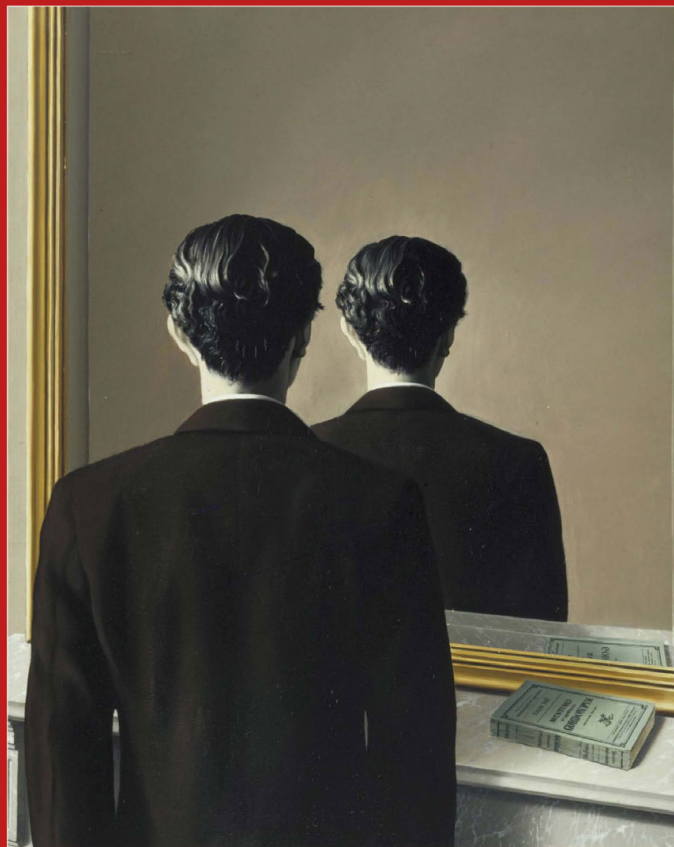


Theoretical Discussions of Biography

APPROACHES FROM HISTORY,
MICROHISTORY, AND LIFE WRITING



EDITED BY HANS RENDERS & BINNE DE HAAN

BRILL

Egodocuments and History Series

Edited by

Arianne Baggerman (*Erasmus University Rotterdam
and University of Amsterdam*)

Rudolf Dekker (*Center for the Study of Egodocuments
and History, Amsterdam*)

Michael Mascuch (*University of California, Berkeley*)

Advisory Board

James Amelang (*Universidad Autónoma Madrid*)

Peter Burke (*Emmanuel College Cambridge*)

Philippe Lejeune (*Emeritus, Université de Paris-Nord*)

Claudia Ulbrich (*Freie Universität Berlin*)

VOLUME 7

The titles published in this series are listed at brill.com/egdo

Theoretical Discussions of Biography

*Approaches from History, Microhistory,
and Life Writing*

Revised and Augmented Edition

Edited by

Hans Renders
Binne de Haan

With a Foreword by

Nigel Hamilton



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: © René Magritte, *La reproduction interdite (Portrait of Edward James)*, 1937 c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2014.

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual “Brill” typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see www.brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1873-653X

ISBN 978-90-04-27014-5 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-27470-9 (e-book)

Copyright 2014 by Koninklijke Brill nv, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill nv incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Nijhoff, Global Oriental and Hotei Publishing. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill nv provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA.

Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Contents

Foreword IX

Nigel Hamilton

Acknowledgements XII

Note on the Revised and Augmented Edition XV

List of Illustrations XVI

Notes on Contributors XVII

1 Introduction: The Challenges of Biography Studies 1

Hans Renders and Binne de Haan

SECTION 1

Historiography of Biography Studies

2 Towards Traditions and Nations 11

Binne de Haan and Hans Renders

3 Roots of Biography: From Journalism to Pulp to Scholarly Based
Non-Fiction 24

Hans Renders

4 The Solace of Doubt? Biographical Methodology after the Short
Twentieth Century 43

James Walter

SECTION 2

Biography and History

5 The Uses of Biography 61

Giovanni Levi

6 The Role of the Individual in History: Biographical and Historical
Writing in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century 75

Sabina Loriga

7 Contemporary Values of Life: Biographical Dictionaries in the
Nineteenth Century 94

Hans Renders

SECTION 3

Biography and Microhistory

- 8 What Is Micro in Microhistory? 105
Matti Peltonen
- 9 Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge 119
Richard D. Brown
- 10 The Limits of Representativeness: Biography, Life Writing,
and Microhistory 129
Hans Renders
- 11 Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It 139
Carlo Ginzburg

SECTION 4

Biography and Life Writing

- 12 Biography in Academia and the Critical Frontier
in Life Writing: Where Biography Shifts into
Life Writing 169
Hans Renders
- 13 The Eclipse of Biography in Life Writing 177
Binne de Haan
- 14 Coming to Terms: Life Writing – from Genre
to Critical Practice 195
Marlene Kadar

Appendices

- 15 Biography 209
Anonymous
- 16 Sex in Biography 213
Ernest Boyd
- 17 The Personal in the Political Biography 216
Hans Renders
- 18 The Biographical Method 222
Hans Renders

19 Why Genealogy and Biography are Not Kin 227*Hans Renders***20 A Nobel Prize for Biography** 232*Nigel Hamilton***Bibliography** 235**Index** 264

Introduction

The Challenges of Biography Studies

Hans Renders and Binne de Haan

We live in a time of hitherto unknown interest in biography. There have always been intense discussions about whether biography belonged with the arts or the sciences or how much intimacy or psychology was justified in a biography. These discussions have subsided, with the passing of time, without being resolved with clear answers. These were also senseless discussions because good writing is not only the provenance of literary authors and because it is more revealing to consider biographical *research* than the form of that research. It is reasonable to hope that every biographer does his best to produce a compelling read, but it should be his research – and not only with respect to issues of intimacy and psychology – that is a proper subject of critical discussion. Speaking in general terms about *biography* has now gradually but definitively become passé. Recent years have also seen advances, as many publications bear witness, in the understanding that theorizing about biography is not intended to educate biographers, but much more to support the study of the significance of biographies. Just as literary theory is not intended to educate people to be writers, but to educate them in the history and significance of literary texts. Biography can receive a different accent in every country, but there exists at the same time a genuine need for an international debate. Biography is, after all, a worldwide phenomenon which continues to provoke many reactions.

A book which reveals the scandalous behavior of some singer or football player cannot be equated with, for example, books about the Bush family or about Oprah which have as their basis journalistic questions, concerning George W. Bush's alleged drug use or the issue of Oprah Winfrey's biological paternity. Biographies which are intended as homage to a writer, entrepreneur, or sports figure represent yet another genre. And there's no point in treating biographically colored collections in which several authors describe some aspect of Hermann Hesse or another person as belonging to the same category as that of a book-length, scholarly biography. Collections of this kind lack in almost all cases a central biographical theme and appear to be designated 'biographies' solely in order to profit from all of the attention which exists for the genre. The same applies to the many studies and histories which bear the subtitle 'biography of a city', 'biography of a river', or 'biography of a political party'.

In this book, biography will consistently designate the study of the life of an individual, based on the methods of historical scholarship, with the goal of illuminating what is public, explained and interpreted in part from the perspective of the personal. The personal is in this respect an important source, but not a determining one. The researcher remains in control of his subject and will critically judge the value of autobiographical material, such as letters, journals and memoirs, just as he would with other sources, and will deviate from them to the extent that he considers them to be unreliable.

Biography was, for a long time, regarded with skepticism by the academic world. After the genre became extremely popular worldwide, scholars began, about a quarter of a century ago, to take a greater interest in the importance that personal background can contribute to the study of history. The time of structural interpretations seemed to be passing. In the meantime, something strange has happened. It looks as if the great interest in a genre that has been made respectable especially by non-academics – biography – is being embraced by the academic world in order to humble it. All over the world, university institutes are appearing which are devoted to Life Writing. Although the personal is the object of study, the knowledge which is garnered in the process is employed in support of sociological structures and patterns.

Life Writing is the phrase which is used to designate biographical research in the broadest sense of the word. The problem with the practice of Life Writing is that it often depends on autobiographical sources which have received commentaries by researchers and have been assigned an interpretation. Autobiographica are important in Life Writing research due to the experience which they record, more than as a possible source for illustrating or contextualizing history. The interpretation of these autobiographies is all too often subordinated to an ideological agenda. Seldom is their significance placed in an historical context; more often in one that is sociological or feminist or in a racial perspective. Life Writing appears too often to serve to confirm – or represent – pre-existing positions or accentuate certain reputations. Autobiographies which confirm that slaves or other disadvantaged people of this world were discriminated against in the past are popular among Life Writers. That makes this field of scholarship a commemorative and rarely a critical activity.¹

¹ Hans Renders, 'Did Pearl Harbor Change Everything?: The Deadly Sins of Biographers', in: *Journal of Historical Biography* 1(2008)3, p. 98–123. Michael Holroyd also drew attention to this and his observation is also, strikingly enough, taken up in Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 213, and see also chapter 12 in this collection.

Although according to some, the genre biography comes under Life Writing, there exists an important difference between the two. The editors of this collection embrace the position that biography as a research area belongs to history. The form in which the research results are presented, however important it may be, is not a subject of discussion in this collection. Biographers like to present themselves as novelists. The literary form, however, is all too often used as camouflage, as an excuse for not doing any serious research. For that reason many authors of non-fiction texts love to display the label 'literary'.² This flirtation with literature is by no means reciprocal. The writer claims an imagined reality, while the biographer presents himself as someone who describes and interprets an actual life. This is to put to the side the historical novel and the *vie romancée* because they are genres which are heavily determined by questions of form but reveal little if anything about the research on which they are based.

Life Writers are interdisciplinary in their orientation but history is rarely of principle importance to them.³ During the great Life Writing-congress in 2010 in Sussex, reference was made in various sessions to the 'terror of facts'. To accentuate the value of autobiographies, the cry was even heard: 'damn the facts!'⁴

Whatever science Life Writing does serve, remains obscure. The essay by Marlene Kadar which is included in this book at least offers a historiography of Life Writing. Her contribution to the debate, published twenty years ago now, has never been bettered. It has to be said, however, that it is more a matter of inventorization than theorizing. This is not her fault. Articles in which the theoretical foundation of Life Writing are described do not exist. That is related to the great diversity among definitions of a theory. We embrace the definition which Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey formulated as a working hypothesis in the introduction to their *Wittgenstein, Theory, and the Arts*: '[Theories] unify a range of apparently disparate, unconnected phenomena by postulating an underlying principle that these phenomena putatively have in common and that can explain their nature or behaviour. Second, the common underlying principle postulated by the theory – whether it takes the form of an entity,

2 Hans Renders, [review John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism. The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst (Mass) 2000], in: [e-zine] *List for Discussion of History and Mass Communication*, on the digital publication page: JHistory@H-Net.MSU.EDU, 4-11-2002.

3 See for example Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

4 Conference 'Life Writing and Intimate Publics'; Sussex, 28 June to 1 July. Some proceedings of this conference are published in *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 34(2011)1.

process, force, concept, or something else – is at least initially hidden from view.⁵ From this point of view, one can conclude that Life Writing has no theoretical foundation. There is no theory which unifies the many varieties of Life Writing in order to be able, subsequently, to study them, even if only because both autobiography and commentary on autobiography fall under the title Life Writing. The theoretical foundation of biography is, for that matter, not terribly solid either, but from the perspective of historiography, the genre can be effectively studied – with due regard to Allen and Turvey's definition of theory.

The volume is divided into four sections. The first three discuss the most important challenges of Biography Studies today. The first contextualizes the research field of Biography Studies in scholarly history. It becomes clear that there are still many desiderata, but also that efforts have already been made to provide biography with a critical framework, as shown by the contribution by James Walter. Additionally, the influence exercised on biography by journalism will be discussed in this first section. In the second section, major contributions by Giovanni Levi and Sabina Loriga demonstrate that biography and history are closely related. A chapter on biographical dictionaries shows the cross-fertilizations among biography, journalism and historiography in the nineteenth century.

The third and fourth sections of the volume are more programmatic. In section three Matti Peltonen, Richard D. Brown, Hans Renders and Carlo Ginzburg analyze the rise and theoretical premises of microhistory. Their contributions make clear the important methodological intersections between biographical research and microhistory. The fourth and last section reveals the fundamental distinction between biography and the current practice of Life Writing in academia. In conclusion, the Appendices contain some discussion pieces from the present and the past that illustrate the debate on Biography Studies in a way that differs from those exemplary and insightful contributions made by the writers included in this book. The contributions of the first four sections have been rewritten or brought up to date at our request.

What makes biography a variety of historiography? Biography and historiography are such broad concepts, just as Life Writing is, that in this collection biography means the so-called scholarly biography. Just as publications by historians can take a variety of forms, depending on theme, period and of course

5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 3rd printing, 1967, original 1953), p. 27 (section 109); Richard Allen and Malcolm Turvey ed., *Wittgenstein, Theory, and the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2001); cited by Ray Monk, 'Life without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding', in: *Poetics Today* 28(2007)3, p. 528–570.

the relevant historian's talent for writing, so does scholarly biography take many forms and sizes. But what these varieties of books which present themselves as biographies have in common is the belief that research on an individual can be tested by means of the same standards as a study of the Second World War or American foreign policy between 1950 and 1965. An important standard is the verifiability of sources. And the representative nature of the research results will always have to be addressed. Is a certain element of the foreign policy of Harry S. Truman or Dwight D. Eisenhower representative for the policy in general or are we dealing with something more or less unique? By asking this question we have arrived, without realizing it, at a variety of historiography, specifically microhistory. Thus, the neurologist and politician David Owen has made clear the extent to which the carefully concealed histories of illness of political leaders have influenced history.⁶

The value of this book depends especially on the new insights which are here presented about what microhistory is. Two of the founders of this methodology – Carlo Ginzburg and Giovanni Levi – have cooperated on this book. In the 1970s and 1980s, they asked that attention be devoted to the tribulations of marginals in historiography, the individuals who until that time had not been represented by historians. Nor did it have to do only with people, such as criminals and other social outcasts, but also with marginal phenomena, like the signature on a painting and other clues and traces, which were a means of forming broader generalizations about the world. Subsequently innumerable authors, such as the Finnish historian Matti Peltonen, have initiated a new phase of microhistory by applying the question of representativeness to the marginals of society, the 'normal exceptions', instead of to well-known groups and individuals. In this way it became possible to shed light on the representativeness of groups of individuals who had not previously been recognized as a community. Peltonen pleads for zooming in on events and situations in such a way that the reduction in scale brings someone into focus not just as politician or artist, but equally as the resident of a village or the member of an extended family.

As an alternative to the commemorative biography or the sociologically tinted Life Writing, we propose a fruitful association between biography and microhistory. To that end we are advancing the work of Ginzburg, Levi and Peltonen and giving it a new impulse. Our new ideas concerning biography and microhistory were presented at the 21st Congress of Historical Sciences in 2010 in Amsterdam. Under the chairmanship and with the approval of Levi

6 David Owen, *Sickness and in Power: Illness in heads of government during the last 100 Years* (London: Methuen, 2008).

(first phase) and Peltonen (second phase), we built on the primary ideas of microhistory in order to forge, subsequently, a new path. That was the context and the motivation for this publication.

The famous book *Montaillou*, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, was for a long time regarded as pioneering because it told, by means of the microhistory of a fourteenth century village in the Pyrenees, the story of the late Middle Ages, just as a grain of sand contains in fact all the properties of the whole beach. Microhistory would be representative of the larger story. We have turned that around. Microhistory is not only concerned with a small history (a village, a painting or a vagabond) in which a forgotten part of history is represented, nor is it only concerned with the 'exceptional normal' or the 'normal exception', but microhistory should rather be exploited in order to place the broader historiography in proper perspective, and perhaps also to alter it a little. The exemplary character of microhistory, we now have to declare, has proved to be a dead end. It concerns itself with the unique events which give new meaning to the larger story. The umpteenth description of the life of a concentration camp prisoner might be gripping, but it will only contribute something to the history of the Second World War if it is *not* exemplary. To understand the whole, we have to understand the parts, but to understand them, we have to understand the whole. There is reciprocal dependence between these two operations; one feeds the other. However, 'understanding of the particular depends on knowledge of the general'.⁷ In their recent handbook on microhistory, Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó show that the precise relationship between microhistory and larger historical narratives can be interpreted in two diametrically opposite ways. Szijártó posits that the results of microhistory derive from microhistorians' attempts to find answers for great historical questions through their microscopic studies. On the other hand, Magnússon emphasizes that the power of microhistory resides precisely in its taking the greatest possible distance from History with a capital-H and in the fresh, alternative view on the past yielded by intensive study of historical fragments.⁸

With the benefit of these insights about uniqueness and representativeness, microhistory can be associated with biography in a theoretical sense. Biography

7 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (1910), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bernard Groethuysen ed. (Stuttgart/Göttingen: Teubner/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1927) Vol. VII. For a discussion of the positions of Dilthey, see chapter 6 of this book.

8 Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 9–10, 157–158.

ought not so much to be trying to understand how a person from the past who has been studied fits into his context and is in that way representative, but would be better advised to consider to what extent a person was distinctive and influenced his context. In 2001, the American historian Jill Lepore described the difference between microhistory of the first phase and biography as follows: 'If biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual's life and his contribution to history, microhistory is founded upon almost the opposite assumption: however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness, but in its exemplariness, in how that individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.'⁹

By stressing the exemplary in this way in microhistorical research, biography can indeed be a part of Life Writing. It is this prosopographical concern which we are addressing. In this way we aim to wrest biography from the sociological context in which microhistory and Life Writing have become a method whereby the experiences of a life can be taken to represent an entire group. Most often this has to do with the experiences of a victim. That can be sympathetic and can even offer some a wholesome therapeutic comfort, but the past cannot after all be corrected. Only our view of the past. When Lepore says: 'The life story, like the mystery, is merely the means to an end – and that end is always explaining the culture,' she is referring in a very one-sided way to the question of representativeness of every biography.¹⁰ The new form of microhistory does precisely the opposite. By means of biographical research on a person, one attempts to determine the extent to which the accepted story about a culture is correct. In this process, the biographer or the microhistorian is not the advocate of the individual but the advocate of history, if a micro-advocate. By ideology, sympathy or another bias, the biographer or the microhistorian ought not to be bothered.

Life Writers, according to Smith and Watson in *Reading Autobiography*, base their work exclusively on sources which came into existence during the life of their principle subject.¹¹ Their concern is, after all, the experience. For biographers this is not at all a consideration. Documents concerning a person which came into existence after her or his death, for example in diaries written by others, can be just as valuable as personal letters by the subject. In this case, too, it is the biographer who is in charge, not the sources. Even more to the

9 Jill Lepore, 'Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography', in: *The Journal of American History* 88(2001)1, p. 129–144.

