



For Philippe Lejeune

Craig Howes

Many critics, theorists, and scholars are more qualified than I to evaluate the life's work of Philippe Lejeune, and many others have had the longer, more intimate relationships with him necessary for composing a personal portrait. What I can do here, then, is map out my own encounters with Lejeune, both professional and personal, as a student of biography and autobiography, an editor, and a colleague lucky enough to cross paths with him from time to time. Of course I value greatly his contributions as a founder of and prolific contributor to the field of life writing for well over forty years. But I also deeply appreciate some of his other, not as well known actions, and I might be able to provide some behind-the-scenes information about what he has done outside of the public eye. What follows is my personal and professional account of life and life writing with Lejeune.

I knew about Philippe Lejeune well before I became the editor of *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* in 1994. The autobiographical pact, certainly the most cited concept in lifewriting studies over the past forty years, was very important to me when writing a book on the autobiographies, memoirs, and biographies of American POWs during the Vietnam War. But when I began evaluating manuscripts, and copyediting those we accepted with our managing editor, Stan Schab, I soon developed a second sense about when an author would mention the pact—often without referring to the rest of the essay, or to the elaborations and qualifications Lejeune had subsequently published.

Why weren't more critics quoting more of Lejeune? Part of the answer was language. Speaking for myself, although I can read French after a fashion, I relied on the 1989 collection *On Autobiography*, with its introduction by Lejeune's good friend Paul John Eakin, and translations by Katherine Leary. Most Anglo-American scholars of a certain age will still remember the specific font of its pages from regularly flipping through

some of the most photocopied and assigned essays in history. But at *Biography*, we also received copies of the *APA* journal, *La Faute à Rousseau*, and of his new publications, which we sent out for review. So I had a strong sense of what he was doing. But for many scholars, relying by necessity on English translations meant that they were familiar with relatively little of Lejeune's work.

I first met him in Beijing, China in 1999, at the huge conference that gathered some of the most prominent lifewriting critics together in one place, and resulted in the founding of the International Autobiography and Biography Association (IABA). In attendance were Sidonie Smith, Paul John Eakin, Margaretta Jolly, G. Thomas Couser, Susanna Egan, William Andrews, Kay Schaffer, Michael Keren, Suzanne Bunkers, Alfred Hornung, Katerina Longley, Thomas Smith, Eugene Stelzig, and Joseph and Rebecca Hogan from *A/B: Autobiography Studies*, among others. I think I nodded to Philippe in the crush of greetings and introductions before the conference began, but I actually first talked to him briefly on stage during the opening ceremonies, waiting to address the large hall as representatives of publications and centers—he for *APA* and France, and I for *Biography*, the Center for Biographical Research, and (I suppose) Hawai'i.

Right before the meeting that created IABA, I first spoke at length—well, actually conspired—with Philippe. We knew there would be such an initiative. Zhao Baisheng, our host at Peking University and the energetic organizer who had personally convinced us to come, had billed this conference as the first major international symposium on life writing. This administrative meeting, held for some twenty or thirty visiting and resident scholars, was explicitly for the purpose of establishing an organization.

Somehow Philippe and I realized that we shared reservations about this impending undertaking, and practically in the hallway beforehand, we compared notes. We agreed that we had no interest in creating a group with the predictable officers, executives, bylaws, rotating responsibilities, elections, sub-committees, and so forth. Nor did we want the headaches that would result from the organization maintaining a budget, with all the problems of memberships, dues, and fees that would follow—and especially for a truly international organization. So Lejeune and I agreed on two principles: no executive structure and no money.

We carried both points. During a productive discussion marked by general goodwill, we swiftly decided that sharing information about conferences, publishing opportunities, and new work in the field was an excellent idea, and because I had access to some resources at the Center for Biographical Research, I volunteered to find out how to set up an e-mail listserv. IABA-L made its appearance in July of 1999. Now eighteen and a

half years old, it has 1,500 subscribers, and serves as a vibrant communications network for lifewriting scholars around the world. We also reached a consensus that we should never leave a conference without determining where we would meet next. As luck would have it, Susanna Egan had already organized an autobiography conference for the following year in Vancouver. That became IABA II; Richard Freadman was there, and offered to hold IABA III in Melbourne in 2002. We've been biennial ever since.

