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Editors' Notes

John David Zuern, Craig Howes

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EDITORS' NOTES

International Year in Review

I began writing this note introducing the fourth installment of *Biography's* International Year in Review on the first day of June 2020, which meant that I couldn't help reflecting on this year's collection of essays across a horizon defined by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests sparked by the killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers on May 25. These uprisings have inspired people in London, Berlin, Amsterdam, Tokyo, and other cities around the world to take to the streets, despite stay-at-home orders and curfews, to express their outrage at systemic injustice in the US and in their own countries. In many places, the two phenomena are linked: the disproportionate impact of the coronavirus on particular populations—in the US, people of color, low-income workers, and the elderly—has dramatically exposed longstanding inequities and the failure of institutions to protect the most vulnerable members of society. The individual names and foreshortened life stories of those who have died, whether by outright brutality or malign neglect, are providing powerful touchstones for collective demands for change.

This year a striking number of contributions attest to the important role of life narratives in confronting inequality and institutionalized violence. In the first essay in the lineup, Kylie Cardell surveys a range of publications in Australia that engage urgent social concerns, among them Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*, the Kurdish writer's account of his detention in an Australian government facility for asylum seekers on Manus Island, and the anthology *Stories from the Australian Movement: #MeToo*. The #MeToo movement in the US provides the framework for Leigh Gilmore's discussion of Sarah M. Broom's *The Yellow House*, Brittany Cooper's *Eloquent Rage*, Chanel Miller's *Know My Name*, and several other memoirs and essay collections that bear witness to women's experiences of sexism, racism, sexual violence, and domestic abuse. Two of the memoirs Nick Tembo reviews decry the South African medical establishment's callousness and indifference toward people with conditions like autism (Ilana Gerschlowitz's *Saving My Sons*) and HIV (Helena Kriel's *The Year of Facing Fire*). Along similar lines, Liam Harte's presentation of Emilie Pine's *Notes to Self*, Sinéad Gleeson's *Constellations*, and Mary Cregan's *The Scar* emphasizes these memoirists' indictment of the pervasive misogyny of the medical profession in Ireland. Sleiman El Hajj directs our

attention to texts and performances that contest the marginalization of non-conforming members of Lebanese society such as queer people, Syrian refugees, sex workers, prisoners, and women who wear the hijab, while Alana Bell explores how both Harold R. Johnson's *Clifford* and Tanya Tagaq's *Split Tooth* disrupt conventional narrative forms to convey the precarity of Indigenous lives in Canada. Ricia Anne Chansky introduces us to the "mass-listening projects" that are giving survivors of the waves of natural disasters in Puerto Rico a space to tell their stories and distribute resources in the absence of adequate government support. Essays by Gunnthorunn Gudmundsdottir (Iceland), Heui-Yung Park (Korea), Ana Belén Martínez García (Spain), and Szidonia Haragos (United Arab Emirates) also touch on works that demonstrate life writing's capacity to document injustice and spur resistance.

Life narratives by and about political figures continue to be well represented. Ilaria Serra includes Antonio Scurati's biography of Benito Mussolini in her selection of publications in Italy; Lu Chen discusses a variety of recent works representing the life of Akihito, who abdicated his position as Emperor of Japan in 2019; Rose Mary Allen and Jeroen Heuvel devote their essay to Bernadette Heiligers's biography of Miguel Pourier, the former prime minister of Curaçao; and Maarit Leskelä-Kärki gives a sensitive reading of Johanna Venho's formally inventive narrative of a short period in the life of Sylvi Kekkonen, the wife of former Finnish Prime Minister Urho Kaleva Kekkonen.

As in past years, I'm impressed by the wide variety of approaches our contributors have taken. Some give us an expansive view of the publishing scene in their countries, as do Marianne Høyen (Denmark), Joanny Moulin (France), and Monica Soeting (the Netherlands). Other authors employ a tighter scope. Tobias Heinrich, for example, reviews the two most recent German biographies of the eighteenth-century poet Friedrich Hölderlin, while Tom Overton recounts the reception in the UK of Richard J. Evans's biography of the influential historian Eric Hobsbawm. The life story of a single intellectual is also the focus of Gabriel Murillo's essay, which pays tribute to Alfredo Molano Bravo, the Colombian sociologist who dedicated his career to studying the effects of violence and displacement on rural communities in Colombia, and who died in 2019. Gabriel's contribution is one of two essays in Spanish in this issue; the other is Gerardo Necoeachea's compelling review of three new biographies of women who were active in twentieth-century communist politics in México. Once again, we're grateful for support from Lucía Aranda, *Biology's* Spanish-language coeditor.