10 Lepore, 'Historians Who Love Too Much', p. 133.

11 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 6.

point, a critical evaluation of a person, for example in a journalistic work, can be of much greater value for the biographer than the stories about a certain event which the subject himself has told in his autobiography.¹²

Journalism embraces a few points of departure which are also important for microhistorians and biographers. One of them is the question of representativeness. In serious journalism, a context will always be established in reporting which will make clear to the reader whether the uniqueness of an event or its representativeness is being confirmed. Media theories about hypes provide a good illustration of this. During a hype about violence and night life, every trifling incident in the bars on a Friday night is absorbed into this theme. A welfare recipient is only interesting if the reader understands that this person is representative in a certain respect for the social system, or precisely because he is not. 'Journalism is the Destroyer of literature,' wrote the American critic and novelist Julian Hawthorne.¹³ Whether that is true remains an issue, but literature is certainly all too often the Destroyer of Biography, at least in those cases where literary form is used in order to conceal a lack of solid research.

In this book, biography is positioned in the history of scholarship and the book offers at the same time an up-to-date commentary on the genre which addresses it both from the standpoint of scholarship and popular culture. This book also is intended as a handbook in which one can learn what microhistory and Life Writing are.

12 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 'Life Narrative: Definitions and Distinctions' (p. 17) assume that the media want to exploit the people who are given a biography and that therefore the information provided by the subjects themselves is more valuable than the information others provide with regard to them.

13 Julian Hawthorne, 'Journalism the Destroyer of Literature', in: *The Critic* 48(1906) February, p. 166–177.

SECTION 1

Historiography of Biography Studies

∴

Towards Traditions and Nations

Binne de Haan and Hans Renders

*'How many scholars may have thought of tackling the field of biography and then withdrawn from it not knowing how to encompass it?'*¹

Carl Rollyson

During the past two hundred years, many publications about biography have operated in a border region between scholarly debate and critical debate in the more public domains of historical and literary culture, in newspapers and periodicals for a wider readership. The American professor of English literature David Novarr wrote in 1986 that the largest part of literature about biography was informal, diffuse and journalistic, 'causerie rather than treatise'.² In the past decades, a growing group of scholars have tried, however, to study biography critically within the walls of academia. A recurring observation in this context was that little fundamental or critical-theoretical research on biography exists.³ As a consequence of the lack of a solid academic tradition, a satisfying *status quaestionis* could never be achieved in studies and articles about biography. Nor was there any prospect of a scholarly debate with a measure of continuity or a shared research agenda. Looking back, it is noticeable that, among other things, Biography Studies lacked an over-arching cultural-historical perspective covering the various biographical traditions in language areas, countries and intellectual domains. Before more fully explaining this observation, it is, however, important to pause to consider the historical context of the meanings of the word 'biography'. That will lead us directly to various questions that play an important role in thinking about biography.

The word 'biography', which has gained currency over the past few centuries, has had a great variety of meanings. In Great Britain, the first recorded use

-
- 1 Carl Rollyson, *Biography. An Annotated Bibliography* (Pasadena and Englewood Cliffs: Salem Press, 1992), p. 8.
 - 2 David Novarr, *The Lines of Life: Theories of Biography, 1880–1970* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1986), p. xiv.
 - 3 For a treatment of this topos in theoretical literature about biography, see, e.g., William H. Epstein, *Recognizing Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), p. 1–12.

in print of the term 'biography' appears in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁴ In France, the term 'biographie' became common around the same time. Its official use was, however, only established by the Académie française in 1762.⁵ The first use of the word 'Biographie' in Germany can be dated to 1709, but it only became a standard term in German usage as a designation for the description of a life in the nineteenth century. Other related terms in German were 'Lebensbeschreibung', 'Nekrolog', 'Charaktere', 'Portrait', 'Gemälde', 'Ehrenmal', 'Denkmal'. In English, similar words were in use: 'life', 'story', 'narrative of the life'; and in French, 'vie', 'caractère', 'éloge' and 'portrait'.⁶ A striking feature of these terms related to biography is the stress on commemoration.

What path had the word 'biography' followed before it slowly achieved, from the seventeenth century, widespread use? Although it is a Greek compound, the word 'biographia' was first used in the sixth century, long after the flourishing of classical civilization.⁷ In that period of flourishing, in which Plutarch and Suetonius wrote works that would become part of the biographical canon, the terms 'bios' (Greek) and 'vita' (Latin) were the most widely used terms for biographical texts.⁸ 'Vita' survived into the seventeenth century as the dominant term for the description of a life, before the modern 'biography' overtook the Latin word. The subjects of vitae were people with special talents or exceptional destinies, such as politicians, kings, and royalty. In the Middle Ages, vitae of bishops, abbots and saints also appeared – later often designated hagiographies. Profane vitae, which described the lives of secular figures, were

4 Falko Schnicke, '1. Begriffsgeschichte: Biographie und verwandte Termini', in: Christian Klein ed., *Handbuch Biographie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2009), p. 1–6; Schnicke designates the year 1683 (based on John Dryden; cf. Donald Winslow, *Life-Writing. A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography and Related Forms* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995, [original 1980])). Ruth Hoberman argues for the year 1661: Ruth Hoberman, 'Biography: General Survey', in: Margaretta Jolly ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. 109–112.

5 Daniel Madelénat, *La biographie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984) established that the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* took up 'Biographie' in 1762, but points out that in 1755 the word was also used in the second edition of the *Manuel lexique ou Dictionnaire portatif* by Abbé Antoine François Prévost: p. 14, note 2.

6 Schnicke, '1. Begriffsgeschichte: Biographie und verwandte Termini'.

7 The first use of the word 'biographia' is attributed to the Neoplatonic philosopher Damascius (ca. 462–538 AD).

8 Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography. Four Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971); A. Chorus, *Het beeld van de mens in de oude biografie en hagiografie* (The Hague: Leopold, 1962).

characterized by a mixture of historical and symbolic elements. They shared a common concern with virtues, and were anecdotal and factual in content. It is striking that much attention was devoted to the outward appearance of the subject, down to the smallest details. Later, in the Early Modern Period, more attention was given to a description of the character of the main subject, independently of the facts and the historical context. This is the origin of our use of terms like 'portrait' and 'character'.⁹ This development coincided in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with the translation of, among other works, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* in the context of the Renaissance. These translations led to new descriptions of the lives of contemporaries from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which were inspired more by the *vitae* of the classical world than subsequent descriptions of lives from later centuries would be.¹⁰

Surprisingly, little attention has been paid in Biography Studies to biographical texts in this transitional phase between the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period, or indeed to anything earlier than the now archetypal English-language benchmarks in the history of biography by Samuel Johnson (1709–1784) and James Boswell (1740–1795). The theory of biography has addressed itself until now especially to the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The stress has been placed mostly on literary, formal and ethical aspects of biographical practice. In considering the predecessors of the present-day biography, one's thoughts do not immediately turn to the four gospels or to nineteenth-century journalistic portrait series. Distinguishing different types among the great quantity and variety of biographies has never really been accomplished. A generalized perspective on 'biography' has often been predominant, with the result that the cultural-historical and topical context of biographical writings has been left to play a supporting role. Thus, for example, the literary historian Paul Murray Kendall, author of *The Art of Biography* (1965), chose, in his article 'Biographical literature' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, a classification of types of biography based on gradations of objectivity and subjectivity.¹¹ The entry as a whole testifies to a strong tendency toward generalization: under the term 'biographical literature', Kendall even includes both biography and autobiography. His definition of 'biographical literature' – notice the word 'literature' – reads: 'One of the oldest forms of

9 Schnicke, '1. Begriffsgeschichte: Biographie und verwandte Termini'.

10 As is well known, Shakespeare, too, was inspired, for his biographically colored plays, by Plutarch. Reed Whittemore, *Pure Lives: The Early Biographers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

11 P.M.K., 'Biographical Literature', in: *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, (Chicago [etc]: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1994).

literary expression, biographical literature seeks to recreate in words the life of a human being, that of the writer himself or of another person, drawing upon the resources, memory and all available evidences – written, oral, pictorial.' The question is whether an autobiographer will use 'all available evidences' in writing his story.

The search for a satisfying definition of biography is guided by the scholarly background of the author who investigates biographies and the theoretical approach to the selected subject. Literary researchers tend, in their reflections on biography, to analyze its development from their literary perspective. Within 'literary theory' autobiographical texts play an important role, and so attention to the field of 'biography' is directed especially toward autobiography. The biographical approach to literature in literary studies in the twentieth century stood in the shadow of the literary text itself.¹² For that reason, research into the genre of autobiography was in a better position, because autobiography was much closer to the 'creative' and often autobiographically inspired novel than the more historical form of the biography. That is evident in the question that is almost always put to literary authors in interviews: whether the events related in a novel are based on those of real life, and are thus autobiographical.

In considerations of biography in the English-speaking world, the dominant perspective is that of literary studies and literature. An important step in the maturation of the theory of biography would be to give room to other disciplines that are important to biography, in particular disciplines such as historiography, journalism and other fields in the humanities.¹³ To arrive at a new discipline of Biography Studies, it is necessary that researchers begin to think in more interdisciplinary terms and seek out new theoretical definitions. The attention devoted to biography in recent decades can be explained by the increasing convergence in the humanities since the 1970s. The previously more strict borders between scholarly disciplines have become hazier. This offers opportunities to examine subjects and themes that can be situated among various academic fields, of which biography is an outstanding example.

12 Of significant impact were René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948) and Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in: *Aspen* (1967)5–6 ('La mort de l'auteur', in: *Mantéia* (1968)5, p. 12–17).

13 Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, 'The Limits of Representativeness. Biography, Life Writing and Microhistory', in: *Storia della Storiografia* 29(2011)59/60, p. 32–42; Hans Renders, *De zeven hoofdzonden van de biografie. Over biografen, historici en journalisten* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008).

The scholarly field which, after literature, has been most involved with biography is historiography. Biography is often called the bastard child of historiography and literature.¹⁴ Biography was in any case not recognized by either discipline as being fully worthwhile. The history of a human life was considered to be a form too limited to bear the full weight of historiography. In studies of the theme biography-historiography, the stress is often placed on the gap between these two activities, especially since the professionalization of historical scholarship in the nineteenth century. The developments in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment finally led to a historiography in which the historian interpreted the past by means of a supposedly objective, rational-empirical methodology. The writing of biographies was an exception, and was considered to be a subjective, moral and literary activity. Historiography addressed itself to great historical processes and changes. The need to associate large-scale historical narratives with the historical reality of everyday human experience began to be felt more and more in academic circles only in the last decades of the twentieth century.

In the twentieth century, other academic fields within the humanities besides literature and historiography appeared which in one way or another were preoccupied with biographical methodology. Sociology, psychology and anthropology are the most striking of these. But scholars in religious studies, social work, philosophy and ethics also claim that their scholarly insights are valuable when reflecting on biographies. A domain that, just like biography, has long occupied a problematic position in academia is journalism. In recent decades, journalism has, however, emerged in universities as a subject of research. In Biography Studies, journalism is undervalued as a contributor to thought concerning biographical practices. That is only slowly changing.¹⁵ Partially due to the topicality of the present-day biography, which means that the content of many biographies is determined by its (historical) currency, a not insubstantial and even heated element of the debate about biography takes place in newspapers and periodicals. The form of biographies also displays correspondences with those of journalistic reports: they are both a

14 Samuel Johnson positioned biography between historiography and the novel; see also Ray Monk, 'Life without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding', in: *Poetics today* 28(2007)3, p. 527–570.

15 Steve Weinberg, *Telling the Untold Story. How Investigative Reporters Are Changing the Craft of Biography* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1992); Renders, *De zeven hoofdzonden van de biografie*; Hans Renders, 'Did Pearl Harbor Change Everything? The Deadly Sins of Biographers', in: *Journal of Historical Biography* 2(2008)3, p. 88–113.

'narrative form of non-fiction'.¹⁶ Journalistic literature, which made dramatic advances in the 1930s, can also be considered one of the important influences on present-day biography.¹⁷ This narrative style was considered to be problematic. Terms such as 'literary non-fiction' and also 'faction' appeared during the course of the twentieth century in literature, historiography and journalism to designate this awkwardness. Later, in the United States in the 1960s, the New Journalism emerged, as practiced most famously by the American author and journalist Tom Wolfe.¹⁸

Journalists wanted to move beyond the traditional news report, writing lengthy essays and adopting a highly literary style, in which invented dialogue was not unacceptable, while writers like Truman Capote and Norman Mailer turned from imaginative fiction to nonfictional subjects. In recent decades, the border between fiction and non-fiction has become increasingly hard to make out. The genre of 'creative nonfiction' came into being, which is even taught in writing programs. More and more works of literature purport to be based on events that really happened and so can claim to contribute to a better understanding of the past.¹⁹ In the meantime, studies have appeared that consider the possible value of 'historical' and 'biographical' novels.²⁰ In discussions about biography, the border between literature and nonfiction/historiography has been an important point of debate. Is it permissible to offer dialogues in biographies and creative reconstructions of the past? Readers want to know, after all, whether they are reading fiction or nonfiction, and trust that the author is not betraying their expectations.²¹

In addition to the academic-institutional diversity of attention for biography, the interdisciplinarity of biography manifests itself in the elaboration of individual biographies. In a study of the life of a banker, the biographer will not be able to avoid economics, and the life of an art collector must always in part be made comprehensible through art history and the history of art collecting. Various types of biography can be distinguished by the varieties of the subjects' professions and functions. Biographies of engineers, politicians or

16 John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

17 Renders, *De zeven hoofdzonden van de biografie*.

18 E.W. Johnson and Tom Wolfe ed., *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

19 Beverley Southgate, *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow [etc.]: Longman, 2009).

20 John F. Keener, *Biography and the Postmodern Historical Novel* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001); Dennis Kersten, *Travels with fiction in the field of biography. Writing the lives of three nineteenth-century authors*, ([Nijmegen]: [n.p., 2011]).

21 Dorrit Cohn, 'Fictional versus Historical Lives: Borderlines and Border-line Cases', in: *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 19(1989)1, p. 3–24.

writers can be categorized by the nature of the occupation of the main subject. The biography of a writer is different from that of an entrepreneur, and the biography of a politician is likewise different from that of a television personality. Biographies of politicians share things in common, because they pertain to the same domain of knowledge, namely politics. On the basis of this line of thought, designations for biography's various categories have emerged: biographies of writers, political biographies, scientific biographies (biographies of scientists), entrepreneur biographies and artists' biographies. The biography of a writer is also called a 'literary biography', although the phrase is not meant to imply a biography 'written in a literary way'.²²

Most authors who write about biography have been active in biographical research. Practicing biographers have written about their work in collections published in recent decades.²³ While the observations of biographers can be interesting, the scope of these texts obviously often remains limited to what they themselves have written. Beside these biographers who reflect on their work, there is another group of writers who take a theoretical interest in biography, derived from their work as academics. These scholars operate according to the assumptions of their own fields, in which biography is generally considered to be a problematic discipline. Because they have tried to establish broader analyses of the development of biography, or have chosen aspects of the history of biography as their subject, these studies contribute more to theoretical research on biography than do the accounts of authors who focus on their own experiences as biographers.

Biography Studies Associated with Traditions and Nations

Since 2000, there has been greater attention given to biography as a subject of academic research. Across the world, a number of centers devoted to the biography have been established at universities.²⁴ There is, however, a

22 Dale Salwak ed., *The literary biography. Problems and solutions* (Basingstoke [etc.]: Macmillan, 1996).

23 For example, Eric Homberger and John Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988); T.C.W. Blanning and David Cannadine ed., *History and Biography. Essays in Honour of Derek Beales* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

24 Well known as centers devoted specifically to biography are: Biography Institute, University of Groningen, the Netherlands; Ludwig Boltzmann Institut für Geschichte und Theorie der Biographie, Universität Wien, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek and Thomas-Bernhard-Archiv Gmunden, Austria; European Network on Theory and Practice

simultaneous development underway, which appears to be positive with respect to research on biography: the rise of research under the banner 'Life Writing'. In theory, research on biographical texts could have a place in that category, next to autobiographies, diaries, memoirs, testimonies, travel literature and autobiographical fiction, but in practice there is within Life Writing little room for biography.²⁵ This discipline seems to have emerged from an academic culture that is striving for political emancipation, in which life stories are exploited as the testimony of witnesses mostly of historical oppression. An international mailing list, by the International Auto/Biography Association, which also serves as a gathering point for international Life Writing research, shows how Life Writing is a kind of research in which the emancipation of groups plays an important role and attention is devoted to rather far-fetched topics.²⁶ It is striking that historians are absent from this field. A large number of researchers within Life Writing come from the area of Cultural Studies, an amalgam of researchers whose interests lie in gender, postcolonial studies, trauma and literary theory.²⁷ The one-sided focus on autobiographical texts, memoirs and testimonies is telling. These 'ego-documents', a term coined by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser, are often not considered to be *historical* sources.²⁸ The general image of research in biography is, following the rise of Life Writing, equivocal. On the one hand, a line can be traced from the 1970s

of Biography (2009–2011), Universitat de València, Spain; National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, Australia; Consortium for the Study of Biography, University of Southern California, USA; The Oxford Centre for Life-Writing (OCLW), Wolfson College, University of Oxford, UK; AHRC Research Network 'Challenges to Biography', University of Southampton, UK.

An independent chair, in History and Theory of Biography, has been established only at the Biography Institute of the University of Groningen, and a number of biographies are defended there as doctoral dissertations each year. In addition a book series is published there (with eight volumes so far having appeared) in which scholarly studies of biography are produced by non-biographers and a Master of Arts program is offered in the History and Theory of Biography.

25 See chapters 12 and 13.

26 Via the digital newsletter of the IABA, announcements are made on an almost daily basis concerning conferences which, for example, concern the processing, in autobiographical texts, of trauma after vacations, post-natal trauma, life writing under water, the relation between eating habits and life writing, the relation between women and their fathers, attitudes towards animals in childhood, etc.

27 Jolly ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing*, in which articles about Life Writing as well as approaches to the study of biography can be found.

28 J. Presser, 'Memoires als geschiedbron', in: *Winkler Prins Encyclopedie* viii (Elsevier: Amsterdam, 1958). Reprint: M.C. Brands and M.E.H.N. Mout ed., *Uit het werk van dr. J. Presser* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 1969), p. 277–282.

showing a growing academic interest in Biography Studies, but on the other, research in biographical writings from the 1990s appears to have been carried out from an autobiographical and emancipatory perspective.

