

Editor's Farewell

Thomas R. Smith

In the fall of 2005, my Penn State colleague Richard Kopley gave my name to the publisher of AMS Press, Gabe Hornstein, as someone who might do something to fill the place in AMS's list left by the demise of *Biographical Studies* on the passing of its editor, Frederick Karl. After some Modern Language Association (MLA) meetings that year in Washington, one during a lavish reception for friends of AMS, Gabe and I worked out the details of what became *Lifewriting Annual*. It was to be a series of hardbound books, ideally published annually, and devoted to the entire field of auto/biography, with essays, creative pieces, and reviews of works of lifewriting. Gabe felt that the world of serious readers needed commentary on lifewriting itself rather than commentary on commentary. I shamelessly took the idea of including creative works of auto/biographical writing in a scholarly publication from the then-new Australian journal *Life Writing* (with their knowledge and gracious consent). Committed by contract to provide AMS with six volumes, I quickly created editorial policies, invited scholars to the Editorial Board, issued calls for papers, prepared flyers, devised a style sheet, and devised an in-house style not straying too far from AMS's commitment to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

In the spring of 2006, I was approached to put my name forward to become Division Head for Arts and Humanities, a nearly full-time administrative post at my university, Penn State Abington. What was I thinking? I must have assumed that course releases would allow me to both edit the *Annual* and function as department head for one hundred faculty in twenty-four disciplines and seven majors. I soon discovered I was not Superman.

My boss, an associate dean also new to his position, was a Brit recently moved to the States, a former London policeman, a lawyer, a law school administrator, and a punctilious taskmaster. He took no quarter and did not suffer fools, that is, almost anyone whose opinions, sense of hierarchy, or personal style varied from his own. I learned a lot from him, quickly. The daily demands of scheduling, budgeting, resolving student complaints, and satisfying my colleagues' wishes, no matter how minor, naturally took precedence over editing the *Annual*. After eighteen months in the position, I was tapped to direct the Advising Center on an interim basis, which became a three-year stint. Then after a year of full-time teaching, in 2012 I was again asked to become division head for a three-year term. Given my resistance to delegating the editorial work, I did it all myself, except for one summer when a former student, Alia Tahvildaran, helped bring order to chaos. In retrospect, I am surprised I managed in seven years to produce even three volumes of the *Annual* and to select the essays and all reviews but one review for a fourth volume, the book you now hold in your hands.

My spouse, Eileen, being diagnosed in 2011 with ovarian cancer, along with the expanded responsibilities of division head I discovered when I returned to the position, finally convinced me I could no longer pretend to do even the meager justice to the *Annual* I had been. Carol DeBoer-Langworthy generously assented to become the *Annual's* editor after first agreeing to be book review editor. She has managed the copyediting of volume 4, attracted an enthusiastic group of aides around her, and is preparing volume 5 from scratch. I will be ever grateful to Carol for her willingness to guide *Lifewriting Annual* into the future, and I am confident it will improve under her excellent care.

The essays in this volume range widely, both geographically, topically, and methodologically. David Bahr proceeds formally to examine how the gutter, frame, and compositional style help express mental health issues in Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and then in Darryl Cunningham's *Psychiatric Tales: Eleven Graphic Stories about Mental Illness*. Without belaboring or forcing these three visual elements of comics to mean or "say" more than seems reasonable, Bahr shows how they yield meaning that contributes to the narratives' affect and effects. The autobiographical elements he includes in the essay—and his drawing of himself and his mother with which it concludes—make it all the more compelling.

Alexandra Wagner looks at a text whose form has elicited most of the commentary on it: *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*. She argues that its form is not only related to Barthes's concern in the book with writing and

writing processes, but also that, so far as autobiography creates knowledge, such knowledge is related to autobiographical form in general. Closely reading the order of the book's photographic and other images and its alphabetically arranged textual fragments, Wagner explains its organizational logic by extrapolating from Barthes's statements in the text on its images and on the alphabetical order of its fragments as well as from his references there to his book on Michelet, written just before *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, and his borrowing of the image of the veins in the human body from Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopedie*. Wagner makes a solid contribution to scholarship on a work long taken to be the autobiography that broke the mold.

