Writing the Father into Textual Existence: 
The Biographer in Through a Portagee Gate

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Abstract

Through a Portagee Gate was published as the autobiography of Charles Reis Felix and the biography of his father. By building on the theoretical work of Virginia Woolf, this study will focus on the biographical part and how the son uses certain tools of fiction to write “the creative facts” of his father’s life.

Keywords

Autobiography, biography, ethnicity, e/immigration, Luso-American literature, second-generation gaze

Resumo

Through a Portagee Gate foi publicado como a autobiografia de Charles Reis Felix e a biografia do seu pai. A partir dos trabalhos teóricos de Virginia Woolf, o presente estudo concentrará-se á na parte biográfica e como o filho usa certos métodos de ficção para escrever “os fatos criativos” da vida do pai.

Palavras-chave

Autobiografia, biografia, etnicidade, e/imigração, literatura luso-americana, olhar da segunda geração

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In the often-cited essay, “The New Biography” (1927), Virginia Woolf (2017b) contends that biography aims to weave together “truth” and “personality.” She later revisits the subject in “The Art of Biography” (1939) and coins a term by stating the biographer “can give us the creative fact” (Woolf 2017a). In Through a Portagee Gate (2004), Charles Reis Felix (1923–2017) also commits to transmitting his father’s personality with creative details that unpack a certain system of values. This essay aims to examine how this is accomplished in the book and how it writes the father into textual existence.

The father’s existence outside of the text is a verifiable fact and not questioned here. My interest, then, lies not in pursuing claims of veracity, but in the way in which elements of his life are selected and presented by the son as a sort of “mixture of factual accuracy and imaginative recreation which Woolf enjoins the modern biographer to attain” (Gualtieri 2000: 352). Charles Reis Felix, too, as the writer of his father’s life, recreates facts with imagination that approximate the form of his writing to fiction, in which, as Woolf’s essays propose, creativity techniques of literary fiction aid in grasping the essential qualities of his subject.

Through a Portagee Gate softens conventional classifications of genre and accommodates multiple reading strategies. The reader will decide. To this reader, and as is printed on its flap, the book can be “both an autobiography and a biography,” but it can also be read as a memoir or a work of fiction. This essay will focus on the biographical aspect of the book since it is the father that interests me, particularly how the son sorts the facts of his father’s life.

Reflecting on his work, Charles Reis Felix (2011: 226–227) explains his love of history and that he writes “nönfiction fiction” since he is “deficient in imagination.” It is true that his published works are autobiographical, as is all writing, but I am not convinced of his lack of creativity, for his books on the Portuguese-American experience show a mature writer who has mastered the art of storytelling. One clear example is Through a Portagee Gate, whose structure and narrative creativity dissolve the constraints of genre. Even Felix seems to be uncertain about what to call Through a Portagee Gate; he alternates between memoir and autobiography/biography (Fagundes & Biskup 2017–2018: 221; Fagundes 2005: 33). Consequently, the book has been read as an ethnic autobiography or ethnic autobiography/biography, and even as a full fictional work.1 Regardless of its generic agility, the book narrates the lives of a son and his father and belongs to immigrant and ethnic literature, particularly as a wholesome exemplar of Portuguese-American literature. As such, to the present study, the text’s qualities and effects in the reading process are regarded as more important than generic differences.

Charles Reis Felix begins his book by explaining the origin of the title. It seems he has traveled thousands of miles, from New Bedford in Massachusetts to Escamil in California, to escape his “Portagee” past, only to be fortuitously confronted by it when a nameless American rancher tells him, “laughing,” that in that part of the world, a makeshift opening in a fence is called a “Portagee gate.” This experience coupled with another with a real estate agent, reminded the author that the Portuguese reputation had preceded him in California and was not too dissimilar from his own opinions at the time (Felix 2004: 21–26). The narration of these encounters and others with Portuguese immigrants in California is used as narrative strategy for the author to share his ethnic memories, mostly of growing up in New Bedford as an American-born child of Portuguese immigrants.

