

Conversation with Margaretta Jolly and Hope Wolf

par Jean-Louis Jeannelle, Bruno Tribout

Entretien disponible également en français.

Margaretta Jolly and Hope Wolf, director and associate director of the Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research at the University of Sussex.

Bruno Tribout : We are interested in the identity and history of the Centre. In what ways would you say that it differs from other research centres dealing with life writing in the UK ? What part did the association with oral historians and with the Mass Observation Project play in the making of the Centre ? What would you say characterize it best today ?

Margaretta Jolly : The Centre was set up in 1999 by Alistair Thomson, who worked in the Centre for Continuing Education. He was an oral historian, with less interest in literature. An Australian, he did a lot of work on the oral history of migration, on Australian identity, on masculinity in the war. He and Dorothy Sheridan, who was at the time the director of the Mass Observation Project and Archive, the two parts of Mass Observation, thought of doing a research centre and wanted to attract a major grant to do an oral history of the university. They didn't succeed in getting that, but they did set up what has become quite a long-standing Centre. It was initially called the Centre for Life History Research. I had done my PhD at the university of Sussex and was in the School of English at the time : I was looking at the edge of literary theory where theories about fiction could be related to non-fiction ; I got into the fascination of true stories from my undergraduate days at Cambridge, so I have always had that love of the autobiography, letters, and diaries. I was then a PhD student, but I went to the early meetings of the Centre. Nearly ten years later, I came back to Sussex for a lectureship,

in part because Alistair was leaving to return to Australia, Dorothy was retiring, and I was given the chance to take over this Centre. I added 'life writing' to the name of the Centre to encompass all the genres, try to connect it more to the huge debates going on in the Arts and Humanities and join them up with those in History, Philosophy, and Social Science.

Having edited the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (2001), my point was that these were all part of a family of fields across the written, across the oral, across nations, with political interests and potential around the field of testimony and identity politics. Following the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, Oxford University Press approached me to contribute to the Oxford Bibliographies online and create an annotated bibliography on Biography and Autobiography (2017). The *Encyclopedia* was in part about defining terms and taxonomies, and so that was a chance to update them. I made it a personal principle to have international representation and listings from all continents, both in the *Encyclopedia* and the Oxford Bibliography, because of my politics and because I think that we tend to be siloed and not joined. But then again, there are people who are joined and always think in this way : Philippe Lejeune was a huge influence on me and so was the International Auto/Biography Association (IABA).

I have been to all the 'world' IABA conferences (except the one in Brazil) and that was a forum which always insisted on trying to join people from across continents ; it has a very post-colonial approach as well. The very first IABA conference was in Beijing in 1999. I only knew about it because I was trying to find a Chinese writer to do some of the Chinese entries for the *Encyclopedia*, and I was asking everyone I knew. My sister, who knows people in Beijing, put me in touch with Zhao Baisheng, who told me that he was about to create an organization on life writing and have a big conference. So, it started outside of Europe and outside the West. Philippe Lejeune went because he was interested in that. Sidonie Smith, who was to become the president of the Modern Language Association of America, went too. Craig Howes, who edits the *Biography* journal from Hawaii, which is all about East-West transnational conversations, went. So, because of this intense experience, I think we all bonded, and we set the template for thinking across geographies and languages. In multi-lingual ambitions, we mostly failed : Philippe Lejeune was our conscience ; he generally refused to talk in English and challenged us all the way through (and again when we met in Hawaii, where there was another conference in 2008). Of course, he is right, and this is due to the dominance of English everywhere, in my world anyway. But through IABA conferences, I have seen the map of life writing research in other countries, countries such as Estonia (2011) and Cyprus (2016), where there are so many brilliant initiatives across the field.

To come back from this beautiful vision, the other thing is the truth that, as with most research centres in this country (such as the Centre for Life Writing Research,

led by Clare Brant and Max Saunders, whom we know quite well), we don't have very much funding, we don't have a building. The Centre is a network with some passionate people in it. It's a product of a time when there was the idea that you needed to create a centre to try and attract funding, but we don't have a huge amount of resource or time. So, we just do what we can do. But we have had a lovely programme of events ever since 1999, and we have got good contacts. On the Centre's website, we have a links page organized by continents, and we also work with community heritage groups like Strike a Light, QueenSpark Books and Sussex Traditions. In the international section, the IABA is the most important network, but there are others like the International Oral History Association, the Global Lives Project and the Museum of the Person in São Paulo. For France, there is Autopacte, Philippe Lejeune's association. I joined the Association interdisciplinaire de recherches sur l'épistolaire (AIRE), because my particular genre in the 1990s was letters. I did feel that there was a cultural difference in what they were interested in - lots of Madame de Sévigné and lots of eighteenth century, but I got their journal for a long time. Right after the Beijing 1999 conference, Philippe Lejeune invited me to go to an event organized by the Association pour l'autobiographie (APA). I was a young, unpaid associate from the Mass Observation Project Archive, and he loved the Mass Observation Project because it is very much about ordinary people and everyday life, democratising the archive. He set up the APA, somewhat inspired by it, I think. So, because of that, he invited me to go to the town of autobiography, Ambérieu-en-Bugey, and it was very wonderful and brilliant to see these connections.

