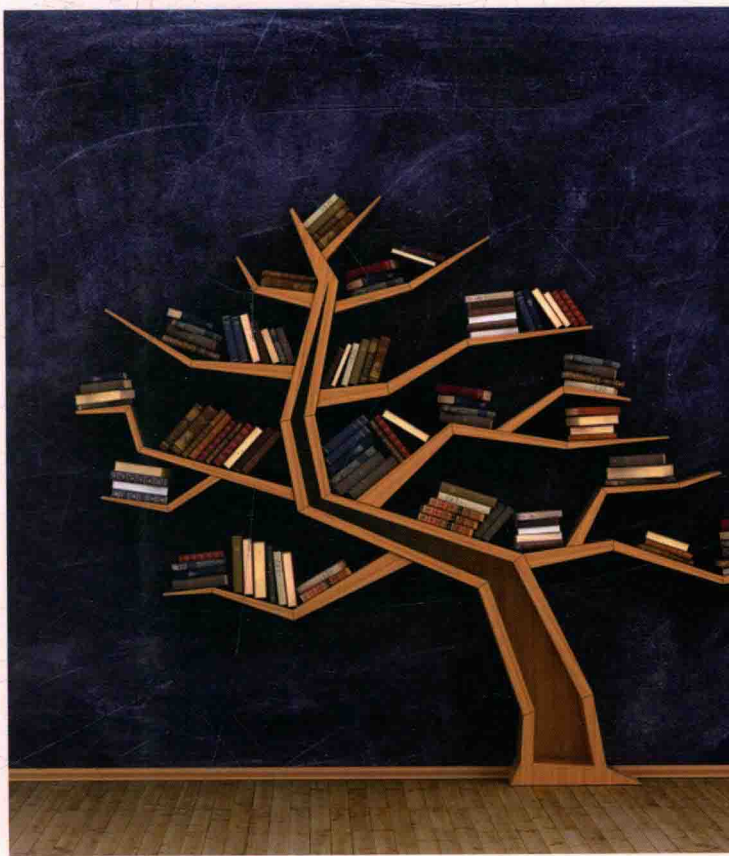


No. 5, Autumn 2015

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现代传记研究



Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies

上海交通大学传记中心主办

Center for Life Writing, SJTU

Life Writing Studies from the 1970s to the Present...Margaretta Jolly

My Autobiography Study...Paul John Eakin

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卷首语

传记(life writing)是人类的纪念碑。文化的起源中就包含着传记的因素,孔子的《论语》、柏拉图的苏格拉底回忆录和“四福音书”为传记树立了不朽的经典。其他文学和文化的文本形式,大都随着时代的变迁而消亡,成为历史的陈迹,只有传记以顽强的生命力绵延不绝;到了21世纪更是超过曾经盛极一时的小说,成为文化文本中的最大类别。传统的他传、自传、回忆录、书信、日记、游记等继续繁荣,新兴的口述历史、群体传记又异军突起。传记还超越了文字的媒介,同电影、电视以及互联网和自媒体结缘,开拓出广阔的新空间,拥有难以计量的读者。越来越多的人为自己、为亲爱者写作传记,以保留一份纪念。21世纪是属于传记的时代。

传记的发展,提出了许许多多的问题,需要研究和讨论;本刊是中国境内第一个专门研究传记的刊物,创办本刊的目的就是提供一个发表和交流的园地,为中国传记的发展聊尽绵薄之力。

在一个全球化的时代,《现代传记研究》是一个开放性的刊物。它向中外传记界开放,它发表对各种传记类型的问题,包括历史的、现实的和理论的问题,所进行的不同角度的研究和探讨;它鼓励和欢迎专家、作者和读者之间的交流和互动;它提倡视角和方法与时俱进、不断创新,同时也倡导严谨、求实的文风。它的目的只有一个,促进传记学术的繁荣,推动传记的发展。

办好一份刊物是一件艰苦的事,我们会不断学习、不断反思、不断改善以求进步。我们也吁求国内外传记界的朋友们、传记爱好者的支持,你们的关注和参与,你们的能力和智慧,是办好这份刊物最有力的保证,期待着你们!

《现代传记研究》编辑部

Editor's Note

As a monument to honor human beings, life writing has permeated culture since its origin. *Analects of Confucius* by Confucius, the Socrates of Plato and *The Four Gospels* are immortal classics in the history of life writing. Despite the fact that most genres of literature and culture perish over time, life writing has persisted in a tenacious manner, and the twenty-first century is witnessing a golden age of life writing, which even surpasses the novel, the once-dominating genre. Life writing now is among the most esteemed of cultural texts. Such traditional forms as biography, autobiography, memoir, letter, diary and travel writing still maintain prominence and the emerging oral history and collective lives demonstrate intense momentum. Simultaneously, life writing, having crossed the border of textual medium into the domain of movies, TV, Internet and We Media, claims an ever new and extensive space with the potential for innumerable readers. An increasing number of people have taken to life writing for themselves or for their loved ones, aspiring to erect an everlasting monument. In brief, the twenty-first century is an era of life writing.

