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Center for Biographical Research

A part of the College of Arts, Languages & Letters of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the Center for Biographical Research (CBR) is dedicated to the interdisciplinary and multicultural study of life writing. In conjunction with the Department of English, the CBR offers thesis advising for PhD and MA projects, and graduate and undergraduate courses in life writing. In addition to Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly, published since 1978, the CBR sponsors the Biography Monograph series, maintains a library and resource collection, hosts international conferences and visiting scholars, and conducts a public seminar series.

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The Value of Hawai‘i Becomes a Trilogy

The Value of Hawai‘i 3: Hulihia, the Turning, published online in late 2020 and in print in early 2021, brought the editors of the first two installments together for a collection premised on multigenerational visions of a Hawai‘i not defined by the United States.

"Hulihia" refers to massive upheavals that change the landscape, overturn the normal, reverse the flow, and sweep away the prevailing or assumed.

In a world in crisis, what does Hawai‘i’s experience tell us about how to build a society that sees opportunities in the turning and changing times?

The Value of Hawai‘i 3: Hulihia, the Turning is available for free at http://hdl.handle.net/10125/70171. Related educational materials can be found at https://valueofhawaii.wordpress.com/.
Six Biography Prize winners, 2020–22

The Biography Prize is awarded every spring to the best projects that focus on or intersect with any aspect of life writing theory, history, or practice in any medium and discipline.

Both 2020 winners were recognized for their dissertation work, and both 2021 winners for essays written for graduate seminars. This year an MA project and a dissertation were honored.

This year is also notable because it is the first time the prize was awarded to a project composed entirely in ʻōlelo Hawai‘i: Jacob Hau‘oli Lorenzo-Elarco’s “Helele‘i Ka Ua Lilinoe, Ola Ka Honua.”

The Prize is open to any MA or PhD student at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The winners receive a monetary award and are invited to give Brown Bag Biography presentations.

2020

Amy Carlson
"Reading Mediated Identities: Auto/Biographical Agency in the Material Book, Museum Space, Social Media Platforms, and Archives"

Aiko Yamashiro
"Nā Hua Ea & Building Decolonial Community (writing poetry with ʻāina and each other)"

2021

Li Shan Chan
"On Writing a Life"

Stephanie Sang
"In Time, A Writer"

2022

Jacob Hau‘oli Lorenzo-Elarco
"Helele‘i Ka Ua Lilinoe, Ola Ka Honua"

Sharon Weiner
"Juliette May Fraser: A Kamaʻāina Life in Art"

Brown Bag Biography on Zoom and YouTube

When COVID-19 hit, UH’s longest-running speaker series went on a brief hiatus, but returned in Fall 2020 on Zoom, enabling us to post Brown Bag talks on YouTube. Search for our channel—Center for Biographical Research—and catch up before we hit our 800th talk this fall.

“A Hybrid Memoir: A Reading and Discussion” with Dr. Rajiv...
Center for Biographical Research
62 views • 5 months ago

“Hawai‘iloa and the End of the Kanaka Diaspora” with Michael...
Center for Biographical Research
97 views • 1 month ago

“An Ethics of Settler Decolonization in Hawai‘i” wit...
Center for Biographical Research
52 views • 5 months ago

“Remembering Our Intimacies: Mo‘olelo, Aloha ‘Āina, and Ea”...
Center for Biographical Research
116 views • 5 months ago
"We Are Maunakea: Aloha ʻĀina Narratives of Protest, Protection, and Place"

a special issue of Biography, vol. 43, no. 3, 2020

Guest editors Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada and Noʻu Revilla and the editorial team of Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly are proud to present a special issue on the lifewriting strategies of the kiaʻi (protectors) who gathered at Puʻuhonua o Puʻuhuluhulu in the summer of 2019 to defend Maunakea against desecration by the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). This special issue features first-hand accounts, academic reflections, creative works, photography, and interviews with kiaʻi from the 2019 front lines and members of the media team.