Attempts have been made, nevertheless, in recent decades, to study biography specifically as an academic subject and to support it theoretically. A number of German publications in particular are noteworthy for having attempted to place biography both in scholarly and international contexts.²⁹ One of these publications, *Theorie der Biographie*, is a comprehensively annotated anthology of texts important for the theory of biography, which includes German translations of texts in English and French in addition to texts written in German. That the German consideration of biography has had a more international character than what has been produced in English is evident, among other things, from the two most important English-language counterparts to the German publication: anthologies by James Clifford (1962) and David Novarr (1986) address themselves exclusively to English-language authors.³⁰ Among the most successful attempts in the past to study the biography traditions in languages other than English were the articles in the journal *Biography*, a publication of the University of Hawaii's Center of Biographical Research – by virtue of its location and history an institution having a more foreign orientation than what we would find elsewhere in the United States or in Great Britain – and those in the collection *Mapping Lives* (2002).³¹

29 Thus, in 2009, Christian Klein ed., *Handbuch Biographie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2009) appeared. In this book, biography is treated from many different perspectives by a group of 47 authors. Scholarly theory, national and practical themes are discussed in articles of a few pages each. Christian Klein ed., *Grundlagen der Biographik. Theorie und Praxis biographischen Schreibens* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002) had appeared earlier. A small group of the authors contributing to these two publications have been united, since 2004, in the scholarly network Zentrum für Biographik. It is typical that the network is not set up within a university, or associated with a university, though most members are academics. Additionally, in recent years, three titles have been published by the Ludwig Boltzmann Institut in Vienna, all of which treat the theory and history of biography: Wilhelm Hemecker ed., *Die Biographie. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009); Bernhard Fetz and Hannes Schweiger ed., *Die Biographie. Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009); Bernhard Fetz and Wilhelm Hemecker ed., *Theorie der Biographie. Grundlagentexte und Kommentar* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011).

30 James L. Clifford ed., *Biography as an Art. Selected Criticism 1560–1960* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962); Novarr, *The Lines of Life*.

31 Anthony M. Friedson ed., *New Directions in Biography. Essays* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981); Carol Ramelb ed., *Biography East and West. Selected Conference Papers*

Despite the relatively large number of articles and monographs by British and American authors in Biography Studies, there is a striking absence of recent, important academic publications in the English-speaking countries, such as handbooks or textbooks about biography. A reason for this absence is the private status of biography within the academic world, especially in Great Britain. Recent books about biography are expressly intended for a broad public. These are books written by authors with solid academic reputations, like Nigel Hamilton and Hermione Lee, who have published widely read biographies.³² The discussion on biography generally appears to take place in the English-speaking countries, including the United States, more in public arenas like newspapers and periodicals than in academic spaces.

Biographies and reflections on those biographies are inextricably linked to national cultural-historical debates and traditions. A large number of biographies are about people who are especially well known in their own country or language area. Biographies also have an important role to play in the formation of national identities, such as those expressed in imagined communities and *lieu de mémoire*.³³ The wide-ranging applications of biography and especially the variety of forms that it can take in different countries and fields of knowledge make it necessary to distinguish various national and disciplinary 'cyclical movements' in the development of the term 'biography'. And to escape from the idea of a 'universal' sense of biography, but also, paradoxically enough,

(Honolulu: College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature, University of Hawaii, 1989); George Simson, *Biography and the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i, 1976–1999* (N.p.: n.p., 2010), rev. ed. of George Simson, 'Biography and the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i, 1976–1999', in: *Biography and Source Studies* 5, ed. Frederick R. Karl (New York: AMS, 2000), p. 61–96; Peter France and William St. Clair ed., *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford/New York: The British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2002).

32 Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2008); Nigel Hamilton, *How To Do Biography: A Primer* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2008); Hermione Lee, *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005); Hermione Lee, *Biography. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

33 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983); Astrid Erll, 'Biographie und Gedächtnis', in: Klein ed., *Handbuch Biographie*, p. 79–86; Hannes Schweiger and Deborah Holmes, 'Nationale Grenzen und ihre biographischen Überschreitungen', in: Fetz and Schweiger ed., *Die Biographie. Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie*, p. 385–418; Gerry van Klinken, 'Nationale helden in Indonesië', in: Rosemarijn Hoefte, Peter Meel and Hans Renders ed., *Tropenlevens. De (post)koloniale biografie* (Amsterdam and Leiden: Boom/KITLV Uitgeverij, 2008), p. 216–235.

to demonstrate this sense, it is important to identify concrete differences in, for example, British and French traditions in writing biographies. Although there are many nuances in the works produced in these and other countries, general observations can be made. In Great Britain, the concept 'literary biography' is a dominant variety, for example, within which biographers are also novelists; many biographies deal with literary figures. The writers of the Bloomsbury Group, among them Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, have had an important influence on thinking about biography. In France, the historical biography is predominantly represented, as a result of the powerful social-philosophical tradition, but also of the preeminence of national-historical traditions.

In this regard, more distinctions can be identified in national and professional traditions evident in publishing practices, choices of subject for biographies and the style and execution of biographies, which express themselves in various types of biographies. A fruitful way of revealing these differences is comparative biographical research. This kind of research can be conducted by comparing biographies sharing common characteristics (subjects, book structure), but also by comparing biographies of the same person. Comparisons among publications in various countries of biographies of the same figure – for example, Cleopatra, Goethe, Napoleon or Churchill – can shed light on the changes and differences among biographical traditions. At the same time, such research can reveal the shared characteristics within the genre of biography.

In France, Germany and the Netherlands, there was evidence, up until the 1960s and 1970s, of a decline in academic interest in biography, which was caused by the preference for more structural and quantitative approaches in the humanities. But in the 1980s, biography returned to the fore. The influence of developments in academia on the content of biographies in the various European countries produced common trends, even if there has been little international cross-fertilization in research on biography.

It is conspicuous, too, that scholars regularly point to the absence of a biography culture in their own country. Authors in Germany, France and the Netherlands have done so. They write about the difficulties that biography has experienced in those countries. Simultaneously, their works point to the qualities that distinguish the biographical traditions of their own countries, though they do so often tentatively, based more on random observations than on empirical research into series of biographies.

In Germany, the repudiation of biography by academic historiography in the *vie romancée* discussion in the 1920s was an important cause of the low estimation of biography by German historians in subsequent decades. In recent

decades, biography seems once again to be part of German historiography.³⁴ In France, biography also was given a hard time by historiography. That was a result of the agenda of the *Annales* historians, who rejected biography as a historiographical form. In the 1970s and 1980s, French historians took a new direction with the rise of the history of mentalities and ‘new’ cultural history, which also gave biography more prominent attention. In addition, biography in France is more closely a subject of the national French philosophical tradition. Sartre wrote biographies (of Flaubert, among others) and also reflected on biography.³⁵ Foucault wrote about the lives of infamous men. Bourdieu put forward the problem of the ‘biographical illusion’.³⁶

Great Britain also has a tradition of biographies of national symbols, but there it is the domain of writers that determines the image of biography. But there is increasing influence of developments in the United States, where biography, emerging from the tradition of newspaper reporting and investigative journalism, is an important phenomenon. Biographies here too seem to belong especially to the domain of popular culture: biographies address the lives of people like Donald Trump, Lady Di and Jacqueline Kennedy, though they are often governed by a journalistic-academic standard.

In addition to the parceling out of Biography Studies according to disciplinary borders, there also seems to be a question of another approach which might be influential in theoretical research on biography: an inclination making the history of reflection on biography a history of forebears, a tradition based only on texts of well-known names. Individuals who reflected on biography receive more attention in such cases than groups or types of biographies. Plutarch, Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, Wilhelm Dilthey, Lytton Strachey, Virginia Woolf, Jean-Paul Sartre and Leon Edel are important figures in

34 Roger Paulin, ‘Adding Stones to the Edifice: Patterns of German Biography’, in: France and St. Clair ed., *Mapping Lives*, p. 103–114; Olaf Hähner, *Historische Biographik. Die Entwicklung einer geschichts-wissenschaftlichen Darstellungsform von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).

35 See the chapter ‘Sartre and the question of biography’, in: D. LaCapra, *Rethinking intellectual history* (Ithaca [etc.]: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 184–233; Albert Dikovich, ‘Dem “ursprünglichen Entwurf” auf der Spur. Die biographischen Hermeneutik Jean-Paul Sartres’, in: Fetz and Hemecker ed., *Theorie der Biographie*, p. 247–256.

36 Hannes Schweiger, ‘Die Macht der Archive. Zu Michel Foucault: “Das Leben der infamen Menschen”’, in: Fetz and Hemecker ed., *Theorie der Biographie*, p. 277–284; Pierre Bourdieu, ‘L’illusion biographique’, in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 11(1986)62/63, p. 69–72; Hannes Schweiger, ‘Das Leben als U-Bahnfahrt. Zu Pierre Bourdieu: “Die Biographische Illusion”’, in: Fetz and Hemecker ed., *Theorie der Biographie*, p. 311–316.

thinking about biography, but can also divert attention from cultural-historical research to corpora of biographies and biographical texts. Recognizing and distinguishing in a comparative perspective from among the many biographical traditions in various language areas, regions and nations, which are in turn determined by topical, cultural and academic questions, constitutes one of the first agenda points for Biography Studies today.

Roots of Biography

From Journalism to Pulp to Scholarly Based Non-Fiction

Hans Renders

The development of biography often has been associated with shifts in historiography and literature. Theoretical publications on the biographical enterprise however offer opportunities to chart changes in the genre since the midnineteenth century as driven by developments in journalism. The influence of journalistic methods on biography has largely been underestimated until now. Another key area for exploration is the tension between fictionalised biography and the genre as approached by historians. While an artificial distinction is sometimes posited between those whose primary focus is literary on the one hand, and scholarly writers on the other, writing well is just as important to non-fiction writers as it is to novelists. Biography belongs to the non-fiction-genre.¹

Sidney Lee, editor of Britain's *Dictionary of National Biography* (DNB), gave the Leslie Stephen Lecture, named after the DNB's first editor, in 1911. In the lecture, entitled *Principles of Biography* (see Illustration 3.1), Lee demonstrated that these principles were products of their age. 'Biography exists to satisfy a natural instinct in man – the commemorative instinct.'² At the time of Lee's speech, a type of biography was already emerging that would undermine the commemorative principle, namely the critical, interpretive biography. Lee cannot be blamed for failing to foresee that certain developments in the historical sciences and journalism would lead to a new kind of biography.

Commemorative biography already had a long history. Biographies were published on the occasion of anniversaries and other commemorative milestones to remember those men and women who had lived remarkable lives in the public eye. Such works still appear today. Commemorative biography, in seeking to consolidate the subject's reputation, is seldom scholarly. The biographical subject is seen as a unique person, rather than a representative of his time, environment, or group. The commemorative biography is celebratory,

¹ Hans Renders, 'Did Pearl Harbor Change Everything?: The Deadly Sins of Biographers', in: *Journal of Historical Biography* 2(2008)3, p. 98–123.

² Sidney Lee, *Principles of Biography*, The Leslie Stephen Lecture, Delivered at Senate House, Cambridge, 13 May 1911 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), p. 7.

PRINCIPLES OF BIOGRAPHY

THE LESLIE STEPHEN LECTURE
DELIVERED IN THE SENATE HOUSE, CAMBRIDGE
ON 13 MAY 1911

BY

SIR SIDNEY LEE

Hon. D.Litt. Oxford

Cambridge :
at the University Press
1911

ILLUSTRATION 3.1 *Title page of: Sidney Lee, Principles of Biography (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).*

often reinforcing the good things that we already knew about a particular person. Such biographies have often been authorized, or indeed even commissioned. Intensive research into the social context in which the biographical subject lived is generally lacking. Instead, the author may be generous with stylistic devices, sometimes with success.

The critical interpretive biography, however, is based on diverse sources, both personal and indirect. It situates the biographical subject in a particular context, and addresses the extent to which he was unique in his environment. The interpretive biography is usually an unauthorized biography, and the author generally adopts the disciplinary conventions of a historian rather than the techniques of a literary author.

In some respects, the development of biography as a critical genre is analogous to developments in journalism. The interpretive biography evolved in the periodical press as a reaction to current events, thus playing a role in public opinion. In England, France, and the Netherlands, countless biographical magazines were published during the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Little scholarly research has been conducted to establish the extent to which journalism, literature, and current affairs determined the content of those magazines. Samuel Johnson's writings on current affairs and biography are often seen as heralding the modern biographical genre. His 'twopenny' periodical, *The Rambler*, appeared from 1750 to 1752. Johnson drew upon a variety of sources for his biographical works, not only the conventional published sources, but also private correspondence, diaries, and information derived from conversations.³ He used this method to write a biography of the young actor and poet Richard Savage, which was published in 1744, shortly after Savage's death. The result was an almost exclusive focus on Savage's life, and especially the sordid or salacious details that illuminated Savage's moral failings. Savage's poetry is hardly mentioned. James Boswell's famous biography of Johnson stresses Johnson's focus on detailed journalistic information to build a complete understanding of the activities of the biographical subject. Indeed, Boswell himself adopted this approach and did not hesitate to include 'even journalistic, gossipy detail and color' when writing about Johnson's life.⁴ Johnson was the catalyst for the many biographically inspired periodicals that would appear in later years.

3 Samuel Johnson, *Life of Savage*, Clarence Tracy ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971, original 1744).

4 Nigel Hamilton. *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 94.

The tradition of interpretive biography writing is not only rooted in the discipline of history or in literature, but also in journalism. A biographical culture flourished in the French press. The nineteenth-century journalist Jules Barbey d'Aureville published articles about particular persons under titles such as 'Les Blagueurs en littérature' and 'Les Chroniqueurs', first in newspapers and magazines, then as pamphlets, and later compiled in book form.⁵ Barbey d'Aureville was free-spirited enough to make use of theories that would put his own journalistic practices into perspective. In his view, journalism and biography are alike: they form a conspiracy against history. They are but temporary products, and historians will come to rely on them as if they encompass eternal truths. Biographers are predators in need of prey; if there is no prey, they invent one, or base one on malicious rumours. Biographers exploit their subjects for publicity, just as is often said of journalists.

Halfway through the nineteenth century, Eugène de Mirecourt presided over the publication of a series of pamphlets in France, of which a hundred issues appeared, under the title *Les Contemporains*. Under constant pressure to be topical, the word 'contemporain' was one that journalists gladly adopted. As early as 1830, dozens of novels written by journalists appeared in France, with subtitles like 'roman contemporain' or 'roman d'actualité'.⁶ Later in the century, Anatole France collated his 'fiction d'actualité' – we would now call it a literary chronicle – which he first published in *L'Écho de Paris* and in *Le Figaro*, into his four-part *L'Histoire contemporaine*.⁷ De Mirecourt did something similar with his weekly short biography of a living contemporary, the 'biographie contemporaine'. De Mirecourt was a journalist, but he promoted himself as 'le biographe'. De Mirecourt's four-part *Histoire contemporaine: Portraits et silhouettes au XIX siècle*, which reprinted and supplemented his earlier pamphlets, appeared in 1876. The form of publication was not only different, from pamphlet to book, but the ambition and status also changed. As the slightly adjusted title suggests – *Les Contemporains* became *Histoire contemporaine* – the subject of interest was less the individual figure – Alfred Musset, Victor Hugo, Alphonse de Lamartine, or Honoré de Balzac – and more the contemporary history of which these persons formed a part.⁸

5 J. Barbey d'Aureville, *Les Ridicules du temps* (Paris: Éd. Rouveyre et G. Blond, 1883). The seventh edition appeared in 2003 as a reprint by Phénix Éditions.

6 Marie-Ève Thérénty, *La Littérature au quotidien. Poétiques journalistiques au XIX siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007), p. 124–152.

7 Anatole France, *La Vie littéraire* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1888). Hans Renders, 'Actualiteit van biografica', in: *Nieuw Letterkundig Magazijn* 25(2007)1/2, p. 16–23.

8 Renders, 'Actualiteit van biografica'.

In the Netherlands, biographical magazines were established in the nineteenth century in which current affairs dictated the choice of subjects. The Dutch magazine *Mannen van Beteekenis in onze dagen* (Men of Significance in our days) published its first issue, which dealt with German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, in 1870. According to the editors, this was not because he was such an admirable man, but because the name Bismarck had appeared so often in the Dutch press during the Franco-German war, and Dutch readers knew little about this German statesman.⁹ Such biographical magazines played an active role in shaping public opinion on the activities of eminent persons. In France, a written sketch as a response to current events was called 'une biographie contemporaine'. This can be regarded as a significant break with commemorative biography.

In journalism in particular, the 'biographie contemporaine' was used to test prevailing concepts of high culture by examining the lives of the key players in this culture. For newspapers, the biographical form offered a more intimate mode of keeping up to date with current events, and those of name and fame could be judged according to society's ideal of a worthy life. Every available means was employed for that purpose, including the revelation of intimate details. Journalism was meant to cater to the vulgar needs of the general public. The newspaper was meant for the common people, the book for the civilized citizen. In other words, the journalist did not serve a higher purpose. Public opinion was a sleeping monster that could awaken at any moment and bring turmoil into the streets.

This development naturally encountered opposition among those who came to believe that newspapers were merely a means by which the common people could express their ideas about the bourgeoisie and elite. Current affairs and news were, according to these critics, phenomena that should be absent in the lives of the real intellectuals and pure artists. It was an attitude that dated back to what Baudelaire called 'la tyrannie de la circonstance', by which he meant that one should not let oneself be driven to insanity by the issues of day. In the autumn of 1927, the magazine *Margins* even devoted three special issues to 'Les maladies actuelles de la littérature'. There had been a tremendous shift in literacy, but mass culture and public opinion were, in the eyes of many, still dubious phenomena.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the biographer could escape from this journalistic devaluation by writing a commemorative biography, thus presenting himself as the hagiographer of a noble person. According to The British-American biographer Nigel Hamilton, interpretive biographies

9 Editorial, *Mannen van Beteekenis in onzen tijd* 1(1870)1 (Haarlem: A.C. Kruseman).

appeared the moment biographers directed their attention to the vices in the lives of their heroes.¹⁰

Lust

Lust seems inextricably linked to the biographical genre. Why is that so? I fear that a confusion of definitions is at stake. The tabloids promote what is sometimes called 'human interest' in journalism, little stories about famous people's unimportant personal affairs, adultery, and other intimate details. Just as there is a connection between the interpretive biography and journalism, there is also a relationship between the so-called human interest magazines we know since the seventies in the twentieth century and commemorative biography. In fact, the rise of the interpretive biography preceded the tabloids' preoccupation with human interest, and came before the modern biographical focus on the bedroom secrets of actors and singers.