Life writing as a genre of discourse has posed a great number of questions, requiring energies devoted to deeper studies and thorough scholarly discussions. The *Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies* takes the initiative in China as the first journal exclusively devoted to life writing studies. It aims to make a distinctive contribution to the development of Chinese life writing by providing a forum for publication and exchange of views in scholarship.

In the context of globalization, *Journal of Modern Life Writing Studies* is an open journal, accessible to the life writing community home and abroad, publishing research and explorations on all kinds of life writing issues (historical, practical and theoretical) from various perspectives, encouraging and welcoming communication and interaction among scholars, authors and readers, and highlighting innovative perspectives and methodologies as well as rigorous and realistic style. Our over-arching commitment is to facilitate the development of life writing and to bring it to a new level of excellence.

A full-fledged journal requires arduous and painstaking efforts. We pledge to consistently aim for progress through consistent learning, reflection, and improvement. We also appeal to dear friends in the life writing community at home and abroad and devotees of life writing for your support, attention and participation. Your talents and wisdom are the most powerful assurance of our success. We are looking forward to your help!

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Life Writing Studies from the 1970s to the Present

Margaretta Jolly

In the field of life writing studies in China, **Dr. Margaretta Jolly** is well received for her epic reference book *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (2001). Her scholarly orientation joins life writing studies with feminism, within the broad interdisciplinary field of Cultural Studies. For that purpose she concentrates on exploring subgenres such as letter writing, email, oral history and biography with years of endeavor. Hence she is currently found working with scholars at China Women's University in Beijing on comparing women's oral history in the UK and China. Our editor invited Dr Jolly early this year to express her views on the development of life writing studies in contemporary academia.

Question: Would you please give us a brief account of your own experience working in the field of life writing? What are your lessons from it?

Margaretta Jolly: I have specialised in studying the art and history of life narrative since 1985 when my radical college professor Julia Swindells gave me permission to break away from fiction as a young student of English literature. Julia's own work on working class autobiography remains an inspiration, as does the scholarship of Treva Broughton, under whom I took my Masters in Women's Studies in the late 80s. I dove into a truly everyday form of self-writing for my PhD at the University of Sussex, the study of letter writing in the Second World War. This laid the foundation for my first book, encouraged by my supervisors Jenny Bourne Taylor and Jenny Shaw, and also Dorothy Sheridan, who guided me through the extraordinary Mass Observation Archive, a must for anyone interested in British social history as seen through personal narrative. In *Dear Laughing Motorbyke: Letters from Women Welders of the Second World War* (1997) I discovered the unexpected humour as well as struggle for women in wartime through the prism of the epistolary form. *In Love and Struggle: Letters and Contemporary Feminism* (2008) followed through these interests, exploring feminist relationships as they have been expressed in letters and emails since the 1970s.

Although the puzzles of epistolary relationship continue to attract me, over the years I have widened my focus to consider the appeal of life narrative across media. This is particularly since my work at Sussex has involved teaching and researching

oral history – I have spent the last four years directing ‘Sisterhood and After: The Women’s Liberation Oral History Project’, which has brought me into contact with some wonderful Beijing-based oral historians at China Women’s Library. Probably my best known contribution to the field has been *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (2001), which I designed to reflect the field’s gorgeous expansiveness, ranging from Scandinavian life-story competitions to American confessional television, African oral history to Arabic Medieval biographical dictionaries. The great achievements of Chinese life writers are of course represented, and I should say that it was in my search for Chinese scholars to contribute to the book that I discovered Zhao Baisheng at Peking University and had the good fortune to attend the first conference of the International Auto/Biography Association there in 1999. I have been a core member of the IABA since then and it remains a pleasure to go to all of its biannual conferences.

The lessons that I have learned from-goodness me-nearly 30 years of study-include these, in order of decreasing importance:

1. Life writing exists in all cultures and historical periods, but industrialisation and urbanisation tends to transform biographical cultures into autobiographical cultures – with important caveats, particularly in non-Western cultures.

2. Life writing is a useful term as it preserves the connection between biography and autobiography, for each will always be traceable in the other. However life narrative is proving an important concept today since it allows for the increasing multi-modality and mediation of life story telling in a digital age.

3. My own career seems to have been enabled by a general institutional acceptance of life narrative as both object and method of study which has happened in parallel over the last three decades – how lucky I am.

Q: There has been great change in the field of life writing in recent years. Could you outline its trajectory? What are the success and problems?