Hope Wolf : I am a more recent addition to the Centre. For me, the influence of the history of Sussex's Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research can still be felt today : it has a strong political interest in everyday life, working class lives and the under-represented, which is why its oral history strand is so important. The Centre is also very interdisciplinary, which has roots in the early days of the University of Sussex : in the 1960s and 70s students were encouraged, and able, to work across disciplines. Today we work across different media too : we look at how life stories or experiences are presented in the visual arts and in film as well as in texts. Perhaps 'writing' might not seem the right term to use when describing these sources, but then 'writing' also covers the work the critic does in trying to describe or interpret or understand or think with the life of another. I've found life writing centres in the UK that I have been involved with (at King's London as well as Sussex), and life writing courses I have taught, have been very inclusive of all kinds of approaches, and of people who want to work on different media too. It is a capacious, rather than limiting, term, in my experience.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : What was your PhD thesis about ?

Hope Wolf : Hope Wolf : I did my thesis at King's College London on war stories, or more specifically, anecdotes that veterans tell again and again. I was interested in late

memory particularly. It was an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership, and I worked on a large archive at the Imperial War Museum : a collection of First World War life stories that the BBC compiled in the 1960s. They had circulated a call in the UK, and other parts of the world, for those who had lived through the conflict to send them letters describing their most 'vivid' experiences. My job was to read through more than 20,000 letters and to use them not as historical evidence of what happened in the war, but to think about how they were constructed. It ended up being an analysis of how anecdotes work and what we don't say when we tell anecdotes. Like Margaretta, I was interested in the grey areas between fiction and non-fiction. I am also interested in the tactics we use for not speaking directly. I published some of my thinking in a chapter in Adam Smyth's edited collection, *A Cambridge History of English Autobiography* (2016) and in the journal *Life Writing*. Some of the letters I included in a book I co-edited with the novelist Sebastian Faulks for Hutchinson/Random House (*A Broken World : Letters, Diaries, and Memories of the Great War*, 2014).

I went on to work on Clare Brant's Strandlines project. That was really important for me, because I started working on much more contemporary life writing then, collecting oral history and written also forms of autobiography, and working with community groups, a lot of underprivileged groups, which was really eye-opening for me and challenging. That was a really fascinating project to be involved in. I reflected on my experience of working on the project in an essay that I published in a collection entitled *Life Writing and Space* (2018) that I co-edited with Eveline Kilian from Humboldt University, Berlin ('Strandlines : eccentric stories, thoroughfare poetics and the future of the archive').

I then spent some time on a postdoc in Cambridge, before coming to Sussex. And now I work much more on visual lives, or have done recently.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : So your primary supervisor was in English, not in History ?

Hope Wolf : Yes, Max Saunders was my primary supervisor, within English, and my other supervisor was Antony Richards, Head of Documents and Sound at the Imperial War Museum. He was there to help me navigate the archive ; he had a military history background. Working at the Museum also sparked my interest in curation (which is something I have done in recent years) and working with the public. We had a lot of conversations about the differences between historical and literary methodologies. In fact, my undergraduate degree was in History (although my Masters was in English), so I had some experience of that anyway.

Margaretta Jolly : Do you have in France these kinds of collaborative doctoral scholarships (involving public institutions) in the way we do – that have emerged partly with the pressure for universities to be more engaged and connected to the public ? I think

this is wonderful. Even though I was maybe ten years earlier and didn't have that, I had an informal link with Mass Observation and Dorothy was a sort of unofficial third supervisor. Is there that kind of programme in France ?

Bruno Tribout : I don't think we have collaborative doctoral programmes on the same scale in literary studies, even though some museums and libraries (such as the Bibliothèque nationale de France) offer doctoral or postdoctoral scholarships to explore specific archives or particular aspects of their collections, sometimes in partnerships with universities.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : This is more frequent in History, and it is hard to imagine that your PhD would have been supervised within literary studies in France. For an approach similar to yours, I think of historians such as Philippe Artières ; there was also a group of historians at the Sorbonne working on 18th-century material we would call today egodocuments, useful for exploring the history of intimacy, of which Catriona Seth's book, *La Fabrique de l'intime* (2013), would be a good example (but she would be an exception as a literary historian working in that field).

Bruno Tribout : Would you say that the Centre's primary focus has evolved from concentrating on history (with the early involvement of oral historians in the late 1990s) to opening up to other approaches to life writing in literature or visual culture ? In the case of the latter, when dealing with lives in non-written forms, do you still consider the term 'life writing' as relevant ?