Magdalena Ozarka considers a lifewriter's relations with readers when judging the effects of whether or not a specific person is addressed in Fanny Burney's journals. Using Małgorzata Czerwińska's categories of testimony, confession, and challenge to organize autobiography generically, Ozarka argues that Burney's journals are mostly testimonial and to a lesser degree confessional. She demonstrates that when Burney addresses a particular person, she expresses her feelings more openly and "confessionally," but when no addressee is apparent, when she tends to report, "testifying" in the legal rather than religious sense to her experiences. This division aligns a narratological aspect of Burney's journals with their topics and her self-presentation raises questions about Burney as a autobiographical writer and the genre conventions at play in her journal-letters and diaries.

Matthew Wells also considers rhetorical issues in arguing that the Chinese philosopher Ge Hong (283–343) in his early medieval text *Master Embracing Simplicity* (*Baopuzi*) achieves a convincing authorial autobiographical and literary persona by verbally sparring in dialogue with a fictional skeptic who doubts and challenges the author's claim to transcendence. Wells claims that "by crafting a complex, nuanced persona" different from that of the skeptic, Ge Hong's succeeds rhetorically while, ironically, dramatizing his own failure to reach transcendence. In Wells's view, Ge Hong presents himself as a subtle thinker who, though he may have failed himself, still believes in the possibility of transcendence. Thus, for Wells, the book stands as an enduring testament to the validity of the effort to achieve transcendence, "[t]he text replac[ing] the teacher for future adepts."

Katja Lee is also concerned with authors' relations with their audiences as she outlines an "ethics of care" deriving from the media sensation surrounding the end of Morrie Schwartz's life. Made famous by a TV show appearance, Mitch Albom's book *Tuesdays with Morrie*, and several spin-offs,

Morrie Schwartz opened a window for others into his thoughts and feelings as he died. His resistance to becoming a “spectacle” prompts Lee to propose a guideline for others when handling the life stories of vulnerable subjects: that the quality of the relationship between the subject and the teller of the subject’s story as well as “the knowledge gained through that relationship” determine the “life-writing practices” the teller employs. Such an ethics is, of course, case-specific, which suggests the impracticality of applying a rule-bound, absolutist ethics to the life stories of the vulnerable. Lee reminds us that we all one day will be, like Morrie, less in control of our life stories than we might wish.

Rather than focusing on the ethics of representation of an individual, Deanna Reder is concerned with the rights of a group to self-interpretation. She argues that rather than being a foreign literary form that could not have existed before contact with whites, Native American autobiography is an expression of Indigenous intellectual life, which she sees as welcoming many cultural influences from outside itself, including European. In addition to making a strong case for this view, Reder’s essay offers readers an engaging review and lively critique of the last 30 years of scholarship on Native American lifewriting. Reder calls for autobiographies by Indigenous writers to be studied for “content and context, as intellectual contributions to the community” rather than “to perpetuate a reductive game whose object is to prove that any Indigenous author is necessarily different from the white standard,” an argument hard to dismiss.

Marijke Huisman’s essay has a similarly broad scope but attends to a very different set of facts, documenting the growth of autobiography from 1850 to 1918 in the Netherlands. Huisman shows that it was not treated as a genre of its own; texts we now call memoir or autobiography were categorized randomly, sometimes by the occupation of the author, and never rose above 1.2 % of all books published, even when including translations. Huisman’s analysis of book marketing in the period reveals that autobiographical texts were presented as eyewitness documents humanizing historical and current events or as entertaining reading more palatable and uplifting than the gritty realism of naturalist novels. Huisman concludes that these texts owe their existence more to the demands of the marketplace than to an interest in publishing or reading “introspective developmental histor[ies] of a personality.” Significantly, the bias toward public events and improving stories of self-reliance favored men’s stories over women’s, Huisman finds. In her analysis, one may perceive the origins of the Dutch term *ego-documents* for first-person lifewriting.

Diaries can be thought of as serial autobiographies, without the narrative cohesion provided in conventional autobiographies by overarching themes or a single retrospective view of the writer's past. Readers of long sequences of diary entries can chart the paths a diarist takes in life as they were chosen, not as they are imagined after the fact; readers can thus create their own account of how a life unfolds over time. To that degree, diaries are more "documentary" than conventional autobiographies, offering daily detail that can be overlooked by autobiographers in their desire to write a well-constructed narrative, the models for which are, of course, fictions.