It is not always clear if Felix adheres to chronology, as one would expect from a traditional autobiography or biography, and he organizes his narrative with vignettes, microstories at times, of his and his father’s life—occasionally without temporal markers. This narrative form thus leaves the

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1 For more on this, see Felix’s correspondence with Francisco Cota Fagundes, particularly page 154.
reader much freedom to sort the collections of personal memories as they are told in the book. The separate narratives tell the lives of a multitude of immigrants from various geographic and ethnic origins as they intersect in New Bedford at the beginning of the twentieth century. These individuals all seem to, at some point, pass by the cobbler shop owned by the author’s father, Joe (José) Felix; “his true home was in the shop,” as suggested by Charles (Felix 2004: 253). This narrative center provides perspectives on the city and its inhabitants. Yet, most of the narrative focus is on the son and the father, and the Portuguese-American experience.

Through the art of storytelling (dialogue, characterization) the author allows his father to exist, mostly, through his own words, as the author/son also shares his own life and as such the reader is gifted the life narratives of both. Yet it is the dramatic representation of the father, his speech, actions, sensibilities, abundant opinions (never his nonverbalized thoughts) that this reader finds rather literally appealing. I therefore agree with Charles Reis Felix when he writes that “it has always seemed to me that the unique thing about Portagee [the book] was the father, his voice, his words” (Fagundes & Biskup 2017–2018: 219).

It is not that Charles’s life stories in the book are not appealing, but the inclusion of the father’s life narrative, specifically how the author gives him agency by sharing the stories he told, gives the book another dimension. In fact, Charles Reis Felix first envisioned the book as an “oral autobiography” and would only include his father’s “words,” then decided his own life would play a partial role. Eventually, Charles’s part grew, but without diminishing the father’s part:

“Later on, I saw that this had value because now the reader could contrast this immigrant’s life with the second generation’s. We started with one life and ended with two. But I agree wholeheartedly with the judgment that what makes the work truly unique are Joe’s words and life.” (Fagundes & Biskup 2017–2018: 103).

This aspect of the book is what Orson Welles thought would make for a good biography, “I think there’s no biography so interesting as the one in which the biographer is present” (Leaming 1985: 3). But, as I stated before, the son, as a biographer, is responsible for bringing the father into textual existence. And even if Charles Reis Felix planned to “present him, warts and all, as he was, or as close as I could get to reality” (Fagundes & Biskup 2017–2018: 102), we must remind ourselves that in life narratives individuals are textual productions, born out of words and are closer to how the writer thinks a life was lived than to empirical facts. The authors of these sort of narratives (autobiographies, biographies, memoirs, etc.) are not neutral spectators. They make choices that reshape how lives get told and relived by conjuring selected parcels of memory and data to structure them into some sort of cohesiveness that can be moved by conscious or unconscious (or both) objectives. It can be a celebration of life’s journeys that can be useful to another’s own life—a bit like all fictional works but can also be an intention to align how a life is remembered or even to assert a point of view.

Joe Felix’s story was developed by the son as a rebuttal to the xenophobic essay published in The Yale Review (1893) by Francis A. Walker, president of MIT, about what he thought were undesirable immigrants entering the country (not too different from what is articulated today):

Why not refute Walker, I thought, with the actual story of an immigrant? The reader would be able to contrast Walker’s words with the portrayed life and form his own opinion. The immigrant I had in mind was the one I knew best of all—Joe Felix. (Fagundes & Biskup 2017–2018: 102)

By Charles Reis Felix’s own admission, the father “portrayed” in Through a Portagee Gate is written into narrative form to juxtapositionally repudiate Walker’s opinions of immigrants. Even if all that is shared
about the father is factual, the reader must also question how it serves the biographer and ponder the possibilities of what is not revealed. This, combined with the fallacies of memory and objectivity, certainly raises verisimilitude concerns. One example of selectivity is the inequitable attention given to family members. While the father takes centerstage in the book, the author’s mother and siblings receive significantly less attention. Some of his siblings receive virtually no narrative time. Hence, the author elects what is narratively important: the entwined lives of the American-born son and his immigrant father. It is also possible to argue that the qualities featured in each individual, particularly the father, but also himself, undermine Francis A. Walker’s arguments and reveal certain characteristics about Charles Reis Felix. For instance, one might ask what is important to him. A selection of Walker’s article becomes epigraphs to the first chapters of Through a Portage Gate. These paratexts have the potential to influence how the book is read inasmuch as the immigrants in the book contradict much of what Walker identifies as the typical immigrant arriving from Eastern and Southern Europe. In this context, Joe Felix, with his flaws, can be regarded as a Portuguese immigrant but also as someone who can embody a collective significance as a person who is not

the broken, the corrupt, the abject . . .
Ignorant, unskilled, inert, accustomed to the beastliest conditions, with little social aspirations
. . .
. . . piecing out their miserable existence by systematic beggary at the doors of the rich and by picking over the garbage-barrels of our alleys, [or not interested in] the education of children.
(Walker, epigraphs in Felix 2004: 19, 23, 27, 45)

