

Afterword

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SPECIAL ISSUE

AMOR NARRATIO: A FESTSCHRIFT FOR
CATHERINE KOHLER RIESSMAN

Afterword

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On the end of his 10-year run as Co-Editor of Narrative Works, the author reflects on the past and future of the journal.

Keywords:

As an Afterword to this wonderful festschrift that honours Catherine Kohler Reissman's pioneering work in the field of narrative analysis, Elizabeth McKim and I, who founded and have been the Editors-in-Chief of *Narrative Works* since its inception in 2010, wish to let you know that this will be the final issue published under our guidance as we both step into retirement.

Our first issue, in 2011, opened with a series of papers presented at the University of East London's Centre for Narrative Research in celebration of their tenth year of operation. It is perhaps fitting that our journal's 10th anniversary once again features work presented at the Centre for Narrative Research. In a curious coincidence, that first series of papers was entitled "Looking Forward, Looking Back," which now serves as a serendipitous counterpoint to Reissman's (2020) essay in this issue, entitled "Looking Back, Looking Forward." We feel invited to do the same.

In her essay, Reissman talks about how her "narrative work over the years came out of a network of relationships" (p. 118). It is out of a similar sort of network of relationships that *Narrative Works* itself has come. With that network in mind, I want to take this opportunity to do some looking back and looking forward as we prepare to hand over the

journal to Kate de Medeiros of Miami University in Ohio and her team of fellow narrativists from a broad range of disciplines and fields.

Many of the relationships I'm thinking of have had their beginnings in the international, interdisciplinary conferences called *Narrative Matters* that have been held on a biennial basis for nearly 20 years. A committee of faculty and students from St. Thomas University, plus our friend and colleague, Dolores Furlong of the University of New Brunswick, hosted the very first one here in Fredericton, where both universities are located. The year was 2002. So well did this event go over, and so happy were those who attended to have the opportunity at last to connect with folks drawn to narrative ideas and approaches across a range of disciplines, that they urged our group to host a follow-up event in 2004.

At the end of that event, colleagues from Acadia University, located in Nova Scotia, volunteered to host the next one in 2006, while colleagues from the University of Toronto and York University came forward at the end of that event to plan one for 2008. In May 2010, we brought the conference back to Fredericton, and since then things have really taken off. The 2012 and 2014 conferences both took place in Paris, France; the 2016 one in Victoria, British Columbia; the 2018 one at the University of Twente in The Netherlands; and the 2020 conference, if COVID hadn't intervened, would have taken place at Mercer University in Atlanta, Georgia. As it stands now, that event—the 10th in the series—has been postponed until 2022, while colleagues in Finland have already volunteered to host the 11th in 2023.

These events have played a pivotal role, we believe, in nurturing a global community of theorists, researchers, and practitioners who are committed to exploring the narrative complexity of human life on multiple levels and to the application of narrative approaches in numerous fields of inquiry and service—as demonstrated by the broad range of topics that are treated in the articles published in *Narrative Works*.

But back to the topic of relationships ... I still recall the reception that we hosted late one afternoon for keynote speakers, committee members, and others involved in the 2010 event. It took place in the Royal Suite on the top floor of the Delta Hotel, overlooking the beautiful St. John River. Emboldened by an extra shot of pinot noir, I made my way around the room and, one by one, hit up folks like Mark Freeman, Ken Gergen and Mary Gergen, Matti Hyvarinen, Jean Clandinin, Bert Cohler, and Brian Schiff to serve on the editorial board of *Narrative Works*, which at the time we had really only just begun to envision. Their

defenses perhaps lowered by the general conviviality of the evening and by the same refreshments that I myself was sampling, they all immediately consented. Among them were Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich, co-editors of the prestigious, ground-breaking series by SAGE called *The Narrative Study of Lives* that ran from 1993 to 1999. To my great delight, the two of them bought my pitch and graciously agreed, pointing out to me, quite enthusiastically, that an online, open-access journal possessed advantages for disseminating narrative research that traditional print journals simply do not have.