The nature of the research that is conducted beforehand marks the real difference between the commemorative and critical biography. The author of a commemorative biography cannot derive any benefit from sources that dispute the good reputation of his hero, and therefore will not work exhaustively to unearth those sources. These two research traditions result in two types of biographies, the 'low' and 'high' biography, Carl Rollyson notes in his beautiful collection of essays, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism?: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography*.¹¹ In contrast to the principle guiding the young research discipline of cultural studies, 'low' and 'high' do not refer to the *subject* of research itself. Cultural studies investigates low culture phenomena like soap operas and pulp fiction, but, in biographical research, 'low' refers to the *kind* of research that has been conducted. Therefore, the subject in a 'low biography' could be a representative of 'high culture', while a 'high biography' could be a biography of a pulp-writer or popular singer. High biography is almost by definition critical biography, while low biography may include the old-fashioned commemorative biography. But while commemorative biography may claim artistry, it is not literature. Unlike a novelist, a biographer needs to accept, with some humility, that a biography has a shelf life. We all know: pride goes before a fall.

10 Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History*, p. 27.

11 Carl Rollyson, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism? Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), p. 52.

Pride

The expressions 'littérature' and 'biographie' were both coined in the eighteenth century, and the combination of literature and biography, culminating in the 'biographical novel', is also a phenomenon originating in the eighteenth century.¹² As early as the nineteenth century, the meanings of the two terms began to diverge, and biography increasingly became the domain of the academic historian. But there were final convulsions. In the 1920s and 1930s, the so called *vie romancée* made its appearance, a genre which was disparaged by the famous Dutch historian Johan Huizinga. He condemned the practice of inventing situations or events in the life of the hero of a biography. This was, according to Huizinga, 'an unworthy concession to laziness, and a shameful victory for sensation'.¹³

In recent years, this phenomenon has given rise to another: the biography as a novel. Or more precisely: the biographer who thinks he is a novelist, like Vladimir Nabokov in his biographical portrait of the Russian author and satirist Nikolai Gogol. The curious thing is that real novelists today do not wish to be associated with biographers at all. A thick anthology could be collected of quotations in which novelists depict biographers as profiteers, vindictive losers, and so on, qualities that are also ascribed to literary critics. But it does not stop there. Over the last few years, many novels have been published in which one of the characters is a biographer. We are familiar with novels and films featuring a sloppy, alcoholic, and unreliable reporter, a journalist who cannot even dream of being the politician or sportsman he writes about. Biographers in novels are not only unreliable, but also deeply frustrated and yearning for revenge, because they cannot be writers or artists themselves. There was a time when reporters were stock characters in novels, then came the photographers, followed by the obituary writers in novels such as Porter Shreve's *The obituary writer* (2000) and Andrej Kurkov's *Smert' postoronnego* (1996). Now it seems to be the biographers' turn. A.S. Byatt's novel *The Biographer's Tale* (2000) and *Bal Masque* (2007) by the Spanish writer Elia Barceló are examples of novels in which the biographer plays a leading role. And this role is seldom flattering.

A famous novel in this genre, published in 2007, is *Exit Ghost* by Philip Roth. Roth's aspirant biographer consults the main character, Nathan Zuckerman,

12 Ann Jefferson, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also: Hans Renders, 'Mannen van Beteekenis: Ontstaan en groei van de biografie in de 19de eeuw', in: *Geschiedenis Magazine* 42(2007)4, p. 28–32.

13 Johan Huizinga, *Cultuurhistorische verkenningen* (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1929), p. 46.

himself a celebrated writer, on the life of the writer E.I. Lonoff, whom they both admire.¹⁴ Zuckerman is outraged when the biographer confronts him with an alleged incident of incest from Lonoff's life, an incident Lonoff himself described earlier in a novel. What is really fascinating here is that Roth himself does what he accuses the biographer of doing: he describes in the person of Lonoff the life and work of his old friend, Bernard Malamud. You can read *Exit Ghost* a dozen times, but the biographical information that really leads to a better understanding of this book cannot be found in the book itself. Literary authors will certainly close ranks and condemn Roth's future biographer, who will, of course, have to figure out why Roth exploited the life of his old friend Malamud like this in a novel.

Is it so important to be able to classify a book under a specific genre? Yes, it is: it is an unwritten code that we wish to know whether something is true or false.¹⁵ This is certainly important when real and universally known persons are accused of murder and incest. There is nothing wrong with using history in fiction. Dominique Noguez's book, *Lénine Dada*, plays with the fact that, in 1916, Lenin lived in the same street in Zurich where the early Dadaists in Cabaret Voltaire made their anti-art.¹⁶ Lenin loved mystifications and disguises. Noguez provides astonishing historical material to suggest that Lenin was involved in Cabaret Voltaire. He even claims, based on archival research, that the poems of Tristan Tzara were actually written by Lenin. However, no reader will really believe that the Bolsheviks carried out the Dada program in Russia or that the Russian Revolution was a tribute to Alfred Jarry who, according to Noguez, once wrote: 'Beat them to a pulp, those Moscovians.'¹⁷

Curt Gentry's 1991 biography of J. Edgar Hoover portrays the founder of the FBI who, as director of this agency, persevered for forty years and coped with eight presidents, as a perverted manipulator who believed that every man could be accused of being subversive if one listened in on his telephone conversations long enough. This book also shows that the unmarried Hoover persecuted during the day what he himself yearned for at night: homosexuality. Marc Dugain wrote a wonderful novel, *La Malédiction d'Edgar*, which is based on this historical notion.¹⁸

14 Philip Roth, *Exit Ghost* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

15 Dorrit Cohn, 'Fictional versus Historical Lives: Borderlines and Borderline Cases', in: *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 19(1989)1, p. 3–24.

16 Dominique Noguez, *Lénine Dada* (Paris: Laffont, 1989).

17 Noguez, *Lénine Dada*, p. 37.

18 Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Marc Dugain, *La Malédiction d'Edgar* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005).

Noguez and Dugain vivify a historical episode and perhaps offer deeper understanding of the problematics where sources remain silent. No reader of *Lénine Dada* or *La Malédiction d'Edgar* will believe that everything happened exactly as Noguez or Dugain describe, but the novel genre serves to clarify that which could not be sustained by facts. The same thing happens in Pierre Assouline's novel, *Lutetia*, about the Hotel Lutetia in Paris. A three-page appendix references the literature and document sources used to ground the novel in recognizable historical truths. Assouline applies a masterful solution to make the reader accept the combination of history and novel in which characters with psychological depth play their parts: the story is told by the hotel detective Edouard Kiefer. 'I knew everyone, but few knew me,' the fictional Kiefer explains. Every reader understands here that Kiefer is made up and the rest is not.

Biographers will have to make peace with the fact that their work, in contrast to novels, is unlikely to last forever. Ernst Pawel's 1984 biography of Franz Kafka, *The Nightmare of Reason*, is, in my opinion, one of the best biographies ever written, but it will not survive for more than a few decades, while we expect that *Das Schloß* or *Die Verwandlung* surely will last for a very long time.¹⁹

Biographers who wish to be part of the literary scene often state in interviews that their books are creative and not academic works. But this is tantamount to admitting that they are poorly written. In fact, there is no relationship between good or bad research and attractively written books. It is also strange that biographers who research carefully in the archives should be afraid to join the tradition from which they originate: the reportage-novel.

L'Écrivain-reporter

England has a strong tradition of literary journalists, like Daniel Defoe and George Orwell, but France has had by far the most authors in this category. 'L'Écrivain-reporter' was a hero of the people in the interwar years. Figures such as Pierre Mac Orlan, Joseph Kessel, Pierre Hamp, Paul Nizan, Roger Vailland, Colette, Blaise Cendrars, and Georges Simenon were at least as famous in the 1920s and 30s for their journalistic work in *Le Matin*, *Paris-Soir*, *Gringoire*, or the even more sensational *Déetective*, as for the novels they later wrote. Albert Londres' 1925 work *La Chine en folie* and Henri Béraud's works of travel reportage, *Ce que j'ai vu à Moscou* (1925), *Ce que j'ai vu à Berlin* (1926) and *Ce que j'ai vu*

¹⁹ Ernst Pawel, *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984).

à Rome (1929) were inspirations to these writer-reporters.²⁰ In fact, the French researcher Myriam Boucharenc describes the *reporter-écrivain* as the step-brother of the *écrivain-reporter* in her study analyzing the interaction between journalism and literature in the interbellum. Boucharenc's *L'Écrivain-reporter au coeur des années trente* shows that it is impossible to overestimate the importance of journalism in the cultural life of the interbellum. It was the source of an influential genre of non-fiction, produced by non-academic writers, that was read by tens of thousands. An interwar *écrivain-reporter* wrote in a visual style, like a scriptwriter does, and presented himself in his story as a tough explorer, or smart detective with a passion for facts and truth. Such adventurers were free from the duty to report in an objective manner that restricts today's journalists. Storytellers were less forced to obey the compelling laws of topicality and public opinion; they just had to ensure that they entertained or surprised the readers of *Le Parisien* or *Le Matin*. But one rule could not be questioned: each story should be unbelievable but true. That rule was the professional code that separated them from the authors who wrote plausible but false stories. Once they met this condition, nearly everything was permitted.

Many of these journalists pursued two goals. In the popular press, they wrote sensational news stories. In their spare time, they wrote literary texts or – in a quest to make money – detective novels. The authors whom Boucharenc analyzes combined these two activities, writing newspaper reports that later served as material for their books. While the stories were not fictional, the style was literary. No one will question that Émile Zola was a novelist, but his work was inspired by the journalistic approach and was written as a documented chronicle, a reportage-novel. Henri Béraud remarked on the ambition driving this bold mix of genres: 'Rien, après tout, ne nous empêche de croire que le reportage sera la littérature de demain.' Journalistic reports would be the literature of the future. Star reporters for major newspapers traveled to Russia, the Far East, or Africa in search of news stories that would be printed prominently on the front page, often in serial form. Jules Verne's *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours* was often a model; Gaston Stiegler, for example, published a popular travel-reportage in *Le Matin* in 1901 under the title 'Tour du monde en soixante-trois jours'.²¹ These enormously successful stories were often subsequently re-published in book form. Béraud's 1927 book,

20 Myriam Boucharenc's book, *L'Écrivain-reporter au coeur des années trente* (Villeneuve d'Ascq Cédex: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004).

21 Marc Martin, 'Le Voyage du grand reporter, de la fin du XIX^e siècle aux années trente', in: *Le Temps des Médias* 4(2007)8, p. 99–103.

Le Flâneur salarié, suggests that the prestige attached to being a literary author, an artist, in effect, guided the direction of the work of these journalistic authors.

In addition to the literary implications of reportage during the interbellum years, it is also likely that there was a connection between modernism in art or philosophy and the allure of mobility, preferably fast mobility. The designation 'flying reporter' already suggests such a link. Let us explore that thought with biography in the back of our minds: the concepts of modernity and the seductiveness of mobility.

It is not such a strange concept. The British-based literary researcher, Martina Lauster, in her study of the physiology of the nineteenth-century journalist, theorises about the *flâneur* (idler) who was so often featured in French journalism and literature, and typifies him as an icon of modernism. The *flâneur* exists by the grace of his mobility.²² He travels about the city tracing clues to gather information about writers or actors in order to write a topical biographical sketch, hoping to capture the essence of the time in an essay. He is a Bohemian freelancer. The biographer is not a *flâneur*, but they do share some traits. Let us consider the biographer as a historian-in-action. Not only does he study conventional sources, but he also investigates a diverse array of sources to determine whether they might be relevant to the person he is studying. This means that he has to take the byways, the less trodden paths.

How It Started

The word 'biography', in the sense of a history of a private life (not necessarily a booklength volume), was first used by John Dryden in 1683 in a preface to his English translation of *Lives* by Plutarch. It was Thomas Fuller who, in his 1662 work, *The History of the Worthies of England*, used the word 'biographer' for the first time.²³ Still in the same year, the word 'biographist' appeared. Biographist is an admirable word. In Dutch, it can be associated with the word 'bakkenist', that is, the sidecar passenger.²⁴ This association can be used as an illustrative metaphor: the driver is the reporter writing

²² Martina Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century. European Journalism and its Physiologies, 1830–1850* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 8.

²³ Thomas Fuller, as quoted in Catherine N. Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. xxxiii.

²⁴ Hans Renders, *De zeven hoofdzonden van de biografie. Over biografen, historici en journalisten* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008), p. 31.

daily articles for the newspaper, the biographer is the person who sits at the side, observing and drawing thoughtful correlations for his book. It took more than one hundred and fifty years before the modern meaning of 'biography' was established.

Biography has been called the bastard child of science and literature, a sweeping statement that ultimately does not lead to any deeper understanding. A clear distinction has to be made between the form of a biography and the *research* that has been conducted for it, and not – as one might think – a distinction between the form and content of a biography. But the form of a biography should also not stand apart from its sources. As Leon Edel, a biography-theorist and biographer of Henry James, wrote in his 1978 manifesto in the first edition of the journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, 'Biography should take its form from its materials.'²⁵ Writing a biography based on insufficient research is the hallmark of 'low biography'. Certainly there are enough readers longing for *vies romancées*, but a *vie romancée* has little to do with biography. A biography based on scanty research will be faulty. If we observe the research conducted by a rigorous biographer, one can conclude that it is the research of a historian. The biographer dramatizes the story of a life, just as any good historian will also dramatize his or her story. Both biographer and historian strive to write a narrative that is beautiful rather than tedious. Like the historian, the biographer may know more than his subject. The dramatic event of a last poem, or a last farewell, is known to the biographer and reader as the *last* poem and *last* farewell, but not to the subject. The biographer, as Jacques le Goff once wrote, can base his work on an 'histoire-problème', to anchor it in historical theory as well as providing a dramatic touch.²⁶

A biographical approach to literary texts is something different again. This approach is derived from journalism from former centuries and fades away in the twentieth century due to the arrival of analytical textual studies of literature. The American New Critics strongly influenced European literary scholars in the 1960s. They believed that research into literature should only deal with the text, and that the meaning of a novel could only be inherent in the work itself. Biographical knowledge of the author was, in a way, prohibited. In the United States, Edel effectively opposed the New Critics as early as 1959 with his book

25 Leon Edel, 'Biography: A Manifesto', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 1–3.

26 Jacques Le Goff, 'Comment écrire une biographie historique aujourd'hui?', in: *Le Débat* (mars-avril 1989)54, p. 48–53, Eng. trans. Jacques Le Goff, 'The Whys and Ways of Writing a Biography: The Case of Saint Louis', in: *Exemplaria* 1(1989)1, p. 207–225.

Literary Biography.²⁷ As a result, the influence of the New Critics' great propagandists, René Wellek and Austin Warren, was already limited in the United States by the late fifties. But the theories of New Criticism unfortunately became popular in Europe. In juxtaposition to the approach of the New Critics is the argument that the personality of a writer is a decisive factor in the assessment of his work. But among those who favour this biographical approach, there is a split into at least two different schools. On the one hand, there is the approach of Oscar Wilde, who believed that the artist's life was indeed an important key to understanding literature. There was no need, however, for biographers to illuminate an artist's background, as the artist's life was already part of his oeuvre. In this sense, writers' own lives were the best manifestation of their genius. Biographers themselves were therefore, according to Wilde, not only unnecessary, but also hazardous to literature. Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804–1869) articulated a different approach. He wrote that, for a proper understanding of literature, it is necessary to understand the author as part of his context. Literature and personality should be considered as one, and therefore Sainte-Beuve encouraged biographical research. Reviewers of literary texts have always been fascinated by biographical information, because it can justify their opinions of literary texts, and because it attracts readers who still, in a certain way, wish to assign 'truth' to literature, and to connect it to the reality outside literature.

It is because literary texts are highly regarded that biographers so often present themselves as literary writers. A biographer, according to this view, can function like a novelist, deriving material from the real world and transforming it into a work of art. Such biographers, ironically, emphasize the opposite of what literary critics of novels find fascinating in literary texts: they do not point to the biographical treasures in their work, but rather draw attention to the fictional quality of it.²⁸ But if they are not literary authors, are biographers then historians? Not quite.

Nigel Hamilton cites in his *Biography. A Brief History* an anecdote related by Joseph Addison, who was the biographer of Cato the Elder. Addison complained in 1715 that he knew of fellow biographers who were impatiently awaiting the deaths of famous contemporaries, an impatience he likened to that of the writers of newspaper obituaries.²⁹ This reproach – that biographers seek

27 Leon Edel, *Literary Biography* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959). See also Anthony M. Friedson's review of this work in *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 83–86.

28 Hans Renders, 'Het zelfbewustzijn van de biograaf. Waarom de biografie geen roman is', *Zacht Lawijd, cultuur-historisch tijdschrift* 6(2007)2, p. 67–81.

29 Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History*, p. 85–86.

glory on the backs of others – is also heard today with reference to lawyers and journalists. But never is it said that dentists earn their keep by causing pain to others or that teachers live off children's ignorance. Yet, Addison's remark is interesting. At the end of the eighteenth century, there was a quiet understanding that one writes a biography only once the subject is deceased – a scruple that does not impinge upon today's writers of popular biographies. See, for example, the already well-stocked shelves of biographies about the former French president, Nicolas Sarkozy and the American President Barack Obama.

Besides Addison's comparison to the writing of obituaries, there is something else that is fascinating about his reproach. The importance of a person's life was traditionally the only criteria for a biography or biographical sketch, as Plutarch already demonstrated in the first century A.D. in his *Parallel Lives*. But in Addison's remark lies the implication that death is a good reason to bring a well-rounded life into the limelight. Like an obituary writer, the eighteenth-century biographer suddenly saw the *topicality* of an eminent person's death. This topicality was a means to conquer the readers' market. It is illustrated, for example, by the biographies of those who had been condemned to death. In the eighteenth century, we see the phenomenon of biographies as pamphlets, which were literally sold at the market during, and shortly after, the execution of a condemned criminal.³⁰ These so-called 'criminal biographies' nearly always had the characteristics of journalistic reports.

'Biography makes better history than history itself,' writes Ann Jefferson in her inspirational study, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France*.³¹ The argument given for this adage by Louis-Gabriel Michaud is that biography provides us with details about human habits in a certain period. The biographer should then have an eye for detail and should be interested in the question of what exactly these details tell us about the described person and his environment. The biographer's occupation is necessarily an interdisciplinary one, just as the journalist is a generalist. That is why a biographer is preferably someone who begins with a specialist background, but then branches into a biography.

The choice of research subject raises another, potentially paradoxical, question. Does a particular person become the subject of a biography because he or she is representative of a larger topic or because he or she is unique? We would read an interview with a soldier in Afghanistan to satisfy our curiosity about the NATO mission in that country, not to know more about the unique

30 P.J. Buijnsters, *Levens van beruchte Personen. Over de criminele biografie in Nederland gedurende de 18e eeuw* (Utrecht: H&S Publishers, 1980), p. 11.