In writing the narrative of his father’s life, Charles Reis Felix does not have access to his father’s inner thoughts or very modest information beyond what he witnesses. We can then call what the son writes about his father as creative witness stories; Joe Felix’s personality is uncovered through how we are told he lived his life, the words attributed to him by the son, which are not always positive, and his abundant opinions on people and other topics. The matter in which the son presents his father, makes it difficult to not view him, at least somewhat, as a construed character created by the biographer/son to achieve a narrative objective. One example is the constant dialogue or words attributed to the father, which at times include attempts to replicate the nuances of English as a second language:

“My husband has to have the shoes for Wednesday,” she said. “He needs them for work.”
They’ll be ready Tuesday, don’t worry.”
“I don’t come for them. My boy come."
“All right, Podubnia.”
“How much you going to charge me?”
“That’s seventy-five cents.”
“Used to be fifty cents,” she grumbled.
“No, Podubnia. Was never fifty cents.”
“Was fifty cents. I remember.”
“Was never fifty cents.”
“Was fifty cents.”
“I tell you! Was never fifty cents! You have been coming here all these years, Podubnia, and you still don’t know my prices yet?” (Felix 2004: 141)

Here we can notice what Virginia Woolf (2017b: 155) argues that “the biographer’s imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist’s art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life.” This and other dialogues can illustrate the tension between “facts” and
“creative facts,” which is further amplified if the reader questions the accuracy of the dialogue as it is reproduced from Charles Reis Felix’s memory and considers the possible intimacy between the referential and the fictional.

Because Charles wrote the book in his seventies, between 1992 and 1998, and published it in 2004, many decades removed from when the dialogues were voiced, one has to, at least, wonder how much of it is accurate or created for the needs of the book as literary construction (Fagundes & Biskup 2017–2018: 102). Hence, Joe Felix, the textual being, is written from Charles’s memory (let us not forget how it changes with time) and according to the creative needs to present him as the immigrant who will negate the claims in Francis A. Walker’s essay. For context, Charles Reis Felix’s own words might help:

> Over the years I have written extensively about my father, usually in the form of short notes, sometimes just 3 or 4 words, like “Pa and root beer,” code to trigger a memory. I was tormented by the fear that I would forget something. On the other hand, sometimes I would write out a detailed scene at some length.

> So, I had a lot of material but I didn’t know what to do with it. I needed a structure and didn’t have one. It’s like having planks of wood. Before you can build the house, you need a blueprint. Interestingly enough, I thought of this material exclusively in terms of fiction, i.e., a novel. Writing a memoir never crossed my mind. (Fagundes & Biskup 2017–2018: 102; emphasis added)

His plans changed after reading Walker’s essay and decided on an immigrant story by telling the life of Joe Felix. The father, as the son suggests in his thoughts about Walker’s article, is a thematic character: an immigrant. Either way, Charles Reis Felix has made it possible for the existence of his father within and outside of the text. The reader can therefore consider Joe’s life as both “real/historical” and as a fictional construct.

Joe is presented as someone who took advantage of American capitalist opportunities, someone who escaped the ailments of the Old World, such as extreme poverty or servitude, to hustle in America and achieve economic success. One could notice in this depiction an implied lesson, a judgement, for what Charles Reis Felix chooses to share about his father highlights a certain identity trait, which raises the question: how much of the father can be redirected to the son? Or is this because of Walker’s article?

The answers can be found in what Dan P. McAdams and Erica Manczak (2015: 425–426) write in the APA Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology, “Life stories do not simply reflect personality. They are personality, or more accurately, they are important parts of personality, along with other parts, like dispositional traits, goals, and values.” Some scholars of narrative theory have reached comparable conclusions and propose that characters can be analyzed according to routine behaviors. This allows the reader to see “paradigm of traits” as Seymour Chatman (1978: 126) calls it. And thus, when learning about the father as written by the son, it is hard not to question what it says about the son and his memory, but also what kind of father is being composed, his traits, goals, and values, and for what narrative purposes.

