

# **How can therapeutic creative writing uncover a more nuanced story of a past self?**

Elisabeth Winkler

# The Great Unreality



them on the other side of my eyes. I want them with me in my brain. I can't accept the distance, therefore they cease to be real, for they distance I have come too close.)

I thought Walter was far away. I was irritated + angry + hateful towards him. It is a defense. It is easier to hate him. But once I see him properly, it's O.K. I want to love him.

At college, I get lost. I cannot be funny all the time, Shit fuck, I can't think.

It's me me me all the time. I won't write anymore because I am sick of it being continually me. I could write about George: he is ~~ex~~ experienced No.

I will go.





# Data

Journal excerpts

A photograph

Three historic poems

Home

About

Programmes

Research

Prospective Students

Contact

Events



# MSc in Creative Writing for Therapeutic Purposes

# Therapeutic

Compassion is key

# Autoethnography



**Self**

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**Culture**

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**Writing**

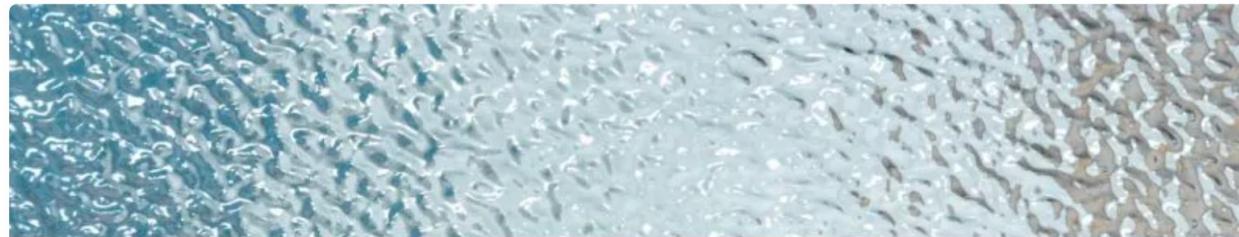
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autoethnography comes from three core aspects: self, culture, and writing. So,

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# Feeling unreal: depersonalisation / derealisation disorder

Written by Carolyn Spring | 30 January 2018



Feeling unreal:

# Transient or temporary symptoms

# Acronyms

DP

DDD

DPD

DP/DR

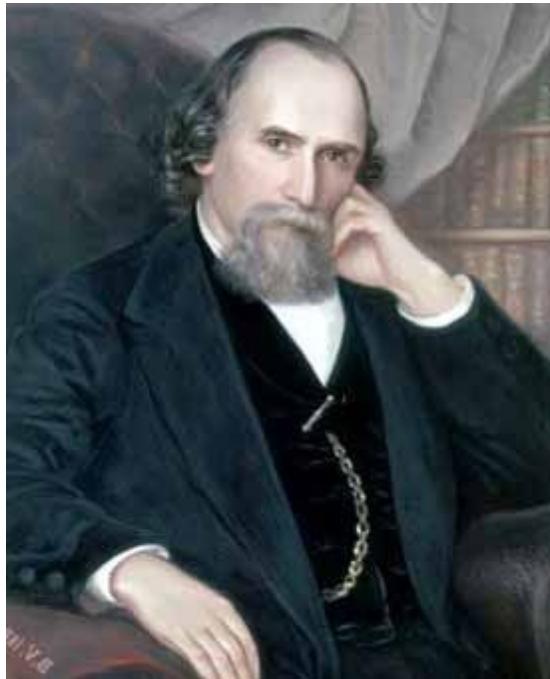
DPDR

DDS

DPAFU

# Depersonalisation

Henri-Frédéric Amiel



Let us write 1.

# I cross a bridge

Describe the bridge, weather, landscape.

Where is the bridge coming from and going to?

What is it made of?

What's it crossing over?

# **David Hanauer: Poetic autoethography**

Poetry to explore a researcher's experience

# A particular type of autoethnography

“...that uses the special features of poetry...to enhance insight, emotional clarity and critical engagement with one's own personal experience.”

*Hanauer 2022*

# Special features of poetry writing

Succinct, condensed

Open to interpretation

Can elicit emotion

Say the unsayable through metaphor or image.

