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## Editors' Note

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## EDITORS' NOTE

Last year's installment of our annual Annotated Bibliography of Works about Life Writing was the final one containing contributions from the feature's founding editor, Phyllis Wachter. She decided that thirty years was enough, and with great gratitude for her work, we accepted her decision and thanked her in the Editors' Note. This year's installment of the bibliography will be the last one strongly shaped by the contributions of our Managing Editor for the past twenty-two years, Stan Schab. He retired in October of 2016. For more information on just how responsible Stan has been for this prominent feature of *Biography*, please consult the tributes celebrating his importance to the Center for Biographical Research, and to the field of life writing more generally, elsewhere in this issue.

As for this year's installment of the bibliography, many trends we have noticed in past years are continuing, and even accelerating. The number of books by individual authors—164 in this installment—has been virtually the same for some years. Doctoral dissertations seem to be down somewhat—sixty-seven, from a total usually somewhere in the mid-eighties. Certain publishers clearly have a heavy investment in issuing books and edited collections with significant life writing content. Seven presses have published ten or more volumes recently. Three of them—Palgrave Macmillan (10), Routledge (11), and above all De Gruyter (19)—are famous for having a very large and diverse international catalog of titles. The other four are American university presses with a strong sense of regional or thematic responsibility—Oklahoma (15), California (14), New Mexico (13), and Nebraska (10). Other presses in a variety of locations—Universitätsverlag Winter, Roman and Littlefield, Wilfred Laurier, and Brandeis—are also responsible for several books and collections.

Remarkable, and even shocking, however, are the disparities in this installment of the bibliography between the numbers of essays published in edited collections, in special issues of journals, and in “regular” issues of journals. In our 2013–2014 bibliography, edited collections and special issues together accounted for 903 of the 1,344 essays listed. Regular journal issues accounted for the other 441—a ratio of roughly two to one.

This year, 1,040 essays appeared in edited collections and special issues—a hefty increase for just two years. But two other factors are striking. First, fifty of the seventy-six items are edited collections, so the ratio of edited collections to special issues is two to one. But 718 of the 1,040 individual essays appear in the edited collections, producing a ratio closer to three to one. Here, however,

is the truly surprising number. Only 129 essays on life writing appeared in the regular issues of journals—a drop of more than 300 in two years, and the reason why the number of entries in this year’s bibliography has fallen from the very high 1500s two years ago down to this year’s 1,398.

There are many possible explanations for this, but here are a few. First, the publishers of edited collections have become almost predatory in trying to secure clusters of essays devoted to a single topic. As those who have recently organized conferences or even individual panels can attest, presses are expressing strong interest before and after the event. Such publishers also are strongly encouraging individuals willing to edit such collections. Almost any call for papers these days indicates that a press has already expressed interest. Given the relatively quick turnaround for such collections, and especially on timely topics, individuals searching for a publishing venue are far more likely to follow up with an invited submission than send their essay to a journal that will put it through anonymous peer review, then eventually indicate whether the essay is wanted or not, and if it is, whether publication will be contingent on substantial revision.

Second, anyone consulting the Call for Papers (CFP) website in the fields of literature and the humanities administered by the University of Pennsylvania, or the H-Net Lists administered by Michigan State University for historians, knows about the explosion in the numbers of for-profit academic conferences and for-profit journals as well. We’ve lost count of the number of new publications with titles like “The Journal of Arts and Humanities,” or “The Social Sciences Review,” or “The Law Journal” that are soliciting essays on equally general, but often timely topics. Exposé articles have noted how the “editors”—or rather, the entrepreneurs—responsible for these usually on-line journals are exploiting the publish-or-perish character of academia by essentially selling access to “publication” while claiming to be refereed, then charging access fees for anyone who wishes to consult the essay.

When compiling our annual bibliography, the problem now is deciding where to draw the line between material published in recognized sources of vetted scholarly work, and essays surfacing in a nebulous new world that features not only for-profit academic publishing, but open access, Academia.edu, mandatory institutional posting, and a host of other options. What we are facing is something similar to the “real news versus fake news” conundrum that members of the general public must navigate—or choose not to. But often it is very hard to determine systematically or fairly whether an essay should be included in our bibliography.

In their shift to special issues and clusters, journals themselves are often accelerating the changes we are seeing. To take *Biography* as an example, the number of unsolicited submissions we receive has been declining for years, and conversations with other editors strongly suggest that for most scholarly journals, this is the case. Faced with the need for content, but unwilling to compromise the quality of the journal, our editors have responded by publishing more special issues, clusters of essays, and invited submissions produced by trusted writers or guest editors. In any event, it is indisputable that the movement away from submitting unsolicited articles to established peer-reviewed journals is affecting their content, and as this latest installment of our bibliography shows, in the case of life writing, this movement is also profoundly influencing how journals are being conducted, and what they publish.

As we continue to struggle to meet these challenges, we hope that the feature debuting in this issue, the International Year in Review, will help begin a process that will lead to more books, articles, essays, and dissertations from an even wider variety of languages appearing in our critical bibliography.

And one final note. In this issue you will also find more information about the person who now presides over this thirty-one-year-old bibliography: Anjoli Roy, our new Managing Editor. She is already doing a remarkable job. We are also grateful for the contributions of our new graduate assistant, the capable and efficient Sam Ikehara, who tracked down and annotated the entries for work appearing since Stan's retirement.