31 Jefferson, *Biography and the Questioni*, p. 91.

personality of each of the soldiers who have been sent there. A journalist may look for the most average interlocutor. A biographer works the other way around. His choice of subject is often meant to emphasize the uniqueness of his hero, but, to achieve this aim, the high biography must include considerable context. This will demonstrate the extent to which the subject is truly unique and to what extent he was the product of his time, his occupation, his social class, or literary trend. This contextualization can be taken too far. It is unnecessary, when writing a biography about a person, to write the entire history of humankind. Robert Musil is an important writer, the author, among other works, of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, but the 2026-page biography of Musil by Karl Corino, which exhaustively treats the political development of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in the first half of the twentieth century, errs in this respect.³²

In low biography, the biographer uses the subject's uniqueness as point of departure, takes it as a given, and searches for information to substantiate this assertion. The freedom fighter becomes more of a freedom fighter, the football star becomes even more exceptional than we already knew he was, and so forth. The high biography will tie the subject's uniqueness in with his representativeness, and thus the person's feats become relative. Whether it is intentional or not, the modern, and thus critical, biography inevitably adopts the characteristics of a debunking book, which may create the impression that the results are the product of a prejudiced exercise. One can be disappointed or angry about it and vent one's grievances. It would be just as sensible as a plea for the establishment of a newspaper that would emphasize good news.

Wrath

To be prejudiced even before one starts working on a biography is a form of wrath. Germaine Greer, who once alleged that biographers are rapists who sacrifice their subjects to their proclivity for literary oppression, recently published a biography of Ann Hathaway.³³ Greer's principal goal in this biography, which appears under the anti-feminist title, *Shakespeare's Wife*, seems to be to indicate that all biographers of Shakespeare are women-haters,

32 Karl Corino, *Musil: eine Biographie* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2003).

33 Germaine Greer, *Shakespeare's Wife* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008). The allusion to Greer's comparison between biographers and rapists comes from Martin Stannard, 'The Necrophiliac Art?', in: Dale Salwak ed., *The Literary Biography: Problems and Solutions* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 32–40.

especially the most recent of them, Stephen Greenblatt. The biographer reveals, in her fury, that none of Shakespeare's biographers looked for the name Hathaway when they consulted church registers, parish archives, and other archival sources. That may be true, but Greer's own biography, which is clearly about Ann Hathaway, seems to indicate that Greer herself resisted the temptation to take on such donkey work. Thus, it falls into the category of low biography.

Former *Daily Telegraph* journalist, and biographer of Mussolini, Nicholas Farrell, is also one who would rather follow his own ideology instead of dispassionately investigating the origins of his hero's beliefs. Farrell believes it is possible that fascism may have a great future in the twenty-first century. And to show that he is attracted to the idea, he lives in Predappio, the Italian town where Mussolini was born and buried.³⁴ 'We live in a post-communist era and there are indications that we are moving towards a post-democratic era. Thus the point may have been reached where it is possible to revise Mussolini's image,' writes Farrell. By the first page of Farrell's biography, the reader is told that he should not think that he is dealing with a villain. Mussolini saved the lives of thousands of Jews, 'far more than Oskar Schindler ever did'. Such an introduction certainly awakens one's curiosity and seems to be interpretive, but with such preconceived motives, Farrell does not give the impression of being a reliable biographer. This impression is reinforced when he ends his biography in the same vein. Mussolini's death is to this day surrounded by conspiracy theories. Farrell hints that Italian communists and other leftists murdered Mussolini out of fear that fascism would, if given the chance, develop into socialism without a class struggle. In Farrell's 'new vision', fascism has a great future on the horizon. A certain wrath lies buried in this biography about the way that Mussolini has been treated until this day. Farrell gives no outward sign of his own ideological motives.

There are many examples of wrath in biographies, accounts of lives that have been written with a hidden ideological agenda. To exploit biography solely as a debunking instrument is a vice. To tie the private to the public in a nuanced manner always leads to a milder approach and a fuller understanding of one's fellow human being, and, through that, a better understanding of history. That has been the approach of the best political historians for a very long time. That is not the same as justifying the acts or statements of the biographical subject. That Hitler, Stalin, and others engaged in wicked practices is something we all know without the aid of their biographies. A biographer needs to have some level of intuition to remain on close terms with virtue and vice and

34 Nicholas Farrell, *Mussolini: A New Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2003).

still have the ability to write the story with the mildness and empathy that yields fuller insights.

Barbey d'Aurevilly's allegation that biography has more to do with journalism than with literature is probably right: biography offers a means of popularizing history. This trend developed in eighteenth-century newspapers, but was especially fed by the rise of a press aimed at mass appeal. Since the abolition of tax on daily newspapers in the second half of the nineteenth century in most European countries, newspapers became accessible to a broader segment of the population. At the same time, this institutional change led to newspapers devoting more attention to topics that would interest the 'ordinary man', stories about well-known politicians, explorers, writers and criminals. Biography became big business, just like the news, as long as it was presented in a dramatic and attractive manner. Biographers began to use the same methods as journalists: eye-witnesses and family members were subjected to interviews, a method historians have traditionally disdained. Biographical texts, like journalistic texts, became the raw materials for the later work of historians. The newspaper writes the history of a day, the biography the history of a life.

With journalism increasingly becoming a tool to judge political or literary culture, biography similarly became a genre that held up ideals, providing examples of noble celebrities who have made the world a better place. The same questions about professionalization and standards of work have been raised about both biography and journalism. The latter occupation has become more systematic, with a greater emphasis on formal training since the 1930s or so. Just as with journalists, it is a holy maxim to the biographer that the reader should be able to trust the reliability of the text, that it should be attributable to sound sources.

Janet Kramer's 1988 book, *Europeans*, was based upon material originally compiled for *The New Yorker*.³⁵ She used the fates of a few individuals, seven biographical profiles, to describe social changes in the European countryside, during the seventies in the twentieth century. Biography was the form through which Kramer chose to write the recent history of Europe. Included was the touching story of Fernande Pelletier, a French farmer's wife in the heart of the Périgord, who truly believed that the agrarian policies of Edgard Pisani, under the presidency of Charles de Gaulle, which called for an increase in scale as well as radical technological changes, would only have a superficial effect on her life. And through the trials and tribulations of Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, Kramer sketched a probing image of the Portuguese Revolution of 1974 and its aftermath. This method of work was also used in 1902 by Jules

35 Janet Kramer, *Europeans* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988).

Huret, a well-known French reporter who wandered through France, Poland, and Austria for months on end and used personal interviews to determine Europe's social state. Kramer, Huret, and other reporters like them, not only looked for institutional sources, but also humanized the knowledge they gleaned from them. This is identical to the working method of the biographer, or at least the 'high' biographer.

There is, of course, no clear-cut definition of what constitutes a good biography. Naturally, the ideal biography is well written, with a form that owes to journalism. It must also make it clear that a life can only be understood in its relation to a whole historical context. The research methodology must include use of all available sources, with oral sources approached in an even-handed way, and every assertion substantiated by a source, which is the norm in both journalism and history. The subject's private life should be used to explain and provide context for what is public. Thus, the extensive attention that is paid to J. Edgar Hoover's secret homosexual life is respectable and even necessary as this side of his life is important in the assessment of his decades-long work as head of the FBI.

A good biographer does not strive towards comprehensiveness: there is nothing as dull as the biographer who tries to incorporate every fact that has been collected. Instead, the biographer's approach should revolve around focused research questions. In asking the research questions, it is better to be modest. A biography has a shelf life and its shelf life will not be extended by asking more ambitious research questions. By asking a topical question, the chances are greater that the reader will appreciate the biography, and without contemporary appreciation a biography has no future. With the form, we can experiment to our heart's content. Of course, we would never read the biographies of James Joyce's daughter or Shakespeare's wife if we were not interested in James Joyce or Shakespeare. Changing the perspective from which a story is told is an experiment with form, but at the same time, an original arrangement of research materials can also lead to new insights. Thus the French historian Jules Michelet writes that the reign of Louis XIV can be divided into two periods: the period *before* and the period *after* the king developed a sinus problem.³⁶ It may go too far to link the boils suffered by Anton Philips' second cousin, Karl Marx, which he developed after overindulging in Dutch cherry jam in the Phillips' family home in the Netherlands, to the passages of *Das Kapital* that Marx wrote while a guest of the Phillips family, but it is an intriguing thought nonetheless. In the recently published biography of Einstein, written by Walter Isaacson, interesting links are drawn between Einstein's love of

36 Boris Sokoloff, *Napoleon: A Doctor's Biography* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1937), p. vii.

playing the violin and the unorthodox manner in which he approached the natural sciences. But before one can allow oneself to indulge in similar experiments, one needs to have engaged in the rigorous work of high biography.

As more examples of public self-reflection and self-congratulation, as well as published diaries, internet blogs, and radio and television interviews, are sent into the public sphere, the need for critical interpretive biography increases. More accessible information means that the need for a sifting of the information increases. The original meaning of biography was an encyclopaedic piece about an important person. Now, the vision of the biographer takes pride of place. The simple facts have become easily accessible, and for that we no longer need a biographer. But the interpretive biography faces a golden future. Journalism is facing increasing pressure to deliver more human interest stories, gossip about famous people, and the media reports more and more about the same thing. The need for an authentic story to be told can only increase.

The Solace of Doubt?

Biographical Methodology after the Short Twentieth Century

James Walter

What of the writing about writing biography? I will explore here some of the trends that have emerged in such publications in the twentieth century, with emphasis on the past decades. I suggest that we can understand present debates as the rethinking of (or resistance to) the suppositions of twentieth-century modernist biography, which held sway from the early 1920s to the early 1980s. Since there are significant cultural differences in biographical practice, my focus is on English-language biography only. Such is the volume of commentary about ‘Life Writing’ that a comprehensive bibliographical essay would be difficult. Fortunately, the regular publication of annotated bibliographies on biography makes that exercise redundant.¹

Twentieth-century biography was shaped by the preoccupations of modernism. It is commonplace to identify Freud’s elucidation of the unconscious, and the iconoclasm of Lytton Strachey, as profoundly affecting the questions biographers have asked of themselves, and their materials. Freud’s was an argument not only for systematic psychology, but also for interpretation – as behaviour and events were plumbed for motives and meanings beyond their surface manifestations. Strachey’s was an argument for selection and discrimination, for brevity, and – above all – for a point of view. Thus were swept aside the memorial hagiographies of ‘great men’, with their illusions of capturing ‘all the facts’.

The ‘new biography’, with its concessions to interpretation, promoted ongoing dialogue about the weight to be accorded to research (or craft) versus art. Virginia Woolf’s brilliant fictional meditations on biography – *Orlando* and *Flush* – were a counter to Strachey. Less of an influence on biographical method than Strachey in the short term, she would nonetheless be adopted by feminist biographers sixty years later as the foundational twentieth-century modernist

¹ For instance, the journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* annually publishes a useful ‘Current Bibliography of Life Writing’; see also Carl Rollyson, *Biography: An Annotated Bibliography* (Chicago: iUniverse 2007; first edition 1992) and Catherine N. Parke, ‘Bibliographic Essay’, in her *Biography: Writing Lives* (New York: Twayne, 1996), p. 125–134.

theorist of biography.² Arguably, the incorporation of fictive elements in post-modern biography owes more to Woolf than to Strachey. That said, Virginia Woolf had a more limiting view of biography's claim to the status of art than did Strachey. Yet as Leon Edel, a later analyst of their debate, was to argue: 'A biographer is an artist from the moment he chooses between different sets of facts and explains and justifies what he has chosen.'³ Another denizen of Bloomsbury, Harold Nicolson, was to draw a further implication from such propositions: 'Biography is the preoccupation and the solace, not of certainty, but of doubt.'⁴ Modernist biographers have continually ruminated on the philosophical problem of 'other minds': 'that I can have direct knowledge of my own experiences and that I cannot have direct knowledge of anyone else's.'⁵ But psychoanalysis raised questions even about unmediated knowledge of personal experience. Indeterminacy, then, has long been recognized as the characteristic feature of modern biography, and the fact that biographical truth can never finally be settled, that biography is always tendentious, has inflected every other methodological strategy.

Most methodological essays have been preoccupied with one or more of the following elements. First, acknowledging the problem of 'other minds' entails accepting that biography works by analogy and inference rather than empiricism alone, and that methods of persuasive argument are as important as research. Second, that the meaning of facts is not self-evident, and that discrimination in what is discussed is as important as the comprehensive garnering of knowledge, puts a premium on analysis. Third, the admission of the centrality of interpretation brings in its wake open resort to various bodies of theory as providing tools for interpretation. Strachey prefigured each of these elements in his description of a book without a point of view 'resembling nothing so much as a very large heap of sawdust'; and 'uninterpreted truth [as] like buried gold'; his subversive assertion that 'ignorance is the first requisite of the historian – ignorance which simplifies and clarifies', and that the biographer should merely 'row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down

2 See, for instance, Catherine Parke's eulogistic treatment of Virginia Woolf, in *Biography: Writing Lives*, chapter 3, p. 67–89.

3 Leon Edel, 'Biography: A Manifesto', in: *Biography* 1(1978)1, p. 2. For Edel's view of the debate between Woolf and Strachey, see Leon Edel, *Writing Lives: Principia Biographia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), p. 186–196, and Leon Edel, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions* (New York: Avon, 1980), p. 253–258.

4 Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 65.

5 A.J. Ayer, 'One's Knowledge of Other Minds', in: D.F. Gustafson ed., *Essays in Philosophical Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 348.

into it [...] a little bucket, which will bring up [...] some characteristic specimen' as a counter to the delusory attempt to tell the 'complete' life; and in his pioneering resort to psychoanalysis in his *Elizabeth and Essex*.⁶ Other working biographers were to write essays and books on these matters, but a useful gloss on the trends within Anglo-American modernist biography is to be found in the work of Leon Edel.

Edel, himself a distinguished biographer, set himself the task of announcing the modern Principia Biographia in a series of books and essays between the mid-1950s and the mid-1980s.⁷ He spoke, perhaps unwittingly, for the professionalization of the craft. He sought to bring together theory and method, and to show how the 'art' demanded by interpretation could be reinforced by 'the science of man'.⁸ When he began, few were publishing in this domain. The precursors (André Maurois (see Illustration 4.2), Harold Nicolson) had preceded him by thirty years. Edel built explicitly on the foundations of Bloomsbury, brought to full flower the principles of modernist biography, and for my purposes was expressive of the end point of 'the short twentieth century' in biography.⁹

In articulating critical theory for the working biographer, Edel wrestled with four dilemmas, first voiced in 1957 as the fundamental issues within his *Literary Biography*, but re-emerging in the 1980s in 'Biography and the Science of Man' and in *Writing Lives*.¹⁰ The first dilemma was that of imposing order, bringing logic and shape to the record of 'something that is as mercurial and as flowing, as compact of temperament and emotion, as the human spirit itself'.¹¹ The second was his rendition of the problem of other minds: how to marry 'the truth of life and the truth of experience [when] a biographer [...] by force of circumstances is always outside his subject [seeking to] penetrate into the subject's

6 Lytton Strachey, *Portraits in Miniature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933), p. 170; Quoted by Edel, *Writing Lives*, p. 183; Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918, reprinted Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 9; On Freud's view of *Elizabeth and Essex*, and on Strachey as the father of psychobiography, see Edel, *Writing Lives*, p. 143–144.

7 Edel's *Writing Lives* is his attempt to draw the threads together.

8 Leon Edel, 'Biography and the Science of Man', in: A.M. Friedson ed., *New Directions in Biography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981), p. 1–11.

9 I refer to Hobsbawm's thesis about the end of the avant-garde in Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), p. 500–522.

10 Leon Edel, *Literary Biography* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957) [references below are to the reissue of 1973]; Edel, *Writing Lives*; Edel, 'Biography and the Science of Man'.

11 Edel, *Writing Lives*, p. 33.

André Maurois

Aspects

de la

Biographie

A PARIS
AU SANS PAREIL
37, AVENUE KLÉBER
—
M. CM. XXVIII.

ILLUSTRATION 4.2 *Title page of: André Maurois, Aspects de la biographie (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1928).*

mind, and obtain insights which are not vouchsafed him even in the case of his most intimate friends'.¹² The third dilemma was how to encompass all available data, and yet reduce them to a manageable compass, to dimensions that can be comprehended by a biographer and an audience. The fourth was how to manage both sufficient immersion in the life of another to understand it, and yet enough detachment to analyse and to explain: 'The biographer [...] is required to get into the skin of his subject [...] yet all the while he retains his own mind, his own sense of balance and his own appraising eye. [...] To be cold as ice in appraisal, yet warm and human and understanding, this is the biographer's dilemma.'¹³

Edel argued that these dilemmas could be resolved by the judicious use of psychoanalytic theory, and the acknowledgement that the successful biographer must be an artist. Psychological awareness solved the problem of getting inside another skin: 'A life-myth is hidden within every poet's work, and in the gestures of a politician, the canvases and statues of art and the "life-styles" of charismatic characters.'¹⁴ The life-myths are the story a subject tells him/herself as the means of coping with the psychological tasks which confront us all: theory unlocks the dynamic of the life-myth, and the meaning of a life's work. Theory in turn solved the problems of the relationship between biographer and subject – the self-aware biographer would be able to achieve empathy, without transference – and of the relationship between a biographer and his material – directing attention to evidence most germane to the 'life-myth'. Yet in the end, the imperatives of interpretation and of narrative demand that the biographer become an artist: 'In the writing of biography the material is predetermined: the imagination functions only as it plays over this material and shapes it. The art lies in the telling.' [...] 'A writer of lives must extract individuals from their chaos yet create an illusion that they are in the midst of life.' [...] 'A biographer is an artist from the moment he chooses between different sets of facts.'¹⁵

By the time he wrote this last comment, Edel was far from alone in his efforts to identify the fundamentals of the biographical art. Significantly, this comment appeared in a 'Manifesto' in the first issue of *Biography* – a journal of which Edel was clearly the intellectual progenitor. During the 1960s and 1970s, a widening group had taken up and elaborated upon many of the elements that had concerned him. Edel had not been the catalyst for

12 Edel, *Literary Biography*, p. 2–3.

13 Edel, *Writing Lives*, p. 41.

14 Edel, 'Biography and the Science of Man', p. 7.

15 Edel, *Literary Biography*, p. 5; Edel, *Writing Lives*, p. 15; Edel, 'Biography: A Manifesto', p. 2.

these effusions so much as their harbinger. James Clifford, for instance, dealt with both the practice of biographical research and the recovery of the critical foundations of the genre.¹⁶ Richard Ellmann, in a series of acute essays on George Eliot, Joseph Conrad, Oscar Wilde, André Gide, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot, showed how biographical knowledge and skill could illuminate literary criticism.¹⁷ Teaching texts began to appear.¹⁸ Robert Gittings tried to recapture something of Harold Nicolson's enterprise, drawing on 'beliefs of a working biographer, based on a quarter of a century of such work'.¹⁹ The practice of anthologizing conference contributions, or commissioned essays, by working biographers became widespread.²⁰ Social scientists turned to mapping biography systematically into their disciplines.²¹ Social scientists also demolished the Everest syndrome (Why write about this prominent person?) by insisting on key governing questions for the biographical project: Kenneth Morgan argued: 'I [...] use biography to [...] answer political questions about public issues.'²² Psychobiographers explored the uses of theory both as an aid to self-awareness and as a means for reaching the subject's core.²³ And,

16 James L. Clifford, *From Puzzles to Portraits* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970); James L. Clifford ed., *Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism 1560–1960* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962).