Margaretta Jolly : I think the answer to your first question – have we moved from oral history through to the literary – is : not really. Yes, I changed the name of the Centre, adding 'life writing' in 2007 to include the many who come from a writerly or aesthetic angle. This emphasis has become more important as the Centre has moved from being attached to the University's 'Continuing Education' department (that was sadly dissolved around 2012) to the School of Media, Arts and Humanities. But I have personally tried to maintain the Centre's original commitments to both oral history and the Mass Observation Archive. In the last ten years I have skilled myself up to become an oral historian, learning in particular from the British Library's Oral History department and the Oral History Society UK – both with roots in socialist, working class and popular history practice. And I fell in love with oral history, having already been in love with autobiography and biography, and sister genres, so I consider them as being all part of the same family. I got some funding to do an oral history of women's movements (*Sisterhood and After : An Oral History of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, 1968-present*, 2019), which complemented my earlier book *In Love and Struggle : Letters in Contemporary Feminism*, 2008, which looked at the form, function and literary effect of letter writing by women in a social movement. So I think it is not really that we have moved

away from oral history, but that we are all working across disciplines. Hope, you came from History, you are in visual lives, and it is not one or the other. I think that most centres are pretty much that way, because of the nature of academia : when you get into the research, to be different and to be new, you generally have to go to the edge of the discipline – and all the more so to get funding. So, I always think that it is a paradox in universities that the students, and the funding from teaching, come through fairly set headings, whereas the research we do is entirely interdisciplinary, don't you think ?

Hope Wolf : I really agree. I think our research is often a lot more interdisciplinary than our teaching, although there are moves being made at Sussex to make it more possible to teach across disciplines. In answer to your question about whether the term 'life writing' is still relevant given our work with other media : I think it is, especially if you think of life writing as not only a source but also as a practice. With regard to my work on visual culture, I have tended to choose artists who both invest their artworks with autobiographical content, but also write autobiographically. I have also, in piecing together a narrative about their lives, being doing life writing myself (as well as analysing it). In 2018-20, for instance, I curated an exhibition on the life and work of a pair who contributed to the fields of psychoanalysis and surrealism *A Tale of Mother's Bones : Grace Pailthorpe, Reuben Mednikoff and the Birth of Psychorealism*). The painters created paintings and drawings but then went on to construct autobiographical reflections about them. Art and life writing came together in inseparable ways. I was also, with the exhibition, trying to construct a biographical narrative about their lives with their paintings. So here, words and images had to work in tandem.

Margaretta Jolly : Just adding further about mapping life writing research in the UK, I am thinking that another key person who was for me really influential was Laura Marcus, who was in the School of English here and whose quality was more philosophical – very interested in film and modernism, so the visual, the existential ; not so focused on the political uses of life storytelling. She went to Oxford and was then part of the Oxford Centre for Life Writing. The sociologist Liz Stanley is another really important person, who, with David Morgan, set up theAuto/Biography Study Group within the British Sociological Association in 1992, and later the Centre for Narrative and Auto/Biographical Studies at Edinburgh. And then there was Meg Jensen's Centre for Life Narratives at Kingston. And at Brighton, the Centre for Memory, Narrative and Histories. That one being literally across the road, I went and negotiated either for it not to be called the exact same thing as our Centre or for it to be part of a mega-centre across the two universities. At the time, the director of the Centre was Graham Dawson, a historian of the Northern Irish troubles, so he was happy not to use life writing and to make it around memory studies, which is another sister field. At points, a colleague would suggest getting funding to do a network of these various centres. I was involved in some of these

ideas, but no funding was got, and we've continued anyway. Each centre has a little flavour, but I do think that all of them are interdisciplinary.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : In France, the legitimization of the field was linked to the canonization of the life writing corpus whereas, in England, from our earlier discussions, the legitimization was linked to opening up to history and a vast number of related texts. Do you think that this is due, on the one hand, to the importance of poetics for us and, on the other, to the importance of identity politics in the UK, or interdisciplinarity, or something else ?

Margaretta Jolly : That is a really interesting question. I would say that, in North America, definitely part of the legitimization, the institutionalization, the funding has come with aligning life writing studies to social movement causes and identity assertion. A person here is Sidonie Smith, whom I mentioned earlier. She, with her co-writer Julia Watson, represent a different approach to Laura Marcus. In books such as Sidonie Smith's *Subjectivity, Identity, and the Body : Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (1993), and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's edited volumes *De/colonizing the Subject : the Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (1992), *Getting a Life : Everyday Uses of Autobiography* (1996), *Women, Autobiography, Theory : A Reader* (1998), or *Before They Could Vote : American Women's Autobiographical Writing, 1819-1919* (2006), it is very obvious, all the way through, that this is about identity claims. I think one of their most interesting pieces is on hoax testimony, which has a long history but has become increasingly common in the digital age. 'Witness or False Witness ?: Metrics of Authenticity, Collective I-Formations, and the Ethic of Verification in First-Person Testimony' (*Biography*, 35.4 (2012), 590–626) is about the challenge of measuring 'truth', which is exactly a measure of how much influence certain life stories have. Another person linked to this is Gillian Whitlock in Australia, and she has written a brilliant book called *Soft Weapons : Autobiography in Transit* (2007), which is about the publication of Arab women's memoirs as a tool in the so-called 'war on terror' (so-called by the Bush administration and allies) and how these get instrumentalized. And this trade also stimulates hoaxes, for instance Norma Khouri's *Honor Lost : Love and Death in Modern Day Jordan* (2002), supposedly from a woman in Jordan who is threatened with honour killing, but it turned out that she lives in Middle America. She is of Arab origin, but none of this happened as it appeared in the book. But there is a price here, there is an opportunity. So, it is definitely true, I think, in North America, that these things have gone together, and the fact that Sidonie Smith became president of the Modern Language Association is testimony to this institutionalization.

