam describes gaps in her thoughts, recognizing “something incomplete.” She perceives herself moreover in this moment as different from “the self that had said one ought to meet everything in life with one’s eyes on the sky,” thus conceptualizing this earlier self as changing and dependent on the present time of recollection. She also claims ownership of her impressions a few lines further by proposing the idea of “her own particular sky as she knew it” (1921, 13), rejecting a universalizing representation of individual experience. While the techniques Richardson uses to describe Miriam’s life—such as stream-of-consciousness narration and excessive punctuation—are undoubtedly modernist in their rendering of perception, impression, and the mind, these strategies also serve to represent self and life as fluid and complex, which is a characteristic aim of many autofictional texts. *PILGRIMAGE*’s serial and unfinished form foregrounds life as a work in process and a series of narrative experiments, while its self-reflexive ideas about writing and truth constitute a metatextual focus on the writing life, thus providing a modernist example of both serial and literary autofiction.

A SERIAL OEUVRE: DORIS LESSING

Doris Lessing, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature (2007) and arguably best known for her 1962 novel *The Golden Notebook*, is an author who has written many autobiographically informed books and has experimented with different forms of multi-volume, serial publication throughout her career. She has released five explicitly autobiographical works. Two are presented as volumes of her autobiography—*Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, 1919–1949* (1994) and *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949–1962* (1997)—and three without such generic designation, but with names that could apply equally well to memoirs or fictional texts: *Going Home* (1957), *African Laughter: Four Visits to Zimbabwe* (1992), and *Alfred & Emily* (2008). While the two volumes of her autobiography trace developments of her life in a linear and chronological manner, her memoirs provide more episodic insights into her relations to Africa and her family life. Alongside these, Lessing has also published a serial of five autobiographically informed novels, the *CHILDREN OF VIOLENCE* serial (first published between 1952 and 1969) centering on her authorial alter ego Martha Quest. Ángeles de la Concha observes that through these texts Lessing rewrites parts of her youth from the “vantage point of her own old age” (2016, 171). Lessing

herself, in her autobiography *Walking in the Shade*, describes “Martha Quest, [her] third book,” as “more or less autobiographical” (1997, 16). Lessing’s writings—both her overtly autobiographical works and her novels—are characterized by recurrent narrative motifs such as the author’s self-understanding as determined by her early years in Africa and reflections on crafting both her fictional and autobiographical texts.

For instance, *Walking in the Shade* presents a linear first-person account of the years 1949–1962 and includes reflections on literary authorship and the crafting of an autobiographical text:

I have far too much material for this second volume. Nothing can be more tedious than a book of memoirs millions of words long. A little book called *In Pursuit of English*, written when I was still close to that time, will add depth and detail to those first months in London. At once, problems—literary problems. What I say in it is true enough. [...] But there is no doubt that while “true,” the book is not as true as what I would write now. It is a question of tone, and that is no simple matter. That little book is more like a novel; it has the shape and pace of one. It is too well shaped for life. (Lessing 1997, 4)

In this passage we can see how Lessing’s profession as a novelist determines the story of her life: she does not only refer to the experience of her arrival in London as “material” for a narrative but also stresses that one of her novels represents this period of her life. However, in this context, she also differentiates between the truth of a novel and the truth of an autobiographical account. For her, these two forms of truth are endowed with different purposes: where a novel subscribes to certain aesthetic criteria (to be “well shaped”), a life narrative seems less polished. As she mentions the abundance of material available, readers are made aware that her autobiographical writing, like her fictional style, too, is invested in shaping and arranging. Much like Richardson’s commentary on men’s self-fashioning style of writing, Lessing’s writing also reveals its own constructedness. *Walking in the Shade* establishes intertextual connections between *In Pursuit of English* (1960) and Lessing’s autobiographical volumes as well as other novels by her, such as the first installment of her Martha Quest serial. In this sense, reflections on her own literary authorship characterize her life stories and at the same time complicate clear-cut distinctions, as—despite distinct generic markers—her fictional and autobiographical accounts potentially overlap.

To a different degree, Lessing's profession as a novelist also resonates in her memoir *Alfred & Emily*. Divided into two parts, the second half of this text is more conventionally (auto)biographical in narrating the life of her parents, but the first part shows Lessing imagining an alternative life for them—one in which the First World War did not take place. Dorothee Birke reads this scenario as “counterfactual,” given that Lessing sketches and fictionalizes an alternative reality (2015, 141). This deliberate fictionalizing can be seen as emblematic of an ongoing probing of different forms of representation which characterizes Lessing's autobiographical oeuvre. Ranging from travel memoir (*Going Home* and *African Laughter*) to fictionalizing her parent's biography or inserting herself as an authorial alter ego in the Martha Quest novels, Lessing's experimentation with different forms of autobiography chimes with the skepticism and ambivalence toward autobiographical unity that is characteristic of much autofictional writing. This disavowal of autobiographical unity is reflected moreover in her use of serial forms, which similarly undermines a sense of a stable, textually unified self.