As discussed by Carolyn Oulton, the diaries of the late-nineteenth-century English novelist Mary Cholmondeley document a complicated and changing relationship to their imagined reader. Written from 1872 to 1911, the diaries early on show Cholmondeley struggling to have faith in her talent as a writer against her self-protective assumption of failure. As she gained success in writing novels based on her experiences growing up as the eldest daughter of a country rector in a large family, Cholmondeley came to resist writing about her personal feelings in her diary, feeling that to do so would be to give them away to future readers. Despite these concerns, later in life she gave her diaries to Percy Lubbock, who in 1928 published a memoir of Cholmondeley that included several extracts from them. Oulton's account of the changing imagined reader of Cholmondeley's diaries suggests, once again, that no diary is finally written for the writer's eyes only, but for a novel reason—that diarists can split themselves into writer and reader, as Cholmondeley does when, in contemplating her unmarried future, she addresses her diary as "you poor old book."

Kaitlin Briggs revives a little-known twentieth-century American writer and composer, Dorothy Smith Dushkin, who composed serious music, with her husband founded music schools in Vermont and Chicago, wrote a still-unpublished novel *The Glassy Interval*, and kept a diary from 1919 until 1988. Referencing Walter Benjamin's ideas on translation in her discussion of Dushkin's diary and the manuscript of the novel, Briggs reveals the struggles of a talented artist to bring her musical work and her writing to fruition. The first scholarly work on Dushkin's writing that I know of, Briggs's essay sheds light on a writer and musician who deserves our attention.

The rise of creative nonfiction has not only helped to fuel the memoir boom, but also allowed writers to combine all sorts of genres. The Crossings section of *Lifewriting Annual* is a place for auto/biographical writers to try their hand at mixing genres. The two Crossings essays in this

volume both concern things religious. Rachel Cope uses her unsatisfying experience of reading *Pilgrim's Progress* as the frame within which to examine the book's depiction of women; this discussion then frames an account of her research into the autobiographical writings of Catherine Livingston Garretson, an American living along the Hudson River who converted to Methodism in 1787 and wrote voluminously until her death in 1849. Cope reports finding herself by means of considering Bunyan and immersing herself in Garretson's writings; she comes to recognize that her own spiritual journey traversed theirs.

Holly Welker defends paying serious, uncondescending attention to the the religious content of Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Terrible Sonnets" and demonstrates how his use of language dramatizes the pain of separation he feels from God and from England while in Ireland. Her analyses of Hopkins's poems—and the poems themselves—are then made more compelling when she discusses her unhappy experiences as a thwarted writer and secret unbeliever in Mormon dogma while serving as a Mormon missionary in Taiwan. Welker's brave discussion of the physical manifestations of her own alienation and depression while a missionary both illuminates Hopkins's poems and pulls the veil off the idea that all criticism is disguised autobiography. Welker proudly proclaims the autobiographical source of her take on Hopkins's sonnets, and her arguments are all the more persuasive for her doing so.

To scholars of lifewriting and lifewriters, please consider *Lifewriting Annual* as a venue for your work. It can be only as good as your contributions.

For support of my work on this volume, thanks are due to Chancellor Karen Sandler and Associate Dean Norah Shultz of Penn State Abington. I am grateful for various kinds of help to Alison Booth, Suzanne Bunkers, Lorna Clark, Judith Lutge Coullie, Martin Danahay, Marlene Baldwin Davis, Richard Freadman, Ruth Hoberman, Becky Hogan, Joe Hogan, Margaretta Jolly, Jacqueline Kolosov-Wenthe, Jonathan Pettit, Kathryn Strong, Julia Watson, and my Penn State Abington colleagues Pierce Salguero and Karen Weekes. And, sadly too late for him to appreciate, Tim Adams, who generously gave me the benefit of his time when I was just beginning the *Annual*. I was and am grateful for his counsel. Finally, Eileen, who has lived with and supported this project for ten years, I owe the most thanks. Her knowledge and wisdom infuse the *Annual* in ways one cannot easily see. But they are there. She has been my best editor. Thank you, Eileen, for that, and for much more.