In France, my stereotype is that, yes, there is still more of a legitimization and place for the purely philosophical, there is less pressure to show use in the world, whereas we are under constant pressure to demonstrate how we can, in short, justify the value

of the university. The next thing is to see if we can commercialize, which I am trying to look into with an open mind. And this is relevant to the term 'life writing' : when I did the *Encyclopedia*, I was wondering whether it should be called the 'Encyclopedia of Autobiography', of 'Auto/Biography', of 'Biography'. But the term 'life writing' was the one that seemed, in a way, the most embracing. Of course, it allows for writing one's own or another's life, but it is also more politically open and is easier to ally with the non-written. I was interested in Walter Ong's arguments about oral culture andManuel Castells's idea of the revenge of the audio-visual with the digital. So, 'life writing' allows for discussions about functionality, whether in law, politics, entertainment, social work, and it was the term I chose – in discussion with my editor at Fitzroy Dearborn, who was a great influence – in looking for a title which would be both catchy and durable. But I was influenced by people like Sidonie Smith who thought that the term could be used both to gain legitimacy, but also challenge the institution.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : In your view, when did the term 'life writing' first appeared in the English-speaking world ?

Margaretta Jolly : The term actually originated in the 18th century in England but was given academic status in Donald J. Winslow's *Life-Writing : A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms*, published by the University Press of Hawaii in 1980 : Winslow edited the journal *Biography* before Craig Howes, which I've mentioned already. Winslow notes that it encompasses both 'autobiography' and 'biography' and comments that 'some writers may prefer the Anglo-Saxon rooted phrase, life-writing, to those Latin and Greek based words'. I think my *Encyclopedia* tried to nail it and stick it to a range of different things, at the time it was becoming more popular a long time later. But it had definitely been coming up in the 1990s. A sort of rival was the term 'auto/biography', trying to do something similar in terms of unsettling a canonical tradition of autobiography, biography being history's genre and autobiography being literature's genre. In the last ten years or so, 'memoir' and 'memoirs' have taken over in the English language, and I think G. Thomas Couser is really good on explaining why and how. There were some feminists who argued that 'memoir' is a feminist term, because it's all about the self in the world, the collaborative or relational self. Helen Buss wrote a book on that topic (*Repossessing the World : Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women*, 2006). And then Tom Couser wrote his short history of memoir (*Memoir : An Introduction*, 2012). For him and for Julie Rak (*Boom !: Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market*, 2013), it is more of a commercial term, adopted by publishers partly because autobiography couldn't be thematized in the same way, once you got so much more publishing interest in the cookbook life, the life on the road, the 'Dad-learns-to-parent life' or whatever, all these niche genres that have been pushed by commercial publishers : 'memoir' worked better for that, and now it has just become the currency,

and it is difficult to get the term autobiography back.

Hope Wolf : I use 'autobiographical' quite a lot, 'autobiographical writing' or 'autobiographical narrative', because it seems less prescriptive a term than 'autobiography' : it need not include the whole life, and not all aspects of the text need be in one genre. It was interesting what you were saying about canonicity. In terms of teaching, I don't feel one has to stick to a canon. There are texts that appear on syllabuses taught at different universities more frequently than others, but, in general, I feel that there has been a real interest in diversifying what we teach in the time that I have been teaching. Life writing courses I have taught on have tended to be less canon-based than some of the introductory Literature courses.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : I wonder whether the importance in France of collections such as 'La Pléiade' and national teacher training examinations like the '*agrégation*', for which authors like Sartre, Beauvoir or Leiris have come up recently, might explain why thinking in terms of the canon is still such a big issue for us. Do you observe the same thing in the UK ?

Margaretta Jolly : Yes, the structure of the examination might play a part. We don't have many exams anymore in the Humanities – we're not allowed to. That said, it's true at A Level (the secondary school final exams). I was interested at one point to see how far certain texts have gone into the English A Level curriculum, such asJeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), which, as with others like Janet Frame and Jamaica Kincaid, are likely there because of the play with genre (true or not ?) but also tell of an oppressed person battling against odds, making themselves again. I'm interested to see Ted Hughes' *Birthday Letters* (1998) is currently offered next to other poems by Hughes and Sylvia Plath : I'm quite sure the discussions engage in the relevance or irrelevance of the author's biography to interpretation, here where the political stakes over authorship and authority are so obviously high.

I am interested in what you are finding out about other countries. For instance, I remember Rudolph Dekker in the Netherlands promoting the term 'egodocument'. I have always associated the word with him. And it sounds very odd in English to me, because of the word 'ego'. Alfred Hornung at the University of Mainz in Germany uses the term 'ego media', which has been taken up by others. What, for you, is 'egodocument' ?

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : It would be used in History and also in Sociology, but I think it is quite uncommon otherwise in France.