17 Richard Ellmann, *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973).

18 For instance Allan Shelston, *Biography* (London: Methuen, 1977), in the Critical Idiom series.

19 Robert Gittings, *The Nature of Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1978), p. 9.

20 See for instance Daniel Aaron ed., *Studies in Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978); James Walter ed., *Reading Life Histories* (Nathan: Griffith University/Institute for Modern Biography, 1981); Jeffrey Meyers ed., *The Craft of Literary Biography* (New York: Schocken, 1985); John Y. Cole ed., *Biography and Books* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1986).

21 For example, Lewis J. Edinger's essays on 'Political Science and Political Biography', in: *The Journal of Politics* 26(1964)2, p. 423–439 and 648–676.

22 Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Writing Political Biography', in: Eric Homberger and John Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography*, (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 33. And see, especially, Alan Davies, 'The Tasks of Biography', in his *Essays in Political Sociology* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1972), p. 109–117.

23 For example, Samuel H. Baron and Carl Pletsch ed., *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self-Awareness* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1985) and W. McK. Runyan, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

carried on the tide of these literatures, the typical anthologizer began to discern another renaissance.²⁴

For all the proliferation in writing about biography, and its popularity as a genre, it remained a pursuit that worked against the grain of the mainstream disciplines. Historians, reacting against the facile Carlylean proposition of history as the study of great men, had taken more holistic approaches, inflected at this time by movements in social history, Marxist labour history, and the Annales school. Social scientists by and large had heeded Émile Durkheim's dictum that society must be understood at the social level. And literary critics, having adopted the textual primacy of 'new criticism', were now prey to Roland Barthes' proclamation of 'the death of the author'. The proselytes of 'new directions in biography', and the many contributors to the field exemplified above, were clearly working within the twentieth-century modernist biographical movement that extended from Strachey to Edel, from Bloomsbury to Hawaii. But as the literature of commentary and practice burgeoned, the modernist approach to biography began to unravel. One telling manifestation of this was Janet Malcolm's forensic deconstruction of the Plath biographers, as 'a kind of allegory' of the problem of interpretation in modern biography.²⁵ Edel, then, was the harbinger of a more extensive literature on biographical practice and theory, and also marked the beginning of the end of a particular way of thinking about biography.

Eric Homberger's and John Charmley's edited volume *The Troubled Face of Biography* (1988) can serve to illustrate this transition.²⁶ This title itself posed a question: troubled by what? Biography, these authors claimed, was anomalous in crossing disciplinary boundaries in an age of academic specialization; the 'commonsensical, empirical and humane' spirit of British biography confronted 'an intellectual Zeitgeist hostile to [its] "central" justification'; the uncertain position of biography in academic life demanded reflection; the biographer's 'love affair with narrative' was challenged by theoretical schisms.²⁷ Among the contributors, the economic historian Robert Skidelsky pursued most vigorously the source of unease: 'a feeling that [biography] has not yet fully won its intellectual spurs [...], is still not taken seriously as literature, as history, or as a cogent intellectual enterprise'.²⁸ The essayists, however, seemed

24 Friedson ed., *New Directions in Biography* is an example.

25 Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (London: Picador, 1994).

26 Homberger and Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography*.

27 These claims appear in Homberger's and Charmley's Introduction to *The Troubled Face of Biography* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. ix–xv.

28 Robert Skidelsky, 'Only Connect: Biography and Truth', in: Homberger and Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography*, p. 2.

selected to demonstrate the obverse of Skidelsky's proposition. They were intellectual heavyweights, whose contributions displayed rigour about methodological issues, an acute sense of the 'provisional' nature of their conclusions, considerable expertise in their fields, and exemplary seriousness.

One anecdote, by Malcolm Bradbury, pointed to a sort of displacement underpinning the unease identified by Skidelsky. Bradbury spoke of visiting a university in Northern Australia 'where in tropical conditions many contemporary theories had reached a state of exotic enrichment' – structuralism, semiotics, hegemonic paradigms, Lacan, Cixous, and Foucault ruled: 'Yet, wandering through the institution one day, I found – like some alternative government, waiting to take over if the prevailing regime was toppled – a major institute of literary biography. People who wrote authors' lives talked to people who wanted to know how to write authors' lives, and strange matters were discussed: how to assess evidence, construct structured narrative, and explore the psychology of creation. Biography was not dead in the academy; it was alive and well but living in a quite different corner of the building.'²⁹

From this, Bradbury deduced not only division but also 'some intimacy', for 'strange tentacular relations do exist between modern literary theory and modern literary biography [...] biography itself has come under the shadows of the era of suspicion, and indeed has been moving in that direction since Lytton Strachey'.³⁰ Indeed, what Bradbury's northern-hemisphere readers may not have known was that his lightly fictionalized biographical institute was a hive of contentious debate, whose published critical essays on theory and method had been floridly attacked in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by a distinguished literary biographer largely because they brought to the fore the 'tentacular relations' between theory and biography.³¹

In one sense, this was not new: the outrage of those who saw any resort to theory as an incursion into the 'commonsensical, humane and empirical' domain of biography had been evident since the biographical experiments of Strachey and Freud. Yet by the late 1980s, the displacement, the sense that biography itself was part of 'the era of suspicion', and the admission that the common enterprise of Life Writing was fragmenting, marked an ending of the

29 Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Telling Life: Some Thoughts on Literary Biography', in: Homberger and Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography*, p. 131–140.

30 Bradbury, 'The Telling Life', p. 137.

31 Walter ed., *Reading Life Histories*; Axel Clark, 'Academics lose themselves in foul verbal swamps', *Sydney Morning Herald* 7 November 1981. More temperate reviews appeared in *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 28(1982)1, p. 124–125, and *Journal of European Studies* 13(1983)51, p. 218–219.

modernist project in biography. Instead of identifying and describing a unified 'life-myth', a biographer could compile many stories about a subject, cross-cutting between many voices, implying that any construction of a self was a matter of perspective and situation.³² In the light of 'the tentacular relations' between theory and Life Writing, the tasks of biography themselves would be differently conceived.

Aesthetic forms mirror, rather than lead, larger-scale social changes. There have been many attempts to chart what were seen as tectonic shifts in the 1970s and 1980s: the transition from Fordist to Post-Fordist forms of production, the transformation from organized to disorganized capitalism, the challenge to unifying nationalisms of economic globalization and the abandonment of state regulation for the rule of 'market forces'. In the arts, those changes translated as the end of the avant-garde, scepticism about the progressive assumptions of twentieth-century modernism and the demise of 'grand narratives'. Hobsbawm has memorably identified these conjunctions as signifying the end of the short twentieth century.³³ We need here to be alert to the changes in the way biography has been written, and written about. The theoretical questions emerging at this time were themselves part of the shifting ground.

The issue of how to write biography after the short twentieth century has been especially to the fore in women's Life Writing. As part of the 'new biography' of the 1970s and 1980s, there were vigorous attempts to recover the stories of women. These were predicated on resistance to the 'masculinist norms [which] supply the backdrop and provide the measure of what women write about themselves'.³⁴ An admirably clear example was Carolyn Heilbrun's *Writing a Woman's Life* (1989). Stressing that narratives control women's lives by determining what can be said, Heilbrun made the telling point that 'lives do not serve as models; only stories do that'.³⁵ The stress on model stories and on narrative, however, led to a preoccupation with 'heroines' of the women's movement at just the time that postmodern theory eschewed 'grand narratives'.³⁶ Feminist Life Writers then raised alternative questions, countering modernist individualism by stressing the self as a product of history, class, and gender; making explicit the implicit epistemological and ontological

32 See, for instance, Peter Manso, *Mailer: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).

33 Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 1–17.

34 Nell Irwin Painter, 'Writing Biographies of Women', in: *Journal of Women's History* 9(1997)2, p. 154–163.

35 Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (London: Women's Press, 1989), p. 37.

36 See, for instance, Carol Ascher, Louise De Salvo, and Sara Ruddick ed., *Between Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

assumptions of biography (and contrasting these with women's ways of knowing); putting unusual stress on the empathy between women as the way of the biographer 'knowing' her subject; and focusing on the micropolitics of subjectivity, identity, and the body.³⁷ As Liz Stanley summarized this: 'Conventional ideas about the self [...] assign selfhood to only a specific kind of person. This traditional grand narrative of the self is [...] an ideology which promotes its supposed coherence and linearity, its temporal development and significance, and [...] must be challenged and replaced by an understanding of the actual fragmentation, polyphony and atemporality of the self. In postmodernist theory the self is instead positioned in relation to situated knowledges and presentations, as contextually and temporally specific rather than as static and unitary.'³⁸

Stanley's own biographical work (on Hannah Cullwick and Emily Wilding Davison) arguably succeeds because of the strong impress of sociology: it is 'self-consciously ideological. It explains the "labor process" of the biography's epistemology, locates the biographer intellectually, and places the subject within the context that [...] nurtures the active female subject.'³⁹ More recently, the stresses on fragmentation and polyphony have been accentuated: 'Bearing multiple marks of location, bodies position the [...] subject at the nexus of culturally specific experiences of gender, race, sexual orientation [...] and at the nexus of "micropolitical practices" that derive from the cultural meaning of those points of identification.'⁴⁰

Such considerations appear to have had a greater impact upon women's autobiography than upon biography, yet they have clearly influenced the questions women biographers raise about their work. At one extreme, however, they appear to undermine the tasks Heilbrun, Stanley, and others envisaged for feminist biography by undermining its political impact. Everything becomes a modality of 'situatedness'. As Herman Rapaport, commenting on Gayatri Spivak, remarks: 'If much of what she writes is strategically incoherent, it is

37 For example, Laura Marcus, "Enough About You, Let's Talk About Me": Recent Autobiographical Writing', in: *New Formations* 1(1987)1, p. 77–94; Liz Stanley, 'Process in Feminist Biography and Feminist Epistemology', in: Teresa Iles ed., *All Sides of the Subject: Women and Biography* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), p. 109–125; This is argued strongly in Margaret Forster, 'Woman to Woman', in: Iles ed., *All Sides of the Subject*, p. 126–133.

38 Liz Stanley, 'The Knowing Because Experiencing Subject: Narratives, Lives and Autobiography', in: *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(1993)3, p. 205–215.

39 Painter, 'Writing Biographies of Women', p. 138.

40 Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 130.

also the work of a multiply situated social subject who does not want to collapse that multiplicity into a singular account that would make her life into a coherent narrative. [...] Life situations are discontinuous, only partially realized, without closure: on this formulation her incoherence rests.⁴¹

The issue of how to recover a 'public idiom' in the face of postmodern fragmentation has been energetically debated by feminist political theorists, but it is as yet an open question as to whether this will generate a new coherence in Life Writing.⁴² The questions of theories of knowledge, theories of being, the social construction of the self, the utilities of empathy, and the micropolitics of subjectivity posed by feminism presage more differentiated forms of biography – far removed from Edel's unifying *Principia Biographia*. Such questions run alongside (and are part of) a much broader vein of experimentation in contemporary biography. They are also part of a self-reflexive tendency that has seen debates about theory and method incorporated within biographical texts themselves. This is where we should now look for new directions in writing about writing biography, rather than just in the published symposia of working biographers (though the latter continue to appear).⁴³

In one direction, recent biographers have stressed the public and the social, moving away from the 'inner life', and questioning the value of empathy. Bernard Crick, in his *George Orwell*, launched an early attack on 'the empathetic fallacy' in a lively interpolation within the text that still stands as a challenging critique of 'the fine writing, balanced appraisal and psychological insight that is the hallmark of the English tradition of biography'.⁴⁴

Some of the more recent challengers of the empathetic tradition have been feminist biographers. Carolyn Steedman, biographer of the socialist theorist of early childhood education Margaret McMillan, is a prominent example. Drawing attention to 'the dead weight of interiority that hangs about the neck of women's biography', Steedman focuses on McMillan as 'a public woman who lived in a public space'.⁴⁵ 'She seemed [...] to be a woman who demanded

41 Herman Rapaport, 'The New Personalism', in: *Biography* 21(1988)1, p. 36–49.

42 See, for instance, Wendy Brown, 'Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures', in: *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3(1991)1, p. 63–83; Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

43 For an exemplary instance, see Warwick Gould and Thomas Staley ed., *Writing the Lives of Writers* (London and New York: Macmillan and St Martin's Press, 1998).

44 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980, reprinted Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 29, and p. 15–39.

45 Carolyn Steedman, 'Forms of History, Histories of Form', in her *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992), p. 164–166.

a public life; in some way she prevented the delineation of an inside that is “personal” and “real” [...] what might be seen as McMillan’s “insideness”, her meaning, which was her remaking and reassertion of childhood, actually spells out the public space of cultural change.’⁴⁶

A spirited chapter within Steedman’s biography debates the methods of retailing such a ‘public life’, and her own intent is clear: ‘I want to make the implied meaning of McMillan’s own life and writing some kind of denial of interiority – which denial may be a pretence or a fiction, but one which might do some political or public good.’⁴⁷

Judith Brett is another who has much to say of how to write biography drawing on the public domain in her innovative political biography of the Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies.⁴⁸ Brett’s contention is that the man lives on through his language – through that the career is accessible. Linked to this is the proposition that ‘the public man is the real man and the task is to read his life and character where we find it – in the shape of the public life’. Brett’s tools for this ‘reading’ derive from contemporary psychoanalysis. She moves from examples of Menzies’s public discourse to instances of his private language, and then to the psychological dynamics underpinning the whole (what it meant to the man) and to the messages conveyed (how it appealed to an audience). Throughout, she draws on the history of conservative thought, the social history of Menzies’s society, and the cultural context from which Menzies drew his resources and which he in turn shaped.

While experimentation with what we might call ‘public domain’ biography led away from ‘interiority’ towards lives as social narratives with a public point, the preoccupation with language and its uses – the stories subjects tell, the narratives biographers adopt – became even more central, as Crick, Steedman, and Brett show.⁴⁹ This, however, could also serve as a bridge to another mode of experimentation with interiority. Raymond Williams had identified the underlying issue in arguing that biography’s insistence on generic factuality often disguised the biographer’s need to invent, concealing the resort to fictive techniques of epic or drama in the text. Crick’s scepticism about precisely this drove one approach: another (and Steedman acknowledged this) was to be

46 Carolyn Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860–1931* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 250–251.

47 Steedman, ‘Forms of History’, p. 170.

48 Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1992).

49 See, for instance, Martha Banta, *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen and Ford* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Richard Sennett, ‘Failure’, in his *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), p. 118–135.

open about choices of narrative form, and to admit that the biographer is engaged in a 'rhetoric of persuasion'.⁵⁰ This in turn has led to what might be called a new romanticism, and to the overt incorporation of fictive techniques, in recent biography.

The possibilities of what I call the new romanticism are best captured in the work of Richard Holmes, especially for our purposes in *Footsteps* (1985). Holmes has concentrated on some of the icons of Romanticism (Stevenson, Shelley, Coleridge, De Nerval), finding all too often 'the Romantic Hero lost beneath the freezing moon of his entranced imagination', but always himself in an entranced quest for imaginative engagement with other lives.⁵¹ For him, it is 'the subliminal battle of imagination between subject and biographer upon which all life-writing ultimately rests'.⁵² Holmes's Romantic heroes are never settled, and in joining their self-dramatizing travels, learning about himself through the journey as they had done, he explores anew the imperatives of identification and of distance. 'Identification or self-projection [...] is an essential motive [...] for attempting to re-create the pathway, the journey, of someone's life through the physical past. [...] But the true biographic process begins precisely at the moment [...] where this naive form of love and identification breaks down. The moment of disillusion is the moment of impersonal, objective recreation.'⁵³

In finding the limits of identification, Holmes neither fully shares the commitment to empathy (pace some feminists) nor falls into what Crick so trenchantly criticizes as empathetic fallacy. Instead, Holmes tries, literally, to follow his subjects as the means 'to produce the living effect, while remaining true to the dead fact'. He is aware that 'you would never catch them [...]. But maybe [...] you might write about the pursuit of that fleeting figure in such a way as to bring it alive in the present.'⁵⁴ Holmes's reflection on biography as both pursuit of what is out there and as exploration of inner truth is itself an enactment of the Romantic quest trope: 'the past is not simply "out there", an objective history to be researched or forgotten, at will, but [...] it lives most vividly in all of us, deep inside, and needs constantly to be given expression and interpretation.'⁵⁵ In a provocative essay on the friendship

50 Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*, p. 244.

51 Richard Holmes, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), p. 274.

52 Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), p. xvi.

53 Holmes, *Footsteps*, p. 67.

54 Holmes, *Footsteps*, p. 27.

55 Holmes, *Footsteps*, p. 208.

between Johnson and Savage, Holmes argues that Savage's 'ability to exploit or live out the image of the unrecognized and persecuted man of genius [...] heralds the coming of the Romantic generation' and that Johnson's 'guilty enchantment' with Savage laid the very foundations of the genre: English biography 'is essentially a Romantic form; and [...] Johnson's friendship with Savage first crystallized its perils and possibilities'.⁵⁶ Holmes, then, encourages open recognition, and exploitation of the possibilities, of the Romantic form, and will draw on the echoes of the Romantic narratives that have shaped the modern imagination (the shadow story behind his *Dr Johnson and Mr Savage* is of course *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*).

What Holmes describes as the 'battle of imaginations' between biographer and subject has been manifest in the resort to fictive practices in contemporary biography. In reviewing the writing about biography, one might profit by reflecting on novels that take dilemmas of biography as their subject – William Golding (*The Paper Men*, 1984) on the irritated retreat from analysis of a creative writer; Bernard Malamud (*Dubin's Lives*, 1979) and Penelope Lively (*According to Mark*, 1984) on the limits of self-knowledge in shaping the biographer's perceptions; Peter Ackroyd (*Chatterton*, 1987) building a fiction on an historical figure, and so on.

More to the purpose here, however, is the way working biographers incorporate the techniques of fiction into their Life Writing – often overtly – to highlight and to resolve the familiar methodological dilemmas. Peter Ackroyd's adoption, in his lives of Dickens, Blake, and T.S. Eliot, of the narrative omniscience of the novelist in facing those gaps and silences about which the biographer can never properly know is commonly remarked.⁵⁷ More interesting has been the appearance of the biographer as a character within his text. Not quite a fiction at first – see, for instance, Andrew Field's insistent interrogation of Nabokov – more recently these alter-ego narrators have taken on more autonomous life.⁵⁸ The purpose behind the creation of such fictional alternative 'authors' has been to dramatize the problems of biography within the text, and to highlight the way speaking positions are defined in the act of writing.