And we also decided that instead of choosing a president, treasurer, secretary, and so forth, or establishing a formal membership procedure, we would let anyone join the listserv, and designate four regional representatives to serve as facilitators for general discussions, principally about conferences. Zhao Baisheng from China, Alfred Hornung from Germany, Margaretta Jolly from Britain, and Tom Smith from the United States were the first four; I was included, because I would be running the listserv.

IABA still doesn't have memberships or an executive, but we haven't missed a biennial conference. The original four representatives are also still talking, and have added several more collocutors who have hosted conferences. And something that Lejeune said in that first meeting has become one of my professional touchstones. When the discussion did drift into what a hypothetical IABA executive might look like, and what each officer would be responsible for, Philippe effectively ended the debate by saying something to this effect:

I will not suggest duties for anyone that I would not be willing to take on myself.

If only more people would be willing to follow what became my golden rule of institutional meetings—and especially in relation to supposed subordinates!

I saw Philippe again in Vancouver, at the “Autobiography and Changing Identities” conference. He delivered his well-known paper “How Do Diaries End?” there, which *Biography* happily published in the 2001 special issue arising out of the conference. His relationship with the journal as a contributor and subject for discussion has been long and fruitful. Between 1991 and 2009 we published four pieces by him, including his keynote from the 2008 IABA conference in Honolulu. One piece—“Calicot”, a brief history of his life with diaries and autobiographies—appeared solely in French. With varying success, we commission reviews of books in languages other than English. Philippe Lejeune is our most reviewed author in any language, with ten reviews appearing between from 1991 to 2016.

My most substantial collaboration with Philippe, however, resulted in *On Diary* (2009), a collection co-edited by Jeremy Popkin and Julie Rak, and published in our Biography Monograph series. The idea was to gather together his most significant essays on diary—in itself a worthy project—but also to provide a starting point and reference guide for other critics and scholars entering this field of study. The entire process was productive and inspiring, and the highest praise came from Philippe himself, who wished there was an identical collection in French. (A similar publication, with many of the same essays and features, appeared in 2014 in German: *“Liebes Tagebuch”: Zur Theorie und Praxis des Journals.*) Working on this book was an honor and a pleasure. As part of our editing process, Managing Editor Stan Schab and I read any book or journal issue aloud. Some of my most enjoyable professional moments were those days when I would read Philippe Lejeune’s essays to Stan—checking for errors, but also savoring the clarity, keen intelligence, wit, and compassion, even in translation. The Anne Frank material was especially absorbing and moving, thanks to Philippe’s meticulous searching through the manuscripts to reveal the results of her discovery that she was a writer. We knew that *On Diary* would leave a legacy—it is a steady seller to this day, and its influence is apparent in an ever-increasing number of essays dealing with diaries.

My next face-to-face encounter with Lejeune was in Honolulu. Language was a major issue for IABA—a challenge for all academic fields, but one especially significant for life writing. From the start, Philippe warned everyone about the Anglophone-dominant nature of our publications and meetings. When my co-editors Miriam Fuchs and Cynthia Franklin and I decided to host the 6th biennial IABA conference, and we chose Life Writing and Translations as the theme, we therefore knew instantly that he had to give the first keynote, and in French. Delivered in tandem by Lejeune, and by Jean Yamasaki Toyama, who prepared the English version, “Le moi est-il international?”/“Is the I International?” articulated many of the hard issues raised by translation. (Both versions are in the special issue that arose from the conference). Then, for the next four days, attendees gave and responded to papers that foregrounded linguistic, cultural, and generic (adaption) translation.

One side result of this conference, held as far away from Europe as could be, was a discussion among some of the European scholars about the need for an IABA Europe, which in alternate years could provide a forum for work of distinctly regional interest, and ideally, in the languages of the continent. Language remains a demanding, and still not fully addressed challenge. Even though four divisions now exist—Europe, Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Africa—IABA still wrestles with Anglocentrism. But the many efforts directed at making our conferences

multi-lingual, and at highlighting the importance of situated knowledge, continue to be inspired by Lejeune's longstanding insistence.