Bruno Tribout : I agree. You might also find 'egodocument' in literary studies as a way of signalling something autobiographical that is not considered 'literary' and might be associated more with documents for historians – so the use of the word itself implies

thinking in terms of disciplines.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : 'Egodocument' is perhaps also less odd for us, because we are used to Pierre Nora's 'ego-history', but it does feel a little artificial, compared to other terms used by literary scholars and historians, such as 'livre de raison' and others.

Hope Wolf : To me, the term 'egodocument' gives too much of a steer as to how a text should be interpreted. When you use the word 'ego', it points to psychoanalysis ; 'document' refers to facts and history. I would say any generic descriptor already implies an interpretation (and I like the idea that texts participate in genres rather than belonging to one), but 'egodocument' seems to be more directive as to how a text should be read than 'life writing'.

Bruno Tribout : Expanding on our discussion of corpus and canon, what are the main changes you have observed in the last ten years in the way researchers think about their primary sources, particularly in terms of the range of material, forms, genres and authors considered ? To put the question differently what are the principal factors today in deciding what 'counts' as life writing and what doesn't ? For instance, Hope, in terms of new forms of life writing, you have worked on Tweets written during the bombing of Gaza in 2014.

Hope Wolf : I have seen researchers bringing their work on more traditional forms of life writing to bear on the digital – and developing new knowledges along the way. I did so with the article you ask about. I worked on the Tweets of an author whose writing had not been published in any book. Her writing had by no means been canonized, and it was not taught on any university syllabus. One reason I like the term 'life writing' is that it seems to me to be less hierarchical than many other terms, less linked with dominant power structures. It need not only include established writers – as Literature is often imagined to do. I learned about the Tweets I focussed on through reading the news. I wrote the article as the Tweets were being added. I used what I had learned in my doctorate about the premium placed on 'immediacy' and 'authenticity' in the life writing of war to think about how far Tweets written during the bombing of Gaza were not only received, but shaped, by readers. I was also interested in how the use of the medium to garner solidarity could be reconciled with one which expressed complexity. I wanted too to know how limiting the forms social media platforms provided were, and how far users of social media could creatively use them to meet their own ends. I compared the form of the Tweet with the diary, which is typically not published as it is written – so is likely to be less intensely or immediately shaped by readers. I published the article in *Textual Practice* (2015), and it was republished in the book edited by Kate McLoughlin and Lara Feigel < *Writing War, Writing Lives* (2018). I was more interested in questions of the limitations and capacities of the Tweet as a form than I was in whether

it 'counted' as life writing. As with my PhD, I did not feel the need to use 'life writing' as a category to facilitate the interpretation. However, 'life writing' remains a helpful term for the way in which it embraces the multitude of forms I want to examine, all of which communicate either something of an individual's life experience, or a collective experience, or both (and I think it can include the experiences of other species too, and aspects of a life that are less clearly defined or delimited than 'experience').

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : Margaretta, how do you look back on the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (2001) some twenty years later ? What were the theoretical frameworks set when you began this project and what would be the ones you would favour today, if you were to start this work over again ? How do you view similar projects (dictionaries, encyclopaedias, histories of autobiographical or biographical writing) that came out after your *Encyclopedia* and might have been written in dialogue with yours ?

Margaretta Jolly : It was such a big project. It would have been good to have got it digitally produced at the time, so it would have been easier to update it. But it wasn't. I would love to have some way to have it operate like Wikipedia, which is a genuinely interactive encyclopaedia. I have a great deal of admiration for Wikipedia as I think it is one of the few big platforms that resisted the horrible monopoly direction and temptations to monetize. The demography of people behind Wikipedia is probably a big question, but I do still have faith in the way it operates as a non-profit, that allows in principle people to change and share expertise. In a utopian world, we could put everything on Wikipedia and use that already global platform. I am not quite sure how it works across languages. But, still, it already exists as an incredible model of what an encyclopaedia can be.

Philippe Lejeune has an understanding of encyclopaedias through time and the radical nature of the encyclopaedia in its roots, which a lot of people, I think, don't understand, because they think it is precisely about canonising, and once you have arrived, you put some great big heavy book on top of it, and you define the field, and that's the end. That wasn't at our aim, but rather this bigger philosophical view of attempting to define the field in a way which acknowledged its blurred edges and popular energies. In the Hawaii IABA conference, Philippe Lejeune talked about the *Encyclopedia* in his keynote : he said that it has really done us a big service, but he regretted that there was no entry on translation. So, of course, ever since, I have been thinking of how I could have added in something on translation. This would complement my attempts to represent the different cultures and nations, which I feel proud of, even though there are still many more countries and regions that weren't there. I would love to have an entry on Arctic Circle, for example : life narratives across media, including very literary ones, have been increasingly prominent in the 'Anthropocene' era of climate change.