We are pleased to have received so many affirmative responses to our invitations to contribute to next year's International Year in Review. We anticipate that authors will find occasions to reflect on how life narratives produced during this year register the global health crisis as well as the public outcries against injustice

that are reverberating throughout the world. We were glad that one of this year's essays was able to take note of the pandemic: Leena Kurvet-Käössar and Marja Hollo conclude their review of publications in Estonia with an account of the diary that the Norwegian Estonian poet Øyvind Rangøy posted on Facebook while waiting out a two-week quarantine in Norway. At the same time, we acknowledge that life writing takes myriad forms and serves myriad purposes in its national and regional contexts, all of which are worthy of our attention, and we look forward to another richly diverse assortment of reviews.

This issue of *Biography* goes into the final stages of production right around the time the journal's entire staff was planning to attend the International Auto/Biography Association's global conference in Turku, Finland, as were many of our readers. To salute the conference planners' hard work in preparing for that meeting, which is now scheduled for next summer, we asked one of them, Maarit Leskelä-Kärki, if she might provide us with a cover image that would reflect the beauty of the place where we hope to gather with our colleagues a year from now. Among the lovely photographs Maarit offered, we selected one of sunlit birches near the site of the future conference on the University of Turku campus. In our present circumstances, we think it's a fitting choice; Maarit tells us that the birch has a special place in Finnish culture as a symbol of purification and renewal.

John David Zuern

Annual Bibliography

This year's installment of the Annual Bibliography of Works about Life Writing proves to be as volatile and intriguing as last year's. The fluctuation in the number of monographs is extreme. Last year's roster of ninety-one volumes has shrunk to thirty-seven, led by a drop in the number published by Routledge and Palgrave Macmillan—from seventeen to six. No other press released more than three, as certain stalwarts seem to have had off years. Although the number of articles appearing in Edited Collections and Journal Special Issues is virtually the same—right around 500—the proportions have flipped. Mirroring perhaps the steep decline in monographs, the number of single-volume edited collections fell by half—from thirty-two to sixteen. But the number of special issues headed in the opposite direction, climbing from fifteen to twenty-four. Individual articles appearing in journals or edited collections fell from 244 down to 215; rounding out the survey, the number of dissertations showed the only appreciable increase—from sixty-seven to seventy-five.

Some other striking trends should be noted. First, the most established life-writing journals are responsible for a very substantial percentage of the

bibliography's content. The special issues featured in *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, *Life Writing*, *European Journal of Life Writing*, and *AvtobiografiA* are responsible for over two hundred entries in this year's bibliography, and when you add the more than 100 essays appearing in the forum issues of these and other periodicals focused on life writing—*Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*, *Genealogy*, *Studies in Testimony*, *The Oral History Review*, and *The Journal of Epistolary Studies*—this cluster of publications accounts for almost half of the article entries. Special notice should be paid to the *Journal of Modern Life Writing*, from Shanghai, which published thirty-two individual essays, most in Chinese.

Second, a few of the edited collections contain a disproportionate number of essays. Four of the sixteen volumes—Richard Bradford's *Companion to Literary Biography*, Ashley Barnwell and Kate Douglas's *Research Methodologies for Auto/biography Studies*, and Alison L. Black and Susanne Garvis's two collections on women in academia—contain 106 articles between them, roughly an eighth of all the entries in this year's bibliography. If we add to this roster Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf's massive three-volume 2179-page *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, with its more than 150 individual entries compiled by more than eighty contributors, collectively these handful of texts represent a major augmentation of critical and theoretical lifewriting resources for scholars and students.

Third, the very nature of this bibliography needs to be rethought, in light of the global shifts in platforms and distribution methods for critical and theoretical work. The decline in the number of entries in this bibliography over the past few years has not resulted from a reduction in the amount of scholarship being produced. Rather, the four categories organizing this feature—Books, Edited Collections and Special Issues, Articles, and Dissertations—cover less of what constitutes the field than they used to do. Language and location have always been major restraints. A quick look at the entries for this year confirms that the discipline of life writing is far more international and interdisciplinary than it once was, even when passing through an English filter. The accompanying International Review in this issue also directs attention toward the incredible diversity in what demands primary and compelling interest in various countries. And finally, online and open access publishing has not just placed important contributions in different venues, but demanded adapting our tools for finding that critical work.

At a time of pandemic, political uncertainty, and cultural tensions, we are all wishing that next year will be different. To compare small things to great, we are planning to make the Annual Bibliography of Works about Life Writing different next year—and better.

Craig Howes