After he agreed to come to the Hawai'i conference, I asked him if he would be willing to speak at a separate one-day event that would bring librarians, archivists, historic preservation specialists, and educators together to talk about preserving Hawai'i's own diaries and unpublished autobiographies—whether institutionally, or within families or smaller communities. To inspire these attendees, I wanted them to hear about *APA (Association pour l'autobiographie et le patrimoine autobiographique)*, in which Lejeune has played so central a role, and whose principal objective is “d'assurer la collecte, la conservation et la mise à disposition de textes autobiographiques inédits rédigés par des personnes de tous milieux sociaux”.

And although I was not present, I would like to record another Lejeune-in-Hawai'i moment. He and John Eakin went to the island of Hawai'i, where one of their destinations was Waipi'o Valley, on the northwest coast. The road into this spectacular place descends rapidly, so visitors must leave their vehicles at the top and walk down. But a local resident with a pickup truck offered them a lift. For some reason, I still take pleasure in imagining these two great theorists of life writing on a steep incline, bouncing along in the back of a truck.

I saw Lejeune again six years later, at the IABA Europe conference in Tallinn, Estonia. He was still concerned with issues of language, and heavily engaged with *APA*, *Le Faute à Rousseau*, and a host of publishing projects. I told him about the growing interest in *On Diary*; he immediately asked how the archiving in Hawai'i was going.

I realized very early on that I shared several of Philippe Lejeune's interests. His critical explorations of genre, and in particular, its deployment by writers who were not literary artists, paralleled my own fascination with satire or parody, and certainly my work on the range of lifewriting modes practiced by America's Vietnam POWs. As a writer, I also aspired to the clarity of his essays on *le pacte autobiographique* and on diary.

Lejeune's constant demands for linguistic diversity within life writing's principal texts, conferences, and critical publications have profoundly influenced how *Biography* evaluates articles, commissions special issues, organizes conferences and seminars, chooses books for review, and assembles our annual annotated bibliography of critical work on life writing. Most recently, as we were creating our International Review, an annual gathering of short essays on life writing highlights of the previous year in well over thirty countries, we kept the need for linguistic and regional diversity firmly in mind. I would like to believe that we would have reached many of these decisions on our own. But I know that whenever I personally think about issues of language and translation, I hear the voice of Philippe Lejeune.

If I had to sum up what his major contributions to life writing have been, I would still start with autobiography. His essay on the pact is almost certainly the most quoted critical text on life writing, and *On Autobiography* remains a primary resource and sparring partner both for those entering the field, and for those who have worked in it for many years. But Lejeune's work on diary has been equally sustained and prolific, and he is increasingly recognized as the pre-eminent writer on this genre. For us at *Biography*, he also stands as a pioneer in the study of lives online, a topic to which we have devoted two substantial and heavily consulted special issues. Published in 2003, the first *Lives Online* collection was one of the earliest substantial publications on the subject. Its contributors paid special attention to online diaries, blogs, and home pages, and because Lejeune had published "*Cher Écran*" three years before, the beginnings of a vocabulary and method—particularly with regard to automediality—were already in place for what is now one of the most intense areas of study in life writing. Conversely, the fourth area where he exerts a major influence involves life writing's most material dimension: through *APA*, Lejeune has shaped our understanding of the need to preserve the physical manuscripts of autobiographies, memoirs, and other ego documents.

I am honored to join with other writers in recognizing Philippe Lejeune's remarkable and enduring contributions to the field of life writing, and in anticipating his future contributions, for many years to come. He has shaped, and continues to direct our endeavors. As Sam Ferguson puts it in his 2016 *Biography* review of one of Lejeune's most recent publications, "If only half of his invitations for further study are taken up by other scholars, he will still have done a great service to the study of life writing" (828–829).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Craig Howes is the Director of the Center for Biographical Research and a Professor of English at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. He has been the co-editor of *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* since 1994, and editor in chief of the Biography Monograph Series, published by University of Hawai‘i Press. A former Vice President and President of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals, he manages the announcement list for the International Auto/Biography Association, reaching 1,500 subscribers. The author of *Voices of the Vietnam POWs: Witnesses to their Fight* (Oxford UP, 1993), he is also the co-editor with Miriam Fuchs of *Teaching Life Writing Texts* (MLA 2007), and with Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio of *The Value of Hawai‘i: Knowing the Past, Shaping the Future* (UH Press 2010). He is the series scholar and co-producer of the *Biography Hawai‘i* television documentary series.