

Miller, Nancy K. "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of Memoir." PMLA 122.2 (2007): 537-548. Print.

Miller's article takes up the problem of reading autobiography in light of recent "scandals" such as the revelation that James Frey's best-selling memoir was partly falsified. Rather than focus solely on memoir writers, Miller also sees "sticky problems of reception" for memoir readers, and looks at how the "entangled self" that a memoirist writes about is received by the reading public. Discussing a wide range of figures like Oprah Winfrey, Philippe Lejeune, and Stephen Colbert (who gave us the term "truthiness"), Miller argues that "the distinction between forms matters to readers" (541) because readers rely on the way in which editors and bookstores select and present the books they sell; they need "guides to the territory" (542). This seems to be what she means by "genre bondage," and by analyzing examples from Joan Didion, Alison Bechdel, and Francine du Plessix Gray, Miller argues that "perhaps it is time to understand the question of relation to the other—to others—as being as important, foundational, to the genre as the truth conditions of the 'autobiographical pact'" (544). This article will be useful in my final paper, because Miller contributes a new "rule" for autobiography when she says "in autobiography the relational is not optional. Autobiography's story is about the web of entanglement in which we find ourselves, one that we sometimes choose" (544). I hope to test this "rule" to see if it is as universal as she suggests; are there any memoirs that might not have a "web of entanglement"? Also, is it possible to write about an un-entangled self, or does our contemporary notion of the "self" somehow depend upon Miller's idea of "entanglement"?