It has been interesting to see that, since then, there has been quite a lot of multi-volume histories or theoretical studies of autobiography. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf in Germany edited a three-volume *Handbook* (a collection of essays with an emphasis on pedagogy for scholars, organized a little like an encyclopedia in that, in the table of contents, titles are 'keywords'). Then there was Zachary Leader in England. There was also the Cambridge history of autobiography, and Treva Broughton's *Autobiography : Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2006) and Ricia Chansky and Emily Hipchen's *The Routledge Auto/Biography Studies Reader* (2016). This means that the field is still expanding. Laura Marcus did a very short history of autobiography (*Autobiography : A Very Short Introduction*, 2018), and I've already mentioned Thomas Couser's book on memoirs. So, there is a publishing trend for micro-summaries, which probably sell a lot more.

I love anything which is getting across nations and languages, and I think there is not quite enough of what you are doing. Because of the problem of the dominance of English, from our point of view, it is really hard to get out of it – maybe we are the goldfish in the bowl, and we don't know how to jump out the bowl, just because we don't have big enough fins !

Bruno Tribout : When it comes to life writing terminology, have you experienced any difficulties – or opportunities – linked to the question of language and translation ?

Hope Wolf : We have a brilliant PhD student, Hannah Davita Ludikhuijze, who is working on life writing and NGO practice in Malawi. She has looked into Malawian terms to think about the life writing texts that she is working with, and this expands the possibilities of her project. It has enabled her to see the limitations of the concepts from the UK or the West more generally, that she might impose on these texts, but also to see commonality as well. Working with her has been really illuminating for me, for how she has opened up terminologies outside the West as something that we really need to think about when working with life writing.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : When specialists from other countries wrote for the *Encyclopedia*, Margaretta, did they write in their own language and then you translated their contributions into English, or did they write directly in English ? And did you have problems translating some terms ?

Margaretta Jolly : I think that they all wrote in English but many of the surveys of different regions or nations reflect on the distinctness of terms and include different languages. The entry on 'the I-novel' for example, by Melek Su Ortabasi begins thus :

> 'I-novel' is an inexact translation from the Japanese of *shishōsetsu* (alternately read as *watakushi shōsetsu*).*Shishōsetsu*, which can be translated more

> accurately as self-writing, denotes prose fiction of variable length believed to reflect authentically the private life of the author. This form, with its fictionalized confessional or diaristic style, is considered central to the modern Japanese literary canon.
>
> […] The I-novel phenomenon (and the term itself) emerged during the 1920s and had its heyday during the Taishō period (1912–26), but it continues to be one of the most popular (and controversial) prose forms in Japan even today.

Other entries discuss *akhyayika*, a form of ancient Hindu biography, or Rwandan *ukwivuga*, the self-narrations of warrior heroes, or the institutionalization of the term '*bildungsroman*' (the German 'novel of formation'). Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud explains of Arabic biography that :

> The art of biography was early described in Arabic as *'ilm* (a science), i.e. a work of learning and scholarship. The general term was *tarjama* (interpretation), now more commonly used for translation. The verb *tarjama li* meant to write a biography, with the name of the subject following. Because one of the earliest biographies of the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, wives, and followers was the *Tabaqāt* of Ibn Sa'd (d. 845), *tabaqāt* often came to be used to indicate works of biography. The term *tabaqāt* (generations) was used by Ibn Sa'd to indicate his system of classifying his material according to generation. In general *trajim* (pl.) were classified under *tabaqāt*, *wafayāt* (dates of death) generally of notables, with a subdivision of *a'mar* (age by decade at time of death). There were also *maghāzī* (military expeditions) of subjects, as well as *manāqib* (virtues) of princes, noblemen, etc., a continuation of pre-Islamic culture.

My editor's note explains :

> In the essays, where an English-language translation is known to exist for a foreign-language work, this is given in parentheses after the date of the original work, in the following manner : … *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958 ; *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*)

Where no published translation has been located or verified, the essayist has very often provided - and especially for less familiar non-Western European languages - a literal translation, in square brackets and without italic, for example : … *Istoriia moego znakomstva s Gogolem* [1855 ; *A History of My Acquaintance with Gogol*]…

One of the difficulties in really engaging with translation is money and expertise as well as the mono-linguistic education system for us in the UK. But the IABA 'Americas' chapter is really good in its principled commitment to publishing in Spanish as well as English and working to decenter the USA, as is the bilingual work from the Center for Life Writing at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. In terms of translating terms, I also recommend Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's *Reading Autobiography : A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2nd ed., Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2010). This includes a list of 'Sixty Genres of Life Narrative', which includes non-Anglo terms such as '*testimonio*', 'autofiction', '*bildungsroman*', and neologisms recently created by academics or sometimes by publishers : 'autography', 'pathography', 'automediality', 'animalography' and the like.

Bruno Tribout : Life writing seems conducive to forms of dialogue between research and creation. Margaretta, I think you have written on the conservation diaries of your mother, Alison Jolly. As you alluded to earlier, Hope, you have recently published a piece exploring why a particular painting has made such an impact on you. Could you tell us more about this approach and its benefits ?