It is not always evident if the opinions of the author/son originate from the time of the events or are from the moment of writing. Either way, the stories told in Through a Portagee Gate exist in the realm of creative writing and not ethnography, even if considered part of Portuguese-American ethnic literature. Thus, it might be helpful to consider the biographer’s craft, as Virginia Woolf (2017a) calls

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3 The book was initially titled Immigrants (Fagundes & Biskup 2017–2018: 102).
it in “The Art of Biography,” as opposed to art, and how much of what is shared about his father belongs to the art of storytelling on the part of the son.

In Through a Portagee Gate, much of what Charles Reis Felix knows of the Portuguese is from non-written sources. It is mainly informed by his first-generation turbulent gaze and the stories he hears from family members, notably those shared by his father which he often transcribes as direct speech. It is important to mention that the immigrant father does not say much about Portugal or his life there. Notwithstanding the reasons for this, he has strong opinions of Portuguese immigrants and other ethnicities, and so does the son. Race and ethnic discourses are complex issues. Nevertheless, the present paper will now discuss how an immigrant father and his American-born son perceive the Portuguese as individuals and community with the aim of further understanding Joe as he is imagined as a textual being, but also the Portuguese-American experience. Secondly, what the author elects to make ethnicity visible will also be discussed, particularly in the context of the characterization of Joe as a Portuguese immigrant.

Charles spends a considerable amount of narrative time to outline his father’s system of values. According to the son, “He never put himself above others. That was the supreme compliment for my father” (Felix 2004: 75). It is true that Joe’s narrative life embodies the spirit of the cited maxim. This trait, presented as positive, humanizes the father, even if one finds flaws in his character. In fact, the reader is not shown many qualities judged by the son as negative, or “warts,” as he calls them. The biographer is using his craft to simply narrate the facts as he remembers them, and he does some withholding of judgement. The reader is therefore designated to render the verdict. Yet Charles Reis Felix’s choices on what to share about his father do point to himself and his discernment.

The “Portagees” and Joe Felix, the Father

As an immigrant, Joe’s ethnic identity is often discussed. This includes what makes him a “portagee” that is different from other “portagees.” Let us then discuss his opinions of the Portuguese in New Bedford, which have moments of ethnic, and at times, racial productions, particularly for Charles.

Joe holds strong opinions of the Portuguese and of other ethnicities; “I thought the Portuguese were brutish, but Italians are more brutish yet. Oh yes, they are thirty times worse than the Portuguese. . . . And all drunkards” (Felix 2004: 112). One notices that the traits he assigns to the Portuguese are not his own. Yet, his wife at times reminds him that he is not that different (Felix 2004: 111). Joe views himself as a different kind of Portuguese, the sort the son holds in higher regard.

To the son, his father was not like other Portuguese: “he talked Portuguese, but he did not seem to be Portuguese,” for he was different from other Portuguese males; he did not play guitar nor sang, nor allowed himself leisure time at social clubs – he simply worked (Felix 2004: 153–155). The son concludes, then, that there are two kinds of Portuguese: his father and the others. Charles prefers the father’s version of Portugueseness, the kind that populates the textual construction of Joe’s subjectivity and identity.

Joe’s strong work ethic is associated with American economic success. He criticized his wife’s father (also a cobbler) for his old country lifestyle and conducted himself quite differently. Unlike Joe, he kept his shop “immaculate” and closed his business to “eat his dinner and relax” (Felix 2004:152). Such behavior, to choose quality of life over business, appears to the son-in-law as madness. His conclusion is this: “That man should never have come to America! He is not suited to this country. He should have stayed in Portugal” (Felix 2004: 153). Joe is certainly passing judgment on certain Portuguese cultural markers not desirable for his version of America.

In the son’s viewpoint the father is a different kind of Portuguese, someone who has shed the main attributes of his Portugueseness to be neither a true American nor a true Portuguese. For Charles, the grandfather modeled the authentic Portuguese, unlike the father; “there is such a thing as a
'trueborn Portuguese.' My mother’s father was a trueborn Portuguese. He dressed stylishly on Sundays, . . . went to his social club” to enjoy himself, play guitar and sing (Felix 2004: 154). And so, if the grandfather was the stereotypical Portuguese, the father was not. Charles Reis Felix, who clearly admires his father but spent his formative years dissociating from his ethnic self, references many instances in his book of his attempts to drop markers of his ethnicity. He also acknowledges in interviews and correspondence that he struggled with his ethnicity in an America that was then more critical of hyphenated identities.4

Joe is written into an ambivalent identity. Not too different from his son’s views, Joe understands himself to be different from other Portuguese and favors what he perceives as the American ethos. While justifying why he prefers a bank far from home (to hide that fact that he has money), he explains to his family that “They [Portuguese] like to gossip. They are always looking at their neighbors. They are always interested in the other fellow’s business” (Felix 2004: 172). This is a mild generalization, compared to others, but serves to illustrate again his thoughts on the Portuguese community in New Bedford from which he wants to distance himself.