As we continue on our look back over the last 10 years, we need to acknowledge a number of relationships that have enabled the journal to succeed. First of all, we must remember with gratitude John McKendy, who died suddenly in the fall of 2008 under the most tragic of circumstances. He was a beloved member of the St. Thomas University faculty and a fierce advocate of narrative approaches in his home discipline of sociology. It was he and Beth who, in fact, first came up with the idea of launching a journal that would publish narrative research that cuts across disciplines in ways which existing journals did not. John's love of narrative has inspired us every step of the way.

To James Kerr, Mike Nason, and Rob Glencross of the Centre for Digital Scholarship at the University of New Brunswick, we are deeply indebted for working closely with us to get *Narrative Works* up and running and, since then, helping to ensure that the quality of each issue has been of the highest level.

We also owe thanks to Brandi Estey-Burt for her assistance in managing the journal during the last couple of years, and to Doug Vipond, for his assistance with copy editing our first few issues.

Special thanks are due to Arthur Frank, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Sociology at the University of Calgary, and a member of our Editorial Board, who has generously supplied us with a variety of intriguing and enlightening book reviews.

We could not have managed without our colleague, Clive Baldwin, Canada Research Chair in Narrative Studies and Director of St. Thomas University's Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Narrative, whose arrival at STU coincided with the launch of the journal. He has been one of its staunchest supporters, and since his arrival, has served as Contributing Editor. Given his encyclopedic grasp of the narrative world, he has provided counsel on countless occasions, whether an initial assessment of a particular manuscript, identification of possible

reviewers, or help with thinking through issues related to the journal as a whole.

As for the many individuals on whom we've relied (a number of them members of the Editorial Board) to review manuscripts for us over the years, *Narrative Works*—like any scholarly journal—would simply be impossible to produce without their selfless contribution. We are profoundly grateful for the hours that these good people, each of them experts in their respective areas, have devoted to giving the manuscripts we've sent them a thorough and constructive critique.

Last, but definitely not least, are the members of our Editorial Board. Beth and I are grateful for the kindness, encouragement, and cooperation that they've shown us over the years—all of them accomplished scholars in their own right and representative of a bewildering range of disciplines and fields where the “narrative turn” has been felt: from psychology to sociology to gerontology to anthropology, from education to social work to medicine, and so on. That range has proven vital for a journal like *Narrative Works* to have at its disposal, given the variety of topics with which the manuscripts we've received tend to deal, or as Reissman puts it, “the range of human problems now subjected to a narrative lens” (Reissman, p. 122). Many members we have, at times, leaned on heavily for guidance in identifying suitable reviewers. One final little story captures this sense of collegiality that Beth and I have experienced in our interactions with members of the Board.

During the *Narrative Matters* conference in Paris, July 2014, Beth and I convened a luncheon meeting of those members who were attending the event. Over a dozen of us—were crowded around a long table that Brian Schiff, the conference's organizer, had reserved. As Beth was presenting our status report, one member interrupted the meeting with an observation that the two of us still quote at one another on a regular basis. Listening to Beth's detailed report and realizing the workload it reflected—especially for Beth, who on top of her full-time position in St. Thomas University's English Department was handling all the correspondence with authors and reviewers, not to mention doing a thoroughgoing copy edit—one member's jaw dropped, a smile of admiration swept across her face, and she exclaimed aloud to the group, “Wow! You guys have been doing all this off the side of your desks? That's incredible!”

It's been an honour and a pleasure to have shepherded *Narrative Works* along since 2010. After a decade of working off the sides of our

desks—Beth’s desk in particular!—we’re equally honoured, not to mention grateful, to hand over “our baby,” as we often refer to it, to Kate and her good colleagues at Miami University. As O’Toole Professor of Gerontology at Miami University in Ohio, as a long-time member of the Editorial Board for this journal, and as an accomplished narrative scholar in her own right, she is marvelously positioned to take *Narrative Works* to the next exciting level. We wish her and her team the greatest possible success.

Reference

Riessman, C. K. (2020). Looking back, looking forward. *Narrative Works 10*, 117–124.

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