Photo Credits: Top: Kanai’a Nakamura; Bottom: Antonio Agosto, Visionize Media.
Introducing the Forum

*Biography* vol. 43, no. 4 introduces the forum into the pages of our interdisciplinary quarterly. We inaugurated this feature, in guest editor Anna Poletti’s words, to "respond to and amplify specific examples of the power of life writing as a cultural, political, and social practice, and which document key moments in the evolution of that practice."

Beginning with Behrouz Boochani’s *No Friend but the Mountains* is important, Poletti argues, because it "emerged from a complex assemblage of telecommunications media, activism, intellectual collaboration, and translation. It aimed to provide a theory of immigration detention based on the lived experience of the men held in Australia’s Manus Island Regional Processing Centre. *No Friend but the Mountains* is a hybrid work of life writing, composed on illicit mobile phones and secretly transmitted to a team of translators and supporters via WhatsApp. . . . It is a uniquely transnational intellectual and aesthetic project whose conditions of production give a strong indication of how mobile media technologies are revolutionizing the practice and uses of life writing."
Answering the call for different perceptions and representations of illness and disability than those found in conventional medical discourse, the newest special issue of Biography (vol. 44, nos. 2 & 3) and the latest installment in the Biography Monograph series, Graphic Medicine asks what it means to give and receive care.

Comics by Safdar Ahmed, John Miers, and Suzy Becker, and illustrated essays by Nancy K. Miller and Jared Gardner show how life writing about illness and disability in comics offers new ways of perceiving the temporality of caring and living. Crystal Yin Lie and Julia Watson demonstrate how use of the page through panels, collages, and borderless images can draw the reader, as a “mute witness,” into contact with the body as a site where intergenerational trauma is registered and expressed. Kiene Brillenburg Wurth examines how microscripts productively extend graphic medicine beyond comics to “outsider art.” JoAnn Purcell and Susan Squier display how comics artists respond to and reflect upon their caring relationship with those diagnosed with an intellectual disability. And Erin La Cour interrogates especially difficult representations of relationality and care.

Read the special issue now on Project Muse or purchase a print copy from the University of Hawai‘i Press in July 2022.
A Tribute to Miriam Fuchs

By Craig Howes, Director of CBR and Coeditor of Biography

It is with great sadness that we mark the passing of Miriam Fuchs, but also remember with gratitude her contributions to the journal Biography, the Center for Biographical Research, and the field of life writing.

As a scholar of literary modernism, Miriam published on T. S. Eliot, William Gaddis, Nathanael West, and Hart Crane, and extensively on Djuna Barnes, H.D., and Marguerite Young. Coedited with Ellen Friedman, her 1989 collection Breaking the Sequence: Women’s Experimental Fiction played an important role in “the continuing feminist project of the recovery and foregrounding of women writers.”

In the mid-1980s, Miriam came to Hawai‘i for a seminar. She ended up staying, becoming a full professor in the Department of English in 2003.

Miriam’s status as a lifewriting scholar is indisputable. In a review of 2004 book, The Text is Myself: Women’s Life Writing and Catastrophe, Susanna Egan wrote that “her remarkable exploration of catastrophe writing will be important in autobiography studies and fascinating to all who care about self-representation as a mode of survival.” Miriam and I also coedited Teaching Life Writing Texts (2008) for the MLA Options in Teaching Series. It has proved very influential.

But most importantly for the CBR, she had a long and profound impact upon Biography and the Center. When I took on the editorship in 1994, I asked her to become a literary editor. By the spring of 2000, she was associate editor, and from 2003 to 2012, when she passed the torch to John Zuern, she was coeditor with me and Cynthia Franklin.

From 1995 until 2007, Miriam was essentially the acquisitions editor, and because Biography is a quarterly, she contributed mightily to publishing seventy-five issues. She also took the lead on two landmark special issues—“Biography and Geography” in 2002, and “Translation and Life Writing” in 2009, coedited with Cindy Franklin.

Miriam Fuchs’s contributions to Biography and the CBR were defined by her courage, determination, and feistiness in the face of constant impending or realized personal catastrophe. She was also my friend. When she gave me one of her publications, she signed it “Your colleague and buddy, Miriam.” I’m proud to claim both. She is greatly missed.