



Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing

G. Thomas Couser

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"My primary concern is with the ethics of representing vulnerable subjects?persons who are liable to exposure by someone with whom they are involved in an intimate or trust-based relationship, unable to represent themselves in writing, or unable to offer meaningful consent to their representation by someone else. . . . Of primary importance is intimate life writing?that done within families or couples, close relationships, or quasi-professional relationships that involve trust?rather than conventional biography, which can be written by a stranger. The closer the relationship between writer and subject, the greater the vulnerability or dependency of the subject, the higher the ethical stakes, and the more urgent the need for ethical scrutiny."?from the Preface

Vulnerable Subjects explores a range of life-writing scenarios?from the "celebrity" to the "ethnographic"?and a number of life-writing genres from parental memoir to literary case studies by Oliver Sacks. G. Thomas Couser addresses complex contemporary issues; he investigates the role of disability in narratives of euthanasia and explores the implications of the Human Genome Project for life-writing practices in any age when many regard DNA as a code that "scripts" lives and shapes identity. Throughout, his book is concerned with the ethical implications of the political and economic, as well as the mimetic, aspects of life writing.

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