In his consideration of the economic interconnections of seriality and mass media, Roger Hagedorn points out how “the serial proper” centers on “the narrative developed in one episode [which] interlocks with previous and subsequent episodes, on the basis of a play of unresolved narrative questions” (1988, 7). This interlocking does not only imply several installments but also that the “break” (7) between distinct episodes is a moment of suspense and a commercial factor ensuring the consumption of the ongoing serial. What is crucial in Hagedorn's account is that, even though he focuses primarily on the serial proper and its medial affordances for economic purposes, he offers two variants of it: “serialized publication of lengthy narratives in relatively self-sufficient episodes or chapters [...] [in which] the narrative structure is unaffected by its mode of presentation” (8), and, in contrast, “series of independent, complete episodes which interrelate through the use of recurring characters and a basic diegetic situation, but not in terms of any overall narrative structure” (8). However, Lessing's two-volume autobiography—*Under My Skin: Volume One of My Autobiography, 1919–1949* and *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949–1962*—complicates such clear distinctions. She refers to both of these texts as “My Autobiography” in the singular, which, alongside the reference to “volumes,” would initially suggest the

serialization of one text. This is underscored by chronological linearity—the years up to 1949 are covered in volume one and the years 1949–1962 in the second part. Yet, in contrast to the serialization of an already finished story, Lessing's two volumes illustrate a supplementary continuation, staging her autobiographical endeavor as ongoing rather than closed-off. As each volume functions as a stand-alone text, they do not constitute a serialization akin to serialized novels but rather rely on a serial connection. Lessing, in sum, not only experiments with diverse subgenres of life writing but also employs different serializing strategies. Whereas *CHILDREN OF VIOLENCE* constitutes a serial of interconnected novels, a sense of serial supplementation structures her two autobiographical volumes. Conversely, her three memoirs, offering more episodic insights into her life, appear as a temporally dispersed series. This diversity of self-referential practices constitutes an autofictional way of experimenting with conventions of autobiographical and textual unity.

SERIAL EPISODES: RACHEL CUSK

Following three memoirs—*A Life's Work* (2001), *The Last Supper* (2009), and *Aftermath* (2012)—Canadian-born, Britain-based novelist Rachel Cusk published an autofictional trilogy between 2014 and 2018. *Outline* (2014), *Transit* (2016), and *Kudos* (2018) are referred to as the *OUTLINE* trilogy by Cusk's US publisher Macmillan and paratextually labeled by a unifying cover design. The trilogy engages in a serial form of dispersing subjectivity across several parts. All three volumes follow Faye—whose name is mentioned only once in each text—as she recounts a series of conversations with people she meets on her travels, at literary festivals, or at writing workshops. The set-up of smaller, serialized segments rather than a linearly unfolding storyline thus mirrors the trilogy's form by serializing both form and content. This translates into the respective novels' chapter structures: the first volume is split into ten distinct chapters labeled with roman numerals. *Transit* and *Kudos* offer a variation: instead of numerical sub-parts, they mark the beginning of a new episode or chapter with a gap instead of a chapter heading. These two texts enhance the impression of non-connectedness between narrated episodes by only giving a minimal sub-structure to the narratives. The listing of distinct chapters and episodes across all three parts establishes neither a chronological

nor a thematic connection. Despite these slight variations in chapter structures, the entire trilogy is built around serially ordered but not causally linked parts, contributing to an overall effect of narrative fragmentation.

OUTLINE has been compared to Knausgaard and his expansive *MY STRUGGLE* serial, although the serials differ considerably from one another in terms of their respective scopes and styles. Knausgaard's six volumes span over 4000 pages, Cusk's three volumes amount to fewer than 700. In a related manner, the author-narrator of Knausgaard's serial recounts his life unambiguously and in great detail, whereas Cusk's trilogy uses a more elusive, externalized, and distanced narrative perspective. Instead of directly recounting personal experiences, the first-person narrator Faye relays stories she is told by others and continually, albeit indirectly, inserts her own perspective into the account of others. In contrast to Cusk's straightforwardly autobiographical first-person account in her memoirs—each centering on an episode of the author's life, such as childbirth or divorce—the narrative style of *OUTLINE* externalizes subjectivity. Even though Faye selects and arranges the stories she receives from others, she remains elusive, or as Alison James notes in her contribution to this volume, “an impersonal, diffracted, or projected version of the narrator's own consciousness” (p. 51).