Hope Wolf : I felt I had to. It was a kind of political imperative for me. There is so much discussion at the moment about positionality and privilege, and I felt like I needed to think about my own, which is why I ended up turning to the autobiographical. In the piece you mentioned, ' "A reasonably sheltered position" : Marion Milner, David Jones and the location of art writing' (*Critical Quarterly*, 63 (2021),90–110), I wanted to know why I was really obsessed by a particular painting, and I used psychoanalysis to think about that. I wanted to understand where my aesthetic preferences came from. I also wanted to think more generally about how where one writes from might impact upon one's affinities. I also felt, through doing this exercise, that I saw the painting differently, noticed details that I wouldn't have done otherwise (so life writing became a way of 'doing art criticism' – Marion Milner was of course my primary inspiration here, but also T. J. Clark's *The Sight of Death*). Autotheory is a very popular genre at the moment, which I am a little sceptical about. But this article didn't come from a wish to be popular, but rather from a kind of personal need – both to understand my tastes better, and also to respond to discussions about positionality which are going on around me at the moment.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : In France, too, this is becoming bigger and bigger, even though we don't necessarily write the same type of texts.

Margaretta Jolly : I have written two academic thought pieces on why this phenomenon has happened. One is titled 'Speaking Personally', which was a review essay of several examples which Liz Stanley asked me to write. She championed this mainly from a feminist standpoint theory perspective. She is a sociologist, and, for her, you

can't separate the observer's from the observed political point. She asked me if I could review several examples, and I concluded that it can be done really brilliantly and it can also be terrible, the worst form of egodocument. I am sceptical about the fashion and over-claiming its purpose and its use, but I'm only one of many who has observed this problem : when it becomes just individualist, it reduces the value of the observation. So, in that review, I consider some good examples, where you are still a part of the world and you are finding the world in a grain of sand, rather than reducing the world to the grain of sand('Speaking Personally, Academically' *Feminist Theory*, 6.2 (2005), 213–20). I also wrote a piece on the institutional drivers for the rise of critical creative life writing ('Life Writing as Critical Creative Practice', *Literature Compass*, 8.12 (2011), 878–89), after I hosted the International Auto/Biography Association conference in 2010 at Sussex. The theme was on intimate publics, and that theme came from Lauren Berlant, a very influential American theorist who proposed this concept that the public sphere becoming many intimate publics is not a good thing. It's got good sides but should not be idealized.

One of the drivers, I think, is recruitment needs in the Humanities in universities, where students want to be able to express themselves, and universities attract them through creative writing courses. I think it is also a reflection of the jadedness and the exhaustion of academics – partly theoretically (where do you go after post-irony, post-deconstruction ?), partly institutionally, with the pressures of academic capitalism. Scholars have also of course been pressured to position themselves politically, initially by feminists and critical race theorists – now, in troubling ways, by the New Right. So scholars also want to express themselves as well in a different way. But, you are right, I also wrote my own piece about my mum and, in a way, like Hope, I had to do it ; I was possessed by the need to write about her after she died. But now I've decided not to do it anymore.

Bruno Tribout : At the start of the interview, you mentioned larger projects associated with the Centre, and I was wondering if you could tell us about some of them, for instance the 'Connected Histories of the BBC'.

Margaretta Jolly : The 'Connected Histories of the BBC', it is a very large, well-funded project that explores the BBC's own in-house oral history that they have been doing since the early 1970s. They have been interviewing their own staff and it was completely closed to the public, but the grant has digitized the interviews and put them into a public catalogue, allowing the public to listen to things online, to annotate them, and to make clips. I was a co-investigator, on the strength of being an oral historian, and David Hendy, a historian of the BBC was the lead, with others such as Tim Hitchcock who have expertise in digital humanities. The BBC, very understandably, needs to manage its reputation. So, it's really tricky, but it is about what oral history is supposed

to be, which is about opening more voices, pluralising the record, not pretending that this is factually reliable, but rather opening up a whole subjective as well as institutional experience, here of a preeminent broadcaster in its 100th year. But there are other lovely research projects attached to the Centre, such as the work Hope Wolf and Helen Tyson are doing on Marion Milner.

Hope Wolf : Yes, our upcoming event on this formative writer-analyst brings together quite a few people who happened to be working on Marion Milner's psychoanalytic life writing at the same time. This includes three at Sussex : me, my colleague Helen Tyson, who works on modernism and psychoanalysis, and also Emilia Halton-Hernandez, who has just written a brilliant PhD on Marion Milner's autobiographical method (that's the title of her PhD ; she is now employed at the University of Essex). Helen and I are organising a conference at the University of Sussex in June, which should be really interesting. Marion Milner published between the 1930s and the 1980s. We will be reflecting on what resonances her work has today, why her work matters now. We will be thinking about her not only as a psychoanalyst but as a life writer. It is a project which brings together the interests of the Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research with those of the Centre for Modernist Studies : two Centres at the University of Sussex. It is exciting to have several colleagues working on similar topics at the same time, and to bring the research Centres together in this way.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : In your opinion, what are the European works on life writing which have enjoyed the widest reception in the UK, and why ? Thinking about France, what critics or works have been the most influential in the UK ? How would you characterize the reception and legacy of Philippe Lejeune ? Beyond *Le Pacte autobiographique*, what is the impact of his work on ordinary writing, on autobiography and genetics, on the history of the diary, or on online diaries ?