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# Life Writing and Poetic Autoethnography Full ...

by Creative Research

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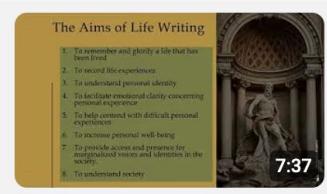
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The Aims of Life Writing

- 1. To remember and glorify a life that has been lived
- 2. To record life experiences
- 3. To understand personal identity
- 4. To facilitate emotional clarity concerning life experiences
- 5. To help contend with difficult personal experiences
- 6. To increase personal well-being
- 7. To provide access and relevance for marginalized voices and identities in the society.
- 8. To understand society

2



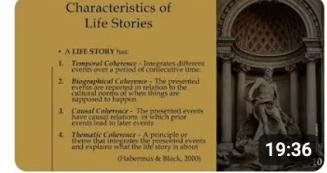
Characteristics of Life Stories

A LIFE STORY has:

1. **Temporal Coherence** – Integrates different events over a period of consecutive time.
2. **Biographical Coherence** – The presented events are consistent with what things are supposed to happen.
3. **Causal Coherence** – The presented events are consistent with what things lead to later events.
4. **Thematic Coherence** – Integrates the presented events and explains what the life is about.

(Guberman & Block, 2000)

3

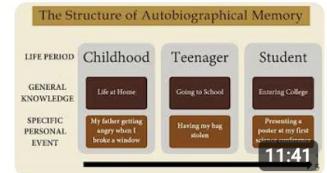


The Structure of Autobiographical Memory

LIFE PERIOD	Childhood	Teenager	Student
GENERAL KNOWLEDGE	Life at Home	Going to School	Entering College
SPECIFIC PERSONAL EVENT	My father getting angry when I broke a window	Having my bag stolen	Promising a poster of my first

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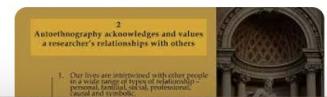
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Autobiography acknowledges and values a researcher's relationships with others

1. Our lives are intertwined with other people in a wider range of types of relationships – personal, work, social, professional, and community.

5



# Poetic autoethnography

“considers **poetry written in the past** as a form of historical documentation through which personal experience can be investigated.”

*Hanauer 2021 p.431*

## **Vile inhuman deadness**

Dead creeping singing in the marshes  
a sometimes relic of what was once human  
Its last form long remembered  
As a crying baby crying in the wilderness.

Heart knows a cool land a green land a fresh land  
Heart knows a path to get there  
Heart frozen and rosy yearns warm and cosy  
And head is a dead-man barring the way.

# Rewriting the narrative

# Self-research - a challenge

Prompts in method

Ethics

Self-care

# Risks to researcher

Self care

Triggers can be illuminating

# Peer support

Are you experiencing Depersonalisation and/or Derealisation? Would you like to be able to meet other people who understand what you are going through to support and learn from each other?





# LIRIC Journal

## Research and writing for wellbeing



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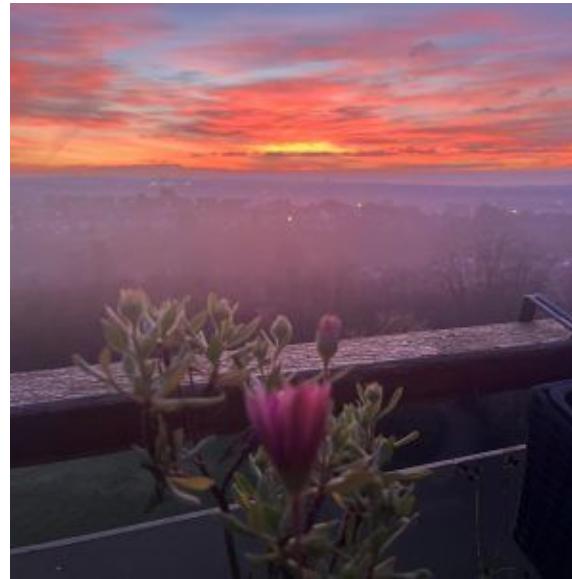
Let us write 2.

# Treasure chest

Open the lid and see what is inside

What treasure do you choose for now?

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**Winter writing January 2026**