

## ***Ecobiography: Exploring Environments and Selves***

*Jessica White*

*Ecobiography: Exploring Environments and Selves* is a critical monograph that analyses expressions of ecobiography from a range of writers around the world. While an autobiography chronicles the life of a human subject, an ecobiography includes the environment with which that person interacts, detailing how the natural world shapes their sense of self.

Smith and Watson open *Reading Autobiography* with a reference to the Greek etymology of the term 'autobiography': *autos* denotes 'self', *bios* denotes 'life' and *graphe* denotes 'writing', providing a neat definition of 'self life writing.' The term emerged in the West in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, and analyses of the form have historically supported the belief and values of an essentialist notion of selfhood, in which a unified self is seen as representative of universal human nature. This interpretation of autobiography is one that is emphatically anthropocentric, with human life at its core. However, if we cannot have a life without the lives of other inhabitants such as fungi, bacteria, air, or orchids, then it becomes desirable, in creating an autobiography, to include the lives that sustain and shape it: the *autos* of a biography should include our environment.

The term 'ecobiography' first appeared in Cecilia Konchar Farr and Philip Snyder's 1996 essay "From Walden Pond to the Great Salt Lake: Ecobiography and Engendered Species Acts in *Walden* and *Refuge*." The authors describe ecobiography as 'a life-story constructed according to a pattern divined internally through the Self's interaction with the external environment, especially Nature, the multiple exchanges of which (re)present a kind of ecosystem of the Self'. In these life stories, they continue, 'it is impossible to tell where the Self ends and Nature begins or where Nature ends and the Self begins: ego and eco are inextricably intertwined'. In the two decades since the term's provenance, however, there has been remarkably little critical attention to the form and what it constitutes, perhaps reflecting the entrenched anthropocentrism of life writing.

This monograph aims to redress this lack of critical attention. Through a detailed analysis of the stylistic techniques, themes and language which ecobiographers use to express the intertwining of selves and environment, my monograph will show how storytelling can illuminate the crucial dependence of human lives upon non-human lives. From this, it is hoped that readers will consider the importance of the ecosystems of which they are a part, as well as the impact of their lives upon these ecosystems in a rapidly changing world.