Jolly: Critics have often been charmed by the idea that life writing ‘works’. Despite the important lessons from philosophies of deconstruction in the 1980s, we continue to describe a genre seemingly in possession of magical powers to teach, to heal, to lobby, to promote both truth and reconciliation. I am probably quite typical in having moved from thinking about life writing in more strictly aesthetic terms to a more functionalist approach – my most recent book, which I edited with Meg Jensen, *We Shall Bear Witness: Life Narratives and Human Rights* (2014), focuses on testimonial forms of life narrative in the urgent contexts of today’s wars, traumas and struggles for justice. Yet, as I ask in this book, how do we know life writing works? Why do we believe that it does? Moreover, what is the work that life writing makes critics do in evaluating it? These are three problems which I consider face scholars in the field today:

1. The problem of excess (which partly ensues from the academic embrace of function not value). Print culture made reading and writing part of everyday life; digital culture has added to that exponentially. Life writing may prove especially plentiful as a field both because it encompasses so many forms of writing and, simultaneously, because it can require so much contextualisation to evaluate.

2. The problem of scarcity (which may make us sweat more). Though life stories are abundant, our means of analysis are limited, intellectually and materially. Scarcity describes the conditions of academic funding and the demand for research that proves 'impact', even as we attempt to prove the 'impact' of life writing texts.

3. The problem of value. This has always described life writing's reception as a borderline art, but returns in new guises from this perspective. Critics cannot escape debates about value through focusing on function. But can we combine respect for life writing's work with an honest acknowledgement of the work it makes us do?

At the 2008 International Auto/Biography Association conference at the Center for Biography in Hawai'i, a gathering of 60 scholars who manage life writing journals, centres and associations that now stretch from China to Estonia, presented these concerns:

1. There are insufficient multilingual scholars and translations/translators of life writing, reflecting the economic and political convergence towards English-language based scholarship, as well as lack of time to do comparative work in an era of mass publication.

2. While there are increasing numbers of students graduating with life writing specialisms, there are insufficient jobs in the field for them to take.

3. There are now at least six journals whose specific mission it is to publish life writing criticism or life writing, but there is constant pressure to gain top rating in the various league tables.

4. There is a drastic financial gap between the economies of African, Latin American and South Asian universities and those of Europe, China and the West, such that life writing and life writing scholarship from these areas is not internationally known; growth in some countries leads to greater imbalance globally.

5. Simple lack of time for reading – particularly as we are encouraged to publish more and more. Craig Howes, editor of the leading journal *Biography*, reports that the substantial 25 – 30 page essay becomes more the exception these days than the rule; books become shorter even as their tables of contents grow longer.

This is not intended to be a list of moans, but the outline of a mismatch between the abundance of our material and indeed our production, and the means to respond to it. Of course there is a growing informal exchange of life writing, largely online, by amateur writers and readers who have none of these concerns. However, for the

critic this is itself a fascinating use of life writing that we need the means to analyse. I want therefore to offer another list, one of advised ‘investments’ which respond to the growth of life writing as object and idea.

1. Sampling and emergent method: we need to learn how to manage the proliferation of life stories and life story archives through more intelligent methods of selection, including addressing issues of representativity, validity and reliability in ways that life historians in the social sciences and those managing ‘big data’ already do. Some software programmes, such as Concordia University’s ‘Stories Matter’ and the general qualitative data tool Nvivo can help here.

2. Multi-mediation: we need technological education, in terms of gathering life stories across media, publishing, to match everyday lives with everyday readers, and in terms of understanding life writing as a catalyst for digital literacy. The challenges of online searching propels an urgent need for academics (and archivists) to provide metadata, the new ‘maps’ we need to guide us in the flat and instant archives of global life writing production.

3. Language and discipline: the institutional links between life writing and English literature and language departments need diversification so that it gains status in comparative literature and social and cultural departments; this is particularly important in non-English speaking universities.

4. Impact: this is the latest demand from academic funding bodies in the United Kingdom. We know that it is driven by ideological agendas that are often at odds with the values of the Humanities. But the trail of our ideas outside the university is important to trace. It is surely precisely this that shapes our interest in ‘the work of life writing’.

Q: Would you please give us an overview of life writing theories popular in recent years? What are the leading works in life writing theories in recent years?

Jolly: Life narrative is found in all places and historical periods and encompasses many aspects of everyday speech as well as writing. It is therefore difficult to produce a definitive criticism. Instead, I am excerpting a short section from an extensive bibliography that I prepared for Oxford Bibliographies Online, ^① in which I include critical texts across the literary and sociological spectrum, as well as classic life writings from ancient to postmodern. From a literary or cultural studies perspective, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010) provides the most condensed overview and builds on an important body of joint work by these North American

^① Jolly, Margaretta. “Biography and Autobiography.” *Oxford Bibliographies Online: British and Irish Literature*. (2012). < <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846719/obo-9780199846719-0006.xml> >