

Contents

Acknowledgments — V

1 Introduction — 1

- 1.1 Centenarians' Autobiographies and Successful Aging — 3
- 1.2 Successful Aging as Cultural Capital — 6
- 1.3 Extreme Longevity – An Impossible Desire? — 15
- 1.4 R. Waldo McBurney: The Oldest Worker in America — 21
- 1.5 The Centenarian as a Mirror of Our Future Self — 29
- 1.6 Centenarians' Autobiographies as the Prism of Longevity — 35

2 Centenarians' Autobiographies between Life Sciences and Life Writing — 38

- 2.1 Centenarians' Autobiographies as Serial Narratives — 45
- 2.2 "Writing Science" in Centenarians' Autobiographies — 48
- 2.3 "Successful Aging" as an Antidote to the Fear of Dementia — 53
- 2.4 George Dawson and the Plasticity of the Brain — 62

3 Crossing the "Finish Line": Celebrating the Centenarian's 100th Birthday — 64

- 3.1 From Life Writing to Fiction: Celebrating the Centenarian in Jonas Jonasson's *The 100-Year-Old Man Who Climbed Out the Window and Disappeared* — 67
- 3.2 From Fiction to Life Writing: The Centenarian's Birthday Party — 72
- 3.3 Colorblind Celebrations and the Specter of Race — 76

4 Recruiting the Centenarian: Of Willing and Unwilling Subjects — 87

- 4.1 The Road Not Taken: The Musings of a Reluctant Centenarian Subject in Santa Pi's *Revering, Reminiscing, Recordando* — 88
- 4.2 The Challenge of Recruiting a Centenarian — 93
- 4.3 Recruitment as a Moment of Conversion in the Delany Sisters' *Having Our Say* — 100
- 4.4 "More than a Book: A Story of Friendship": Recruiting the Centenarian in George Dawson's *Life Is So Good* — 108

5 Centenarians' Autobiographies as Advice Literature — 115

- 5.1 From Autobiography to Cookbook in David Mazarella's *Always Eat the Hard Crust of the Bread: Recollections and Recipes from My Centenarian Mother* — 119

- 5.2 *Healthy at 100: Reading Centenarians' Life Narratives through Dietary Advice* — 127
- 5.3 Centenarian Narratives and the Business World — 132
- 5.4 From Yoga to Yoghurt: The Delany Sisters' Lifestyle in *Having Our Say* — 137
- 5.5 *Having Our Say: Companionship as the Secret to Longevity* — 144
- 5.6 Outliving the "Rebby Boys": Centenarians' Narratives as Racial Critique or the Sensationalism of Extreme Old Age? — 146
- 5.7 African American Centenarians' Narratives and the Black Lives Matter Movement — 151

- 6 **The Role of Death and Dying in Centenarians' Autobiographies** — 156
 - 6.1 Centenarians' Autobiographies and the Civil Religion of Dying — 158
 - 6.2 Centenarians' Autobiographies as Models of Resilience — 163

- 7 **Earning Citizenship in the Country of Extreme Old Age** — 167
 - 7.1 Centenarian Lives versus the "Duty to Die" — 168
 - 7.2 Towards the Citizenship of Extreme Old Age? — 173
 - 7.3 Writing Extreme Old Age in the Age of Neoliberalism — 175
 - 7.4 Voting at 100 in Ann Nixon Cooper's *A Century and Some Change: The Day the President Called My Name* — 185
 - 7.5 Morality and Citizenship — 191

- 8 **Centenarians' Autobiographies as Ethnographies of Extreme Old Age** — 198
 - 8.1 Visiting the Native in Their Kitchen: Backstage Encounters — 204
 - 8.2 The Space of the Parlor in the Delany Sisters' *Having Our Say* — 213
 - 8.3 From Friend to Stranger: The Ethnographer at Home with the Native — 217
 - 8.4 Centenarians' Autobiographies as Living History Villages — 225
 - 8.5 Bizarre Temporality and the "Enshrinement" of Centenarians During Their Lifetime — 232
 - 8.6 The Centenarian as an Eyewitness of the Past: Canned Voices — 236
 - 8.7 Towards an Ethics of Readership: Do Centenarians Read Their Own Autobiographies? — 245

9 “The Elephant in the Room”: The (In)visibility of the Co-Author in Centenarians’ Autobiographies — 248

- 9.1 Writing Old Age through Middle Age: The Enigmatic Figure of the Co-Author — **248**
- 9.2 Mental Fitness and the Autobiographical Pact — **251**
- 9.3 Celebrating Co-Authorship in Ella Mae Cheeks’ Johnson’s *It Is Well with My Soul* — **252**
- 9.4 The Co-Author as “the Elephant in the Living Room”: Strategies of Legitimation and (In)visibility — **256**
- 9.5 Kinship as a Legitimation Strategy of Co-Authored Life Writing — **265**
- 9.6 The Portrayal of Racism in Co-Authored Narratives — **266**
- 9.7 Centenarian Puppets and Their Puppet Master? The Politics of Co-Authorship — **270**
- 9.8 Black Griots and the Surrogacy of Aging — **276**
- 9.9 Stories about Ethnic Aging for White Eyes — **278**
- 9.10 “Sign Up Your Favorite Centenarian”: Digital Recognition of Extreme Longevity — **286**

10 Conclusion: Centenarians’ Autobiographies as Master Narratives of Aging? — 291

- 10.1 Successful Aging and the “New Jim Crow” — **291**
- 10.2 The Promise of Immortality and the Reality of Social Inequality — **295**

Works Cited — 309

Index — 319