Brian Matthews, in his idiosyncratic *Louisa*, creates an alter-ego for 'the biographer', who debates with him the meanings of silences, who invents bridges for the gaps in the evidence, and whose dialogue about the meaning of Louisa Lawson's life foregrounds the hidden question of every biography: who

56 Richard Holmes, *Dr Johnson and Mr Savage* (London: Flamingo, 1994), p. 230.

57 Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990); *Blake* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995); *T.S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984).

58 Andrew Field, *Nabokov: His Life in Part* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).

is speaking, and for whom?⁵⁹ Drusilla Modjeska's *Poppy* – a book which, by refusing to define itself as biography or fiction, interrogates the limitations of genre – is preoccupied with voices.⁶⁰ It deals with the relations between a mother and daughter. The quest of the mother for her own life, her own voice, is in creative interaction (and tension) with the task of the author (daughter) in establishing a speaking position. In the process, family dynamics, the logocentric constraints of the 'masculine' voice of academic analysis, and the imperative of understanding the language of women are illuminated. Matthews and Modjeska are writing not only life-stories, but also challenging methodological essays on biography.

The explicit use of fictional techniques to foreground, and to stimulate debate about, the methodology of contemporary biography, as Matthews and Modjeska have done, leads to difficulty when a fictional conceit becomes a seamless part of the narrative. This was highlighted by the controversy sparked by Edmund Morris's *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan*.⁶¹ Morris borrows cinematic technique, creating a montage of fact and fiction, and inventing himself as an ever-present observer within the 'story' of Reagan's achievements: the Boswell to Reagan's Johnson. Critics saw clearly what Matthews and Modjeska were about (and both books won awards): Morris, on the other hand, provoked deep unease: 'Is this some new literary genre with its own intellectual integrity or merely an artful attempt to make duplicity respectable? [...] Should *Dutch* even be placed in bookstores without a clear statement within the text itself that identifies the fictional and non-fictional sections and sources? [...] *Dutch* will make history by defying the very standards that make history worth knowing.'⁶²

The point that Holmes, Matthews, and Modjeska make is that we must acknowledge the implication of the biographer in the story: Morris shows what happens when that is taken too far. In modernist biography, interpretation went on behind the scenes: Edel, for instance, whom we've seen to be a vigorous advocate of psychoanalytic theory as a biographical tool, argued that once motivation is understood the biography should be written 'as if psychoanalysis never existed'.⁶³ Now, however, the acknowledgement of interpretation as part of the story and the implication of the biographer in the text has

59 Brian Matthews, *Louisa* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1987).

60 Drusilla Modjeska, *Poppy* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1990).

61 Edmund Morris, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1999).

62 Joseph P. Ellis, 'Playing the Role of a Lifetime', in: *Guardian Weekly* 14–20 October 1999.

63 Leon Edel, 'The Biographer and Psychoanalysis', in: *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 42(1961)4/5, p. 458–466.

led to what one commentator called 'biography with the utility services on the outside [...] like Richard Rogers's Centre Pompidou'.⁶⁴ In consequence, methodological problems are brought to the surface, and some of the most fruitful commentaries on Life Writing emerge within biographies, rather than (as was common in the modernist period) as separate critical essays. The self-reflexive imperative in current biography underlies both the stream of first-person reflection on what to make of evidence and silence (see, for instance, Modjeska's reflections on understanding the gaps in Grace Cossington Smith's life) and the increasing tendency to include discussion of – and implicit dialogue with the reader about – authorial judgement and intention within a biography (see, for instance, the 'bookend' chapters on biography in Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf*).⁶⁵ Working biographers continue to provide the best critical commentary on Life Writing, and it is no longer in conferences, journal articles, anthologies or essays, but in the self-reflexive prose of contemporary biography that the most interesting writing about writing biography is to be found.

64 Ian McKillop, 'Vignettes: Leavis, Biography and the Body', in: Gould and Staley ed., *Writing the Lives of Writers*, p. 293–301.

65 Drusilla Modjeska, *Stravinsky's Lunch* (Sydney: Picador, 1999), p. 203–340; Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), p. 3–40 and 768–772.

SECTION 2

Biography and History



The Uses of Biography

Giovanni Levi

1. Raymond Queneau writes that ‘there were times when one could describe a person’s life independently of historical events.’¹ One could claim equally well that there were times – possibly more recent – in which it was possible to report on an historical event and in the process refrain from taking the individual into consideration. At the present time, we are in an intermediate phase: more than ever the biography finds itself to be at the center of historians’ attention, but they also clearly stress its ambiguities. In some cases an appeal is made to the irreducibility of individuals and their behavior to generalized normative systems, in the name of a life as it is experienced; in other cases, by contrast, they are seen as the ideal locus for testing the legitimacy of theoretical hypotheses as against reality and the operation of laws and social rules. Arnaldo Momigliano has at the same time stressed the ambiguity and the fruitfulness of biography: on the one hand ‘it is not remarkable that biography is busy establishing itself at the center of historical research. While the fundamentals of historicism make almost all forms of politics and social history more complex, biography remains something relatively simple. An individual has clear boundaries, a limited number of significant relationships [...]. Biography is open to all types of problems within well-defined boundaries.’² On the other hand, however, ‘will historians ever be in a position to calculate the innumerable aspects of a life? Biography derives from this quality an ambiguous role in history: it can be an instrument for social research or offer precisely the possibility of escaping from this research.’³

It is not my intention to return to a debate that is inherent in the social sciences and historiography and that Pierre Bourdieu, with his wholesome mercilessness has called an absurdity.⁴ I think, nevertheless, that in a time

1 Raymond Queneau, ‘L’histoire dans le roman’, in: *Front national* 4 August 1945.

2 Arnaldo Momigliano, ‘Storicismo rivisitato’, in: *Fondamenti della storia antica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), p. 464.

3 Arnaldo Momigliano, *Lo sviluppo della biografia greca* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 8.

4 ‘The completely absurd, in scientific terms, opposition between individual and society’: Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Fieldwork in Philosophy’, in: *Choses dites* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1987), p. 43.

of paradigm crisis and of a fruitful re-structuring of interpretative models applied to the social world, the recent preference of historians for biography and autobiography calls for some comment. In my view, most of the methodological questions in present-day historiography are posed in response to biography, in particular its relationship with the social sciences, the problem of analytical scales, the relationship between rules and actual practices and the complex problems which cross the boundaries of freedom and human rationality.

2. An initial significant aspect has to do with the relationship between history and narrative. Biography forms, indeed, the privileged medium in which the techniques of literature and its way of structuring questions present themselves to historiography. There has been a good deal of discussion concerning this subject, which has to do especially with the argumentative techniques which historians employ. Liberated from the obligation to base their arguments on documentary sources, literature is satisfied with an endless quantity of biographical frameworks and models, which have had a great influence on historians. This influence, more often indirect than direct, has suggested problems, questions and psychological or behavioral frameworks which cast the historian back against documentary obstacles that cannot be bridged: those having to do with every day affairs and thoughts, for example, with doubts and insecurities, with the fragmentary and treacherous character of identity and the conflicted moments of its construction.

The requirements of historians and novelists are not the same, of course, even if they have moved closer and closer together. The fascination which moves those who dig endlessly in archives for descriptions which cannot be substantiated due to a lack of documents nourishes both the new flourishing of history presented as a narrative and the interest in new kinds of sources, in which one might find disorderly evidence for the words and deeds of daily life. It has, moreover, breathed new life into the debate concerning argumentative techniques and concerning the means by which research into a communicative event is altered by the written text.

Is it possible to put down in writing an individual's life? This question, which raises important points for historiography, is often resolved by means of a few simplifications for which the absence of sources serves as a pretext. My aim is to demonstrate that the issue this addresses is not the only or even the most important difficulty. In many cases the most grating distortions come into being because we as historians imagine that the historical actors obey a rationality which is limited and temporally bound. In this, following an established biographical tradition and even the rhetoric of our discipline, we have accepted models which combine an orderly chronology, a coherent and stable personality, actions uninterrupted by inertia and decisions free of uncertainty.

3. Pierre Bourdieu has justifiably spoken of a 'biographical illusion' here, convinced as he is that it is essential to reconstruct the context, the 'social surface' on which the individual is dealing at each moment.⁵ But doubts about even the possibility of biography are a recurring factor. The public, representative, moral biography has not been the subject of a gradual re-evaluation; there was, formerly, a question of oscillations in the definition of rationality which have always been associated with moments of crisis, and also with moments when the confrontation between the individual and the institution became more pointed. This was the case, in a striking way, during a large part of the eighteenth century, with the beginnings of the debate concerning the possibility of describing the life of an individual. With the novel as a starting point (Sterne, Diderot), because it did its best to create a picture of a complex, contradictory person of whom the character, the intentions and the behavior had been taking shape for centuries, this crisis affected the autobiography (Rousseau) and in the end the actual biography. Countless analogies can be drawn between this period and our own: the awareness of a contradiction between the social persona and the perception of the self acquired a very special urgency. The limits of biography were thus clearly recognized, while one simultaneously celebrated the triumph of the biographical genre.

Marcel Mauss describes the difference between social persona and self-image as follows: 'It speaks for itself, especially for us, that there has never been a person who did not have, simultaneously, the feeling of his body *and* a sense of both his spiritual and physical individuality.' This sense is, nevertheless, not consistent with the manner in which he 'through the passing centuries and through various societies did not develop the feeling of "I" but the notion, the concept of "I"'.⁶ It seems obvious that the socially constructed notion of the self in some ages has been very narrow: in other words, what was socially determined and could be communicated corresponded very inadequately to what the person himself considered to be important. This problem, placed in the light of day at the present time, is the same as that which the eighteenth century explicitly formulated.

4. We can start, then, with a few examples from the eighteenth century. *Tristram Shandy*, by Sterne, can be considered the first modern novel, precisely because he stresses the extreme fragmentation properly expressed in an

5 Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'illusion biographique', in: *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences sociales* (1986)62–63, p. 69–72.

6 Marcel Mauss, 'Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de "moi"', in: Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 8th ed., 1983, original 1938), p. 335.

individual biography. This fragmentation is translated into the constant shifting of time, through the use of endless digressions and through the contradictory and paradoxical character of the thoughts and language of the protagonists. One can add that the dialogue between Tristram, the author and the reader is one of the book's leitmotifs. This is an effective way of constructing a story which takes into consideration the contradictory elements which form the identity of an individual and the various representations which one can form according to various perspectives and at various moments.

Diderot was a great admirer of Sterne. He shared with him his ideas about biography, which he did not consider to be capable of capturing the essence of an individual. Not that he rejected the biographical genre; he thought, to put it more precisely, that biography, while not capable of being realistic, had a pedagogical function in what it could reveal about famous people and how it revealed their public virtuousness and private sins. Diderot, moreover, on several occasions entertained the project of writing a biography, before confirming the impossibility of doing so.⁷ His work is not, for all this, any the less laced with autobiographical allusions in the form of fragments, of which we can find the most characteristic examples in *Jacques le Fataliste*. Here the problem of individuality is solved by the use of dialogue: the young Jacques and his old master each have their own lives and they exchange their points of view and often even their roles. A (to a large extent autobiographical) persona is born from this harmonious and dialogic cooperation which seems both young and old. Truth and literary illusion, autobiography and a multiplication of personas have a place in this oscillation; each isolated moment can be nothing more than a deformation with respect to the construction of personas which do not obey a linear development and which do not follow a path which is coherent or conforms to any sense of direction.

Let us consider now a classic example of the autobiography: Rousseau's *Confessions*. At first sight, this example seems to give the impression of contradicting the idea that people in the second half of the eighteenth century doubted even the possibility of writing a biography. Not only did Rousseau think that it was possible (possibly for him alone) to tell the story of a person's life, but also that this narrative could be entirely truthful. Thus the *Confessions* begins with this famous passage: 'Behold, the only portrait of a man, painted precisely according to nature and in all its truthfulness, which exists and which probably ever shall exist'. Immediately, when the writing has hardly begun, the author sees himself to be confronting a project which can perhaps be

7 Concerning the position of Diderot and Rousseau with respect to biography and autobiography, see Jean-Claude Bonnet, 'Le fantôme de l'écrivain', in: *Poétique* 15(1985)63, p. 259–278.

accomplished, but which will in any case be unique: 'I am beginning a project which has no model and which shall have no imitators'. In a certain sense, the future will prove him wrong. The reception of the *Confessions* is well known: when Rousseau submitted his copy for consideration he was, in his opinion, poorly understood and poorly interpreted. The autobiography was possible, but the truth could not be communicated. Faced with this impossibility, not to tell the story of his life, but to tell it without it being distorted or altered, Rousseau chose to give up. He too thought that there was only one narrative solution, the dialogue, and in the years which followed the writing of the *Confessions* he rewrote the contents in the form of a dialogue, *Jean-Jacques as the judge of Rousseau*, adopting now a double persona. For Rousseau, just as for Diderot and for Sterne (and for Shaftesbury before them, who was probably the inspiration for this solution), the dialogue represented not only the means of creating a less ambiguous form of communication; it was also a means of returning to the subject his complex identity by liberating him from the folds of the traditional biography which pretended to represent objective observations and to anatomize it in the manner of an entomological dictionary.

This crisis, which deserves a longer analysis, departed from the novel to extend itself to the autobiography. It has nevertheless resonated in the historical biography only to a limited extent (though it would be appropriate to pause to consider the life of Johnson as described by Boswell, and in particular the role of the imagination in the reconstruction of dialogue by the author, but here too the problem of the relationship between the author and the character sends us back to the remarks above concerning the doubling of the points of view).⁸ A compromise was discovered in the moral biography, which in fact sacrifices the exhaustibility and truth of the individual in favor of a more didactic tone, by adding emotions and passions to the traditional content of exemplary biographies, especially in the acts and gestures of the protagonist. To be honest, this simplification takes for granted a certain confidence in the capacity of a biography to describe what is significant in a life. This confidence would, incidentally, express itself in positivism and functionalism, with the help of which the selection of significant facts would accentuate the exemplary and typological character of the biography, by foregrounding the public as against the private and regarding the departures from the model as insignificant.

5. In spite of this, the crisis rose again in the twentieth century in relation to the appearance of new paradigms throughout the academic world: the crisis of the mechanical conception of physics, the birth of psychoanalysis, the new

8 William C. Dowling, 'Boswell and the Problem of Biography', in: Daniel Aaron ed., *Studies in Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 73–93.

directions taken by literature (it suffices to mention Proust, Joyce, Musil). It is no longer the characteristics but the probabilities which constitute the object of description. Mechanical science rests on the strict definition of what could and had to happen in natural phenomena. This definition has been replaced by a prohibition which, by contrast, defines what cannot happen: consequently everything which can happen without violating the prohibition belongs in the category of fact. In this context it is essential to know the point of view of the observer; the existence of another person in oneself, in the form of the unconscious, raises the problem of the relationship between the traditional, linear description and the illusion of a specific, coherent identity free of contradiction, which is merely a screen or a mask or the official role of an immense quantity of fragments and excesses.

The new dimension which the person takes upon himself with his individuality is thus not the only thing responsible for recent perspectives with respect to the possibility or impossibility of the biography. In a revealing way, the complexity of the identity, its progressive and non-linear form and its contradictions have become the chief players in the biographical problems with which historians are being confronted. Biography has continued to develop, but in an ever more controversial and problematic way, while in the background unresolved and ambiguous aspects continue to exist which seem to me to constitute, today, one of the privileged loci of confrontation in the landscape of historiography. In the background we find a new approach to social structures: in particular the re-opening of the controversy concerning the analyses and the concepts related to social solidarity and stratification accentuate the presentation, in a less schematic way, of the mechanisms by which networks of relationships, strata and social groups come into existence. The measure of their solidarity and the analysis of the manner by which social configurations are made and are destroyed pose an essential question: how do individuals (consciously or unconsciously) make decisions in relationship to the group or recognize themselves as belonging to a class?

6. Historians have thus shown themselves to be more aware of these problems. In spite of this the available sources do not inform us about the process by which decisions come into being, but only about the end result of those decisions, specifically the acts. This absence of documentary neutrality often leads to mono-causal and linear explanations. Fascinated by the richness of individual paths of life and at the same time unable to control the irreducible singularity of the life of an individual, historians have addressed the biographical problem in very different ways. I propose to sketch out a typology of these approaches, undoubtedly inadequate, but which has as its aim to shed light on the unresolved complexities of the biographical perspective.

a) *Prosopography and the standard biography*. From this perspective, individual biographies are only interesting in so far as they illustrate behaviors or appearances which are associated with the most common social conditions, statistically seen. It is not a matter, then, of true biographies, but more of the use of biographical material for prosopographic purposes. The biographical elements which appear in prosopographies are only considered to be historically relevant to the extent that they have a general significance. It is no coincidence that historians of mentality have worked in the field of prosopography without showing much interest in the individual biography. Michel Vovelle writes about this subject: 'Accepting the approaches of quantitative social history, we have tried in the domain of the history of mentality to offer this history of the masses, of the anonymous, in a word, of those who have never been able to allow themselves the luxury of a confession, how unliterary it might be: those by definition excluded from biography'.⁹

Ultimately the relation between group habit and individual habit which Pierre Bourdieu developed refers back to the selection from among what is shared and quantifiable, 'the style which is characteristic of an age or class' and what belongs to 'the unique qualities of the social trajectories': 'in fact it is a relation of singularity, which is to say, of diversity in the homogeneity which the diversity in the homogeneity reflects which for the social conditions of their production is characteristic, which the special habits of the various members of one class bring together. Each system of individual dispositions is a structural variant of the others [...], the personal style is never just alien with respect to the style which belongs to an age or class'. The endlessness of the possible combination on the basis of experiences which the members of a group have in common, from a statistical standpoint, determines in this way both the 'endlessness of the extraordinary differences', as 'the uniformity and manner' of the group.¹⁰ Here it also seems possible to refer alienations and abnormalities which have once been observed back to what structurally and statistically belongs to the group being studied. This approach contains a few functionalistic elements in the identification of the norms and style which belong to the group and in the alienations and abnormalities rejected as not significant. Pierre Bourdieu addresses both the question of determinism and the conscious choice, but the conscious choice is more recognized than defined

9 Michel Vovelle, 'Du quantitatif à l'étude de cas: Théodore Desorgues', in: François-Olivier Touati and Michel Trebitsch ed., *Problèmes et méthodes de la biographie* (Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, [1985]), p. 191.

10 Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Genève and Paris: Droz, 1972), p. 186–189.

and the accent seems to lie on the deterministic and unconscious aspects, on the 'strategies' which are not the result of 'a genuine strategic intention'.

