

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS
TO A THEMATIC ISSUE TO BE PUBLISHED IN E-REA (Spring 2017)
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“A Death of One's Own”?
Narratives of the (Un)Self :
American Autothanatographers, 17-21st centuries

Since the 1980s-1990s, the terms “autopathography” and “autothanatography” have increasingly been used by the theorists of autobiography. Defined by Thomas Couser as “life writing that focuses on the single experience of critical illness” (“Introduction: The Embodied Self”, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol.6, no 1, Spring 1991, 1), autopathography often— but not always—envisions death. The aporic term autothanatography, the writing of one's own death, has provided a useful framework for the theorists interested in the relationships between writing, the self and death. Much of the theoretical background of autothanatography can be attributed to French thinkers (Jacques Derrida who spoke about his “testamentary writing”, Louis Marin or again Maurice Blanchot, the very embodiment of the modern myth of the writer, according to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe who described Blanchot's both existence and writing as “posthumous” ...) but recent works on autothanatography have also drawn inspiration from other European or American writers such as Paul de Man, Jeremy Tambling, Laura Marcus, Linda Anderson, Susan Sontag, Judith Butler or Felicity Nussbaum. Still, a brief overview of recent autothanatographical studies seems to indicate that American writings have not been as thoroughly or systematically explored as European ones.

The purpose of this volume is to address this void by questioning the evolution, the practices and the perspectives of American autothanatographers ever since the 17th century. While not systematically disconnecting death from disease, we will consider how one's own death shapes the author's writing project, turning it into a deathward project actually emerging “from beyond the grave”. The focus, therefore, will not necessarily be placed on the process of dying (as it is in autopathographies), but on death itself as at once the starting point and the result of the writing process. In a 1978 article entitled “The Shape of Death in American Autobiography,” Thomas Couser pointed out that “the form and content of the narratives are often significantly shaped by the writer's preoccupation with death. A surprising number of our major autobiographers anticipate or offer a substitute for their own deaths; some even point beyond it, offering intimations of their own immortality” (“The Shape of Death in American Autobiography”, *The Hudson Review*, Vol.31, n.1, Spring 1978, 53). While such preoccupation with death is likely to be a common feature among autobiographers in general, this volume will seek to delineate and explore the cultural, religious, racial and gender parameters that could contribute to the specificities of American autothanatography. Because of this approach, the historical timeframe is deliberately broad, reaching back to the 17th century, when religion pervaded autobiographical writings, up to the early 21st century. Also, because the boundaries between reality and fiction are by no means clear-cut in the genre of autobiography (and perhaps even less so with autothanatography), contributions examining autofiction will be welcome. Finally, we wish to envision a large spectrum of

autothanatographical expressions, including textual genres such as diaries, memoirs, and autofictional works but also iconographic or visual productions dealing with the author's own death (comics, photography, self portraits, art works...).

While the essays are expected to explore American autothanatographical practices, they must also endeavor to anchor those practices in—or detach them from—the theoretical discourses shaping autothanatography. Ultimately, the volume will question whether the individual act of writing about/from/against one's death has the power to (de)construct “a death of one's own” (Rilke), and whether such writings can collectively constitute a specifically American literary phenomenon.

Articles may examine:

- Special historical moments liable to (dis)connect the individual from/to a sense of national/collective identity
- Issues of race/class/gender/religion inasmuch as they may impact the way in which death affects autobiographical practice
- How cultural and medical discourses on death shape individual representations of one's own death
- The literary, poetic and/or pictorial devices that allow a writer or artist to represent his/her own dying or death
- Double-bottom texts in which the exploration and narrative of the death of the other (thanatography) hide an autothanatographical project
- The notion of mortiferous writing, its modes of existence and implications

Articles in English should be sent to claire.sorin@univ-amu.fr and sophie.vallas@univ-amu.fr for October 1, 2016.

Please use E-rea's stylesheet (<http://erea.revues.org/2153>). If you decide to submit a contribution, please let us know by sending us a message with a brief description of your project by June 30, 2016.