The structural make-up of *OUTLINE* illustrates what Genette considers essential to autofiction, namely, the paradoxical statement “It is I and it is not I” (1993, 77): both Cusk and Faye are middle-aged novelists, mothers of two children, and divorced. Besides the difference in their names, Cusk has two daughters whereas Faye is mother to two sons. Through the parallel structure of evoking yet undermining autobiographical reference, Faye thus appears as an autofictional alter ego of Cusk. In a passage toward the end of *Outline*, the externalization of events by Faye becomes further removed as Faye recounts an incident she learns about from a novelist, Anne, by subsuming Anne's perspective:

The longer she listened to his answer, the more she felt that something fundamental was being delineated, something not about him but about her. He was describing, she realized, a distinction that seemed to grow clearer and clearer the more he talked, a distinction he stood on one side of while she, it became increasingly apparent, stood on the other. He was describing, in other words, what she herself was not: in everything he said about himself, she found in her own nature a corresponding negative. This anti-description, for want of a better way of putting it, had made something clear to her by a

reverse kind of exposition: while he talked she began to see herself as a shape, an outline, with all the detail filled in around it while the shape itself remained blank. Yet this shape, even while its content remained unknown, gave her for the first time since the incident a sense of who she now was. (Cusk 2014, 240)

Through summarizing and relaying an event she did not experience herself but only learns about from Anne, an even more indirect and remote mode of storytelling is evoked. Syntactically, this is underlined by the use of indirect speech and a complete absence of the first-person pronoun. Obvious parallels between Faye and Anne—both are divorced, novelists, teach writing in Athens, and recount conversations during their respective flights to Greece—invite a reading in which Anne functions as a textual stand-in for Faye or even a metatextual stand-in for the author Cusk. At the same time, Faye’s and Anne’s perspectives emerge only as a foil to the male conversation partner, which furthers the externalization of subjectivity as *OUTLINE*’s central autofictional technique. What is more, this technique here carries a distinct gender dynamic. Initially, the emergence of a female character only as the counterpart of her male pendant poses an implicit critique to a dominant conversation partner. Filtering Anne’s account through Faye’s voice—James describes this as a “*mise en abyme*” (this volume, p. 50)—the anti-description poses a challenge to reliability and thus questions the authority the conversation initially indicated. In this sense, the entire serial is structured around the aesthetic principle of providing only outlines of events and persons. Alongside the fragmentary chapter structure, Cusk’s trilogy showcases an autofictional style that disavows textual unity by refusing linear structure and direct self-presentation. Instead, the externalization of self-description and the serializing of episodes are embraced as central techniques for autofictional self-presentation.

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Serial, literary autofiction, as a specific sub-category of autofiction, displays particular narrative characteristics that promote a sense of self, life, and identity as unstable, multi-faceted, and contingent. Often written by professional authors, these texts show their formal experimentation and literary form in distinct ways, thereby illustrating how life narrative is not solely about accurate remembering but is just as dependent on

fictionalization, self-imagination, and creative self-invention. Our case studies have allowed us to distinguish different kinds of serialized autofictional practice: the serialization of a life story into discrete parts (as we saw in Richardson's *PILGRIMAGE*), serials consisting of thematically and conceptually interwoven works (in Cusk's *OUTLINE*) but also series of only tangentially related works which loosely build on similar strategies and motifs (as in Lessing's narratives). In all cases, seriality destabilizes notions of self and life as unified and emphasizes life as ongoing, disjointed, and potentially subject to revision. Serial structures and forms of publication thus enhance autofictional experimentation in their foregrounding of the unstable and open-ended nature of a self and self-writing.

As our case studies from across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries show, autofictional elements may appear in various forms: for instance, in the form of texts featuring an authorial alter ego, playing with tensions of similarity and difference between autobiographical parallels and fictionalized elements, or in experimental shifts of style and aesthetic across different serial installments of self-representation. Rather than perceiving autofiction's conceptual openness as a weakness, we embrace its terminological flexibility to describe texts that voice dissatisfactions with claims of autobiographical unity. By using the adjective (autofictional) rather than the noun, we can extend the scope of the study of autofiction and consider a range of strategies and constellations that constitute experimental and literary means of self-representation. Considering several—possibly unconnected or only marginally connected—texts as part of an autofictional serial enables an extended view on textual and aesthetic continuities, developments, and literary experimentation. Serial structures in autofictional works reveal different constellations of contingency, creative revision, and the instabilities of a work in progress. In this sense, such an approach challenges the self-containment of an individual work, just as autofictional modes of self-narrativization challenge linear, unifying understandings of subjectivity.

NOTE

1. We use capitals to distinguish the titles of series and serials from individual texts.

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