Margaretta Jolly : These are large questions ! A quick answer is that transnational success depends upon publishers, translators, intellectual or cultural trends, scholarly networks. Julie Rak writes a whole chapter on how the graphic memoir by Iranian/French writer Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* became a bestseller in the US in *Boom !* : *Manufacturing Memoir* (2012), which really helpfully situates this in political contexts, and why and how it got repackaged. When French deconstruction/post-structuralism was in vogue, a few texts which played with the limits of self/writing became set texts in the UK, as in the US, for example Paul de Man's 'Autobiography as De-Facement' (1979), Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Hélène Cixous' *The Newly Born Woman* (*La Jeune Née*, co-authored by Catherine Clément in 1975). Before that, Georges Gusdorf 'Conditions and Limits of Autobiography' (1956) gained influence in the Anglo-American world when anthologized by James Olney in his *Autobiography : Essays Theoretical and Cultural* (1980), and Laura Marcus probably helped to revive interest in that with her *Auto/Biographical*

Discourses : Theory, Criticism, Practice (1994), as well as pointing people to an alternative tradition in existentialism. De Beauvoir has been influential here but also in a powerful women's movement-led interest in autobiography which also supported the circulation of Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It* (*Les Mots pour le dire*, 1975). Françoise Lionnet's 1989 *Autobiographical Voices : Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* was important in establishing 'creole' writers in the Anglophone academic world, such as the Caribbean writer Maryse Condé and Marie-Thérèse Humbert, from Mauritius, and in resituating Augustine as a North African writer.

But influence also depends upon individual encounters, brokers and influencers. I've already mentioned that I met Philippe Lejeune in Beijing, and built on my knowledge of his work much more after that – though I'd already encountered a translation of his 'Le Pacte autobiographique (bis)', which I loved for its affirmation of the power of everyday life writing and the statement : 'in spite of the fact that autobiography is impossible, this in no way prevents it from existing' (p. 131–132). Julie Rak and Jeremy Popkin, who I think had also met Philippe at IABA conferences, recognized how much more he'd written that most of us Anglophones didn't have access to, and again with the wonderful University of Hawai'i Press and Craig Howes' support – published a scintillating collection of his writings in translation : *On Diary*, 2009.

My *Encyclopedia* picks out these French authors for individual entries, above the regional surveys :

France :

1. Abelard and Héloïse (12th century)
2. Amiel, Henri-Frédéric
3. Barthes, Roland (1915–80)
4. Beauvoir Simone de (1908–86)
5. Chateaubriand, François René, vicomte de (1768–1848)
6. Colette, Sidonie Gabrielle (1873–1954)
7. *Biographie universelle* (1843–61), *Dictionnaire de biographie française* (1933–) and *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français (Jean Maitron)*
8. Diderot, Denis (1713–84)
9. Duras, Marguerite
10. Gaulle, Charles de (1890–1970)
11. Gide, André (1869–1951)
12. Goncourt, Edmond (1822–96) and Jules (1830–70)
13. Gorz, André (1924–)
14. Green, Julien (1900–98)
15. Leduc, Violette (1907–72)

16. Leiris, Michel (1901–90)
17. Montaigne, Michel de (1533–92)
18. Perec, Georges (1936–82)
19. Richelieu, Cardinal (1585–1642)
20. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1712–78)
21. Sand, George (1804–76)
22. Saint-Denys Garneau, Hector de
23. Saint-Simon, Louis de (1675–1755)
24. Sarraute, Nathalie (1902--)
25. Sartre, Jean-Paul (1905–80)
26. Sévigné, Marquise de (1626–96)
27. Stendhal (1783–1842)
28. Tocqueville, Alexis de (1805–59)
29. Voltaire (1694–1778)

I also featured individual entries on Francophone Canadians :

1. *Dictionary of Canadian Biography/Dictionnaire biographique du Canada*
2. Hoffman, Eva (Polish-born, 1945–) *not Francophone but about translation*
3. Roquebrune, Robert Laroque de (1889–1978)
4. Roy, Gabrielle (1909–)

And Francophone African writers :

1. Bâ, Amadou Hampâté (West Africa/oral history)

There are of course many more writers and modes which have emerged since 2001 when the book was published.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle : Do you attach as much importance to the technological and media mutations of life writing as do many colleagues in England, the United States or Germany (where the term 'automediality' – '*automédialité*' – has become established) ?

Margaretta Jolly : Yes of course we do. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson picked up on the term 'automediality' for their presentation at the Centre for Life Writing conference in 2009 – looking at their title 'Subject Formations Beyond the Book : The Visual – Verbal – Virtual Contexts of Life Narrative', you can see how this points to much work today on, for example, the pressures of an economy of micro-celebrity and confession online, the politics of 'narrative capital', or our colleague Kate O'Riordan's work on personal genomes as digital artefacts and the quantified self in 'fitbit' technology.

That said, I take a queer comfort in what remains the same about everyday life content even in digital media : home, habit, friendship, excessive creativity. Here, as

Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard would say, the practice of life writing escapes the forces of commodity.

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