To Joe, there is one truism about American culture and one he pursues, “this is the only thing that America understands—money! America is a fine place but if you don’t have money in America, watch out! They let you die like a dog in the corner. But if you have money, then it’s a different story. Then they respect you” (Felix 2004: 174). He does achieve economic success, but his obsession with saving every penny earned does not allow him to experience the rewards of spending it. To Charles, “he lived as if money did not exist. He never bought anything. . . . ‘they buy it for show’” (Felix 2004: 263), and was pleased with the outcome of his life, “he was content with his life. How rare that is” (Felix 2004: 254). Additionally, and in the context of the whole book, Joe deems one American myth to be true: the hustle mentality by which hard work will bear economic success and which is part of the American Dream myth.5

Charles often describes his father as different versions of “un-Portuguese,” one who does not possess the flaws of other Portuguese and is reflected in the father’s quoted speech (Felix 2004: 261). This aligns both individuals’ opinions and makes it difficult to know how much of the author/son is in the father and conversely. The son is writing his father’s story and one must ask certain questions: Did the father influence what the son thinks of the Portuguese? Is the son, in the act of writing, creating his father’s character according to this influence, or are his own biases as the son and biographer at work?

Through a Portage Gate and Charles Reis Felix’s interviews do not make this clear, but the totality of his published work that concerns the Portuguese-American experience, including his interviews, do show that he did have a tumultuous relationship with his ethnic self. And so, it is intriguing to see that to the son what is most admirable in his father is that he is not the stereotypical Portuguese immigrant of the time, 1920s and 30s. In fact, Joe seems to not possess many of the negative attributes of the Portuguese, such as “envy.” To the son, as the biographer who is judging and opining, “envy is the common flaw in the Portuguese character” (Felix 2004: 261).

The “envy” conclusion brings the biographer trickily close to his subject. His father also believes this to be true. However, Charles’ tone is more condemnatory:

The Portuguese is very much concerned with what others have. He observes his neighbor with a close eye and takes sour note of his prosperity. “Let no man do well” is his motto. For him envy – this peasant affliction, this ugly and deforming sin – is always boiling close to the surface. (Felix 2004: 262–263)

4 For more information on this, consult the list of works cited.
5 For more on the American Dream see James Truslow Adams’s 1931 best seller The Epic of America.
His generalized assertion (all Portuguese), this phenomenological otherness, is an act of exclusion by attempting to verbalize some sort of universal truth claim regarding the Portuguese, but not the father or himself.

To Charles, his father is Portuguese and not American, but he is fundamentally what other Portuguese are not. He is therefore less Portuguese, which makes the son correspondingly less ethnic. The burden of being ethnic mantled the son for much of his life. This did not affect the father in the book. By Charles’ own admission, the father was content with being who he was. It is Charles who finds turmoil in his ethnic self. In fact, he often expresses desire to shed his Portuguese ethnicity and become an American without ethnic markers.

While pondering on the advantages of attending college at the University of Michigan he writes, “I would be getting on a train in New Bedford as a Portagee and I would be getting off that train in Ann Arbor as an American” (Felix 2004: 374). Charles’ ethnicity anxieties are palpable in his congealed opinions of the Portuguese as he writes some curious things. His assumptions of what the Portuguese think of Dr. Mendes illustrates the point:

The Portuguese liked Dr. Mendes personally. He was a nice, well-meaning man. But they had no confidence in him. After all, he was Portuguese. He was one of them. How much could he know? They knew their limitations as people. (Felix 2004: 299)

In terms of storytelling techniques and western literary traditions, the trip to Michigan puts the hero of the story on a journey of transformation and not necessary to acquire knowledge but a journey into forgetfulness from which he does want to return. Charles did leave New Bedford but did not go back to share his knowledge as some sort of mythical hero. He eventually moved to California, distancing himself spatially and culturally from the ethnic center of his youth. Only in his later years did he return to reorganize a life story through his writing. But one cannot help to notice his attempt, and according to certain principles, to celebrate his father’s life, an immigrant cobbler, individuals whose lives traditionally do not merit biographies, someone who Charles Reis Felix writes into textual existence as the biographer that is not only a reporter of facts and gifts the reader the “outline” of Joe Felix’s personality, his life. As Woolf reminds us:

By telling us the true facts, by sifting the little from the big, and shaping the whole so that we perceive the outline, the biographer does more to stimulate the imagination than any poet or novelist save the very greatest. For few poets and novelists are capable of that high degree of tension which gives us reality. But almost any biographer, if he respects facts, can give us much more than another fact to add to our collection. He can give us the creative fact; the fertile fact; the fact that suggests and engenders. Of this, too, there is certain proof. For how often, when a biography is read and tossed aside, some scene remains bright, some figure lives on in the depths of the mind, and causes us, when we read a poem or a novel, to feel a start of recognition, as if we remembered something that we had known before. (Woolf 2017a: 129)

Another element of the book that denounces the biographer and his craft is Joe’s quoted speech with lexicon and grammatical structures that at times follows the standards of American English,

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6 For more on storytelling and the mythical hero see “The Storyteller” by Walter Benjamin and The Hero with a Thousand Faces by Joseph Campbell.

7 I am using principles as moral obligation to address Francis A. Walker’s opinions of immigrants. I am also thinking of Immanuel Kant and his ideas of categorical imperatives – perhaps a little purposely misread in my statement.
particularly of someone with formal training, at others, does not. This reveals the biographer, his linguistic competency and usage of the language. It might help to remember that Joe Felix, according to the book, had little schooling in Portuguese and none in English. Also, and even though much of what Joe says is written in English, it is often not clear if he is speaking in Portuguese or English. Joe goes from “Charley, do you need any blades to make the shave?” which seems to reproduce the Portuguese effect in his English with “make the shave (fazer a barba),” to “And to my surprise he was befuddled” (Felix 2004: 418; emphasis added).

Below is a better language sample, one that supports the thesis that Charles Reis Felix, as the biographer and son, was more concerned with creating a narrative that presented the creative textual hero of his story, his father, to capture how he lived his life, and a case study of an immigrant that disprove Francis A. Walker xenophobic claims:

I tried to help him [the father-in-law]. I tried to give him some tips. I tried to give him some advice on how to make some business […].

He stayed all affronted at my words. “It's not worth my time to charge less,” he said . . .

And do you know what he does at twelve noon every day? Listen to this. This is straining belief. He goes and locks his front door! Yes, he locks it. A man in business and he locks his door. Then he goes in the backroom to eat his dinner and relax. Let a customer come banging on his door with a pair of shoes to fix and he will not get up and open the door. He has so much business he can turn some away. He stays there in the backroom on his ass, reading the paper. That is the kind of businessman he is . . . Last week I had just sat down to eat my dinner when this fellow came in, the son of a whore [trying to reproduce Portuguese phrase]. He needed some small job.

“I'm eating now,” I said. “Can't you come back?” “No,” he said. “I'll wait for you.” So he sat down in the chair. (Felix 2004: 152)

We can conclude that the cited text could not have been (re)cited precisely as is written from memory. It is, at best, an approximation, the possible and probable words that aid in the characterization of Joe Felix as a competent storyteller, like the son, and the textual being Charles Reis Felix is creating. The inclusion of the customer’s speech also adds a fictive layer to the text, as do other examples of direct speech quoted in Though a Portagee Gate. Together, these provide a dramatic effect associated with fictional works.

The biography of Joe Felix is a gift of intimacy made possible by his son who opted to share the life stories of both. Joe’s inner life can be assumed through the stories of his outer life, even if they can at times appear creative facts. We must then look beyond the “fertile facts” of Joe Felix’s life as written by a biographer who clearly loves his subject and wonder how much we can trust Charles Reis Felix in writing his father into textual existence and ask ourselves how much is biographical, autobiographical or imaginative as he works with “the truth of real life and the truth of fiction” (Woolf 2017b: 123). And then, at the conclusion of reading Through a Portagee Gate, we may not have access to many facts of Joe Felix’s life, but we certainly are closer to knowing what kind of immigrant he was.
References