This type of biography, which we might call standard in the sense that the individual biographies merely serve as illustrations of typical forms of behavior or status, displays certain analogies with prosopography: indeed, the biography is not one of a single individual but rather of an individual that unites all the characteristics of a group. It is, for that matter, the customary procedure first to make clear the structural norms and rules (family structures, mechanisms by which goods and power are transferred, forms of stratification or of social mobility...) before presenting the standard examples which are, in the argumentation, elevated to the status of empirical evidence.

b) *Biography and context*. In this second type the biography retains its specificity. The age, however, the cultural environment and the broader context are greatly stressed as factors which are capable of characterizing an atmosphere which could account for the singular qualities of the path of life. But the context in fact points us toward two different perspectives. In one case, the reconstruction of the historical and social context in which the events take place makes it possible to understand what in the first instance seems to be inexplicable and confusing. That is what Natalie Zemon Davis, referring to her work on Martin Guerre, defines as 'placing a cultural practice or a form of behavior back in a category of cultural practices, specifically that of life in the sixteenth century'.¹¹ In the same way, the interpretation which Daniel Roche advances to be able to understand his hero, the glassmaker Ménétra, tends toward normalizing behavior in such a way that they increasingly lose their association with the individual path of life as they seem to become more typical of a social environment (in this case, that of the system of apprenticeship and the French artisans of the late eighteenth century) and in the end they contribute to a portrait of an age and a group.¹² It is, then, not a question of distilling practices down to typical behavior, but of interpreting biographical vagaries in the light of a context which makes them possible and therefore normal.

In the second case, the context does service as padding for documentary lacunas, by means of comparisons with other individuals whose life in one way or another displays some correspondences with that of the person being studied. We can recall in this context that Franco Venturi in his *Giovinazza di*

¹¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, 'AHR Forum: The Return of Martin Guerre. "On the Lame"', in: *American Historical Review* 93(1988)3, p. 590.

¹² Daniel Roche ed., *Journal de ma vie. Jacques-Louis Ménétra, compagnon vitrier au 18e siècle* (Paris: Montalba, 1982), p. 9–26 and 287–429.

Diderot has reconstructed the first years of the life of his subject almost entirely without direct documentation. ‘These few fragments which survive, from the first part of his life, have, nevertheless, in their totality either a purely anecdotal value or can hardly be distinguished from the general characteristics of the age of Diderot’s youth. In order to make a meaningful attempt at reconstructing the biography of his youth, it is necessary to reach out as widely as possible to the people and movements with which he came into contact, to reconstruct the social circle around him, to multiply the examples of other lives which displayed some parallels with his, to bring back to life other young people around him.’¹³

This biographical practice rests on an implicit hypothesis which can be formulated as follows: whatever its apparent originality, a life cannot be understood only by means of its distinctive or unique qualities, but on the contrary, by returning each apparent abnormality back to the norms by demonstrating it has a place in an historical context which accommodates it. This perspective has produced very rich results, which in general have managed to maintain a balance between the specificity of the individual destiny and the social system in general. We can, however, regret that the context is often represented as rigid, coherent and that it functions as a static background against which the biography can be explained. The individual paths of life have roots in a context, in this way, but they have no influence on it, nor do they alter it.

c) *Biography and borderline cases.* Sometimes, however, biographies are directly used to shed light on the context. In that case, the context is not considered in its statistical completeness and exhaustibility, but by way of its margins. By describing borderline cases, it is precisely the margins of the social landscape, where these cases are possible, which are illuminated. We can cite once again the article by Michel Vovelle concerning biography: ‘The study of the individual case represents the necessary return to individual experience, in whatever significance it has, while it can seem atypical [...] The return to the qualitative by means of investigating a case gives attention to a dialectic movement in the field of the history of mentality. For me, this return is not so much a rejection of the quantified serial approach but a complementation of it, which makes a probing analysis possible which, instead of the leading heroes of traditional history, prefers witnesses of normality [...] or the ambiguous but perhaps richer contribution of the witness on the edge of a fault line’ (Vovelle refers here to his studies of Joseph Sec and of Théodore Desorgues).¹⁴

13 Franco Venturi, *Jeunesse de Diderot (de 1713 à 1753)* (Paris: Albert Skira, 1939), p. 16.

14 Vovelle, ‘Du quantitatif à l’étude de cas: Théodore Desorgues’, p. 197. References to Michel Vovelle, *L’irrésistible ascension de Joseph Sec, bourgeois d’Aix, suivi de quelques clés pour la*

With even more precision, Carlo Ginzburg analyzes popular culture, in his biography of Menocchio, by means of an extreme and in no respect standard case: 'In conclusion, even a borderline case can appear to be representative. In a negative sense, where it helps to specify what we should understand by "most frequent, statistically seen". In a positive sense, where it makes it possible to define the limits of the latent possibilities of something (popular culture) which is hardly known to us on the basis of a fragmentary and deformed documentary record.'¹⁵

Here, too, the parallels with literature are striking. The traditional, naturalistic character is gradually being pushed to the background, while the story of the absurd, for example by Beckett, has provided the solution for the extreme cases. "The most important trump of the traditional character in a novel depended on his capacity or his freedom to enter the struggle, victorious or not, against the threat of extreme situations. That was the source of his dramatic resilience. It seems as if it remains to those who legitimize the present-day "human character" as the ultimate solution to the crisis, only to replace dramatic situations with extreme situations [...]. Their destinies as adventurers, vagabonds, eccentrics and rebels seem to come from a mechanical mill which seems to strive to create movement from an atypical immovability and extreme situations which allow no escape.'¹⁶ But from this perspective, too, the social situation is often represented in a rigid way: by sketching its margins, the borderline cases expand the freedom of movement which the actors can enjoy, but they lose almost every link with normal society (the case of the French criminal Pierre Rivière is in this case exemplary).

d) *Biography and hermeneutics*. Interpretive anthropology has, without doubt, placed the dialectic act in the foreground, this endless exchange and alteration of questions and answers within a communication community. In this perspective, the biographical material becomes intrinsically discursive, but, it is not possible to translate its true nature, the total meaning which it could contain: it can only be interpreted in one way or another. It is the act of interpretation which becomes meaningful, that is to say, the process of the transformation to a text, the attribution of meaning to a biographical act to which an endless quantity of other meanings could have been attributed.

lecture des naïfs (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1975) and Michel Vovelle, *Théodore Desorgues ou la désorganisation* (Paris: Seuil, 1985).

15 Carlo Ginzburg, *Le fromage et les vers: l'univers d'un meunier du xvie siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988), p. 220.

16 Giacomo Debenedetti, *Il personaggio uomo* (Milan: Editore Garzanti, 1970), p. 30.

Since then, the debate about the place of biography within anthropology has taken a very promising but dangerously relativistic path.¹⁷ The history which depends on oral archives or which attempts to introduce psychoanalysis in historical-biographical research, experiences the influence of this only very weakly or sporadically. Here too, as in the eighteenth century, a dialogue takes place at the basis of the cognitive process: knowledge which is not the result of a simple objective description, but of a communicative process between two people or two cultures.

In fact this hermeneutic approach seems to lead to the impossibility of writing a biography. By suggesting that biographical material has to be approached in a problematic manner, by rejecting the unequivocal interpretation of the individual path of life, it has nevertheless influenced historians' thinking. It has led them to a better use of narrative forms in particular; it has led them to techniques of communication which are more respectful of the open and dynamic character of choices and acts.

7. This typology of the use and interrogations which one presently meets in the context of biography does not have the ambition to treat all of the possibilities and practices exhaustively: we could name other types; the psychobiography, for example, but it contains so many obscure and controversial elements that it does not seem to me to have any significant importance at the present time. The large types, presented here in summary form, which provide orientation, thus represent new paths which those are traveling who are attempting to use biography as an historical instrument of knowledge and want to replace the traditional, linear and factual biography, which nevertheless continues to exist and continues to do well.

This has to do, however, merely with partial solutions which still display very problematic elements. Biography thus forms a theme which must be the subject of debate, but nevertheless remaining at the intersection of problems which appear to us to be very important: the relation between norms and practices, between the individual and the group, between determinism and freedom, or between absolute rationality and limited rationality. I do not intend to do anything other here than submit a few themes to this debate and to stress that the four orientations which have been discussed have in common that they ignore fundamental questions. These have to do especially with the role of incoherence among the norms themselves (and no longer only with the contradictions between the norms and how they function) within every social

17 For example, Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), or Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami. Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

system; in the second place, the type of rationality which one attributes to the actors whenever one writes a biography; and finally, the relation between a group and the individuals of which it consists.

8. It is above all a problem of scale and point of view: if the stress is put on the path of life of an individual – and not on the entirety of the social situation – in order to analyze the network of relations and external obligations within which he finds himself, then it is entirely possible to pose the question about the effective functioning of social norms differently. Historians generally see acquired knowledge as something which undergoes change from time to time in every normative system, but at a certain moment becomes coherent, transparent and stable. It seems to me to be so that we should ask ourselves more questions about the extent of the true domain of freedom of choice. This freedom is of course not absolute: culturally and socially determined, limited, patiently conquered, it remains nevertheless a conscious freedom which leaves to the actors the cracks inherent in the general system of norms. No normative system is in reality sufficiently well-structured to prevent every conscious choice possible, every manipulation or interpretation of the rules or every deal. It seems to me that a biography is in that respect the ideal place to control the interstitial – and nevertheless important – character of freedom that agents are able to exert, and also the manner by which normative systems, which are never free of contradictions, function in concrete ways. By doing this, one retains another – though not contradictory – perspective than those who choose to stress the deterministic, necessary and unconscious elements, as does, for example, Pierre Bourdieu. There exists a permanent and reciprocal relation between biography and context; what changes is precisely the endless sum of these interrelations. The importance of biography is to make possible a description of the norms and their effective operation which is no longer presented only as the result of a discrepancy between rules and practice but also as that of structural and unavoidable incoherence among the norms themselves, incoherence which permits the multiplication and diversification of practices. It seems to me that, by this means, one avoids approaching the historical reality on the basis of a unique pattern of action and reaction and that one shows that the unequal distribution of power, however large and urgent that may be, cannot exist without allowing a certain room for maneuvering among the governed; the latter can, from that moment, present the rulers with nonnegotiable changes. This might have to do with nothing more than a nuance, but it seems to me nevertheless that one cannot analyze social change when one has not recognized beforehand the irreducible existence of a certain freedom with respect to the rigid forms and the origin of the reproduction of the ruling structures.

These considerations invite us to consider the type of rationality that one has to imagine when one sets out to describe historical actors. It is indeed rare that one takes one's distance from functionalist patterns or those of neoclassical economics; they, however, assume actors in possession of complete information and judge, by convention, all individuals to have the same cognitive dispositions, obey the same decision-making mechanisms and deal according to a socially normative and uniform sum of profit and loss. These frameworks result, in this way, in the construction of an entirely rational person who knows no doubt, or uncertainty, or inertia. The majority of biographies would take on a radically different character if one imagined a form of selective rationality which did not exclusively seek a maximizing of profit, a form of negotiation in which it would be possible to avoid reducing individuality to the coherences of the group, without sacrificing the dynamic explanatory power of collective behavior as a system of relations.

In addition to the interstitial character of individual freedom and the question of limited freedom, it seems to me that a last point should be brought into consideration. Roger Chartier has maintained that the opposition between the 'microhistorical analysis of case studies' and socio-historical history, between the study of the subjectivity of representations and the study of the objectivity of structures, could be overcome, on the condition that one 'keep to the frameworks which the classification and perception systems produce as true "social institutions" which take up the division of the social organization in the form of collective representations'.¹⁸ This comment seems to me thoroughly justified (perhaps with the exception of equating microhistory and case studies and the study of the subjectivity of representations), but insufficient: as a result of the fact that the stress is placed on the group, the relative stability of the coherence of groups and cohesion of groups is taken for granted, just like the fact that they form the minimum level at which we can still productively study the representations of the social world and the conflicts which they call into being. In my opinion we underestimate the problem of the construction of the group by giving preference in this way to the importance of the group, just as the evaluation of its solidity, its duration, its extent, and in this way we discard the question of the relation between the individual and the group. It is thus no coincidence if Chartier enthusiastically and explicitly equates individual representation and collective representation, as if their origin is of equal importance with respect to form.

18 Roger Chartier, 'La storia culturale fra rappresentazioni e pratiche', in: *La rappresentazione del sociale. Saggi di storia culturale* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1989), p. 14.

True, we abandon in this way the observation of indefinite social and conceptual collections (popular culture, mentalities, classes) to construct a fragmented and conflicted society, where the representations of the world become a subject of struggle. But there still remains a great deal of indeterminacy: the compositions of groups are taken to be acquired and defined; one studies conflicts and the struggle for social power as if they are taking place among groups whose cohesion is assumed, as if analyses of individual differences, so limitless at the border that they become impossible to interpret, had no contribution to make. Here, too, it might be just a matter of foregrounding: if one stresses the 'social genesis of cognitive structures' and the aspect of 'the acquisition in the form of dispositions of a differential position in social space', the activity of the actors remains vague, activity which is merely considered to be the result of 'countless operations by means of which the social order endlessly repeats and transforms itself'.¹⁹ However useful it might be, the notion of the assumption in the sense of 'a social history of uses and interpretations, restored to their fundamental determinations (which are social, institutional, cultural) and ingrained in the specific practices which created them' leaves the problem of the relation between the individual and the group open.²⁰ One cannot deny that an age has its own style, a custom which is the result of shared and repeated experiences, just as every age recognizes a group with its own style. But there exists for every individual significant room for freedom which has its origin precisely in the incoherence of the social surface and which gives life to social change. One cannot, then, attribute the same cognitive procedures to groups and individuals; and the specific character of each individual's practices cannot be treated as if they make no difference and have no importance. Because the not inconsiderable risk is that we will withdraw from our historical curiosity themes of which we consider ourselves to be fully in control while they are still largely undeveloped: for example, class consciousness, or group solidarity, or the limits of control and power. The conflicts concerning classification, distinction and representation are also relevant to the grip which the socially cohesive group maintains on each of its constituent members, just as they reveal the margins of freedom and coercion within which the forms of solidarity come into existence and function. I imagine that biography, in this perspective, might make a more probing study of these problems possible.

19 Pierre Bourdieu, *La noblesse d'État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1989), p. 9.

20 Chartier, 'La storia culturale fra rappresentazioni e pratiche', p. 21.

The Role of the Individual in History

Biographical and Historical Writing in the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Century

Sabina Loriga

For a long time, historians believed that their task was to snatch human actions from oblivion.¹ That idea was rooted in an immortal image of Nature – being eternal, natural elements didn't need memory to continue existing; but human beings, marked by mortality can become almost the same as nature because of History. From this perspective, historical writing ought to focus on the great actions and works of which mortals are capable.²

Things have changed in the last two hundred years. After the end of the eighteenth century, historians put the actions and suffering of individuals on one side to try to discover the invisible process of universal history, 'that evolutionary movement of our genre, which should be considered as its true content, as its centre and its essence'.³ There are various reasons which led historians to ignore individual human beings and pass from a plural history (*die Geschichten*) to single history (*die Geschichte*).⁴ Two difficult surprises of modernity have, without doubt, weighed on this. On one hand, there was the discovery that nature is also mortal and, on the other, the progressive loss of trust in the ability of our senses to grasp the truth.⁵ But, alongside these profound transformations, which go well beyond our conscious attitudes and, for certain aspects, elude us, some less tragic, or even banal, intellectual vicissitudes have perhaps influenced us. First of all, the hope of giving stable and

1 François Châtelet, *La naissance de l'histoire* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1962).

2 Hannah Arendt, 'The Modern Concept of History', in: *The Review of Politics* 20(1958)4, p. 570–590. Reprinted in: Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1961).

3 Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bernard Groethuysen ed. (Stuttgart/Göttingen: Teubner/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1927, original 1910) Vol. VII; Engl. trans. in: Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, H.P. Rickman ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976),

4 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), chapter 4.

5 On the awareness of the vulnerability of nature, also Hans Jonas, *Philosophical Essays. From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 1974).

objective scientific bases to social sciences and humanities. This aspiration mobilized an immense effort across disparate disciplines (from demography to psychology, history, sociology, and more) to highlight uniformity and eliminate idiosyncrasies from humanistic and social scientific models of interpretation and comparison.

This tendency to make the past uniform has had serious consequences. Hannah Arendt spoke about it in a letter dated 4 March 1951 to Karl Jaspers. Returning, once more, to the political and social tragedies of the twentieth century, she wrote that modern thought had lost the taste for difference: ‘What radical evil really is I don’t know, but it seems to me it somehow has to do with the following phenomenon: making human beings as human beings superfluous [...]. This happens as soon as all unpredictability – which, in human beings, is the equivalent of spontaneity – is eliminated.’ Then she clarifies: ‘I suspect that philosophy is not altogether innocent in this fine how-do-you-do. Not, of course, in the sense that Hitler had anything to do with Plato. [...] Instead, perhaps in the sense that Western philosophy has never had a clear concept of what constitutes the political, and couldn’t have one, because it spoke of man the individual and dealt with the fact of plurality tangentially.’⁶

Evidently, in addition to philosophy, loss of plurality also concerned history. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, history books were full of facts without protagonists. They talked about powers, nations, peoples, alliances, and interest groups but only rarely of human beings.⁷ As the German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger guessed, the language of history started to hide individuals behind impersonal categories: ‘History is shown without a subject, the people whom history is concerned with only appear as accessory figures, like a scenic background, as a dark mass in the background of the picture. There is talk of “the unemployed” or “businessmen”.’ Even the so-called makers of history appear to be lifeless: ‘The fate of the others – those whose destiny doesn’t make news – is avenged on their luck. They’re stiffened like mannequins and resemble the wooden figures which, in De Chirico’s paintings, take the place of men.’⁸

The ethical and political price of this desertification of the past is very high. As Isaiah Berlin wrote, at the time we discard personal reasons, ‘Alexander,

6 Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Briefwechsel 1926–69* (München: Piper, 1985), Engl. trans. *Correspondence 1926–1969* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonovich Publishers, 1992), p. 165–166.

7 Philip Pomper, ‘Historians and Individual Agency’, in: *History and Theory* 35(1996)3, p. 281–308.

8 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘Letteratura come storiografia’, in: *Il Menabò* 7(1966)9, p. 8.

Caesar, Attila, Mohammed, Cromwell and Hitler are like floods and earthquakes, sunsets, oceans and mountains; we may admire or fear them, welcome or curse them, but to denounce or extol their acts is as sensible as addressing sermons to a tree.⁹ I believe that Berlin's words are extremely important and current. They show how the danger of relativism, which corrodes the principle of individual responsibility, is not an exclusive feature of so-called post-modern historiography, but is also innate in an impersonal reading of history which describes reality through anonymous relationships of power. How and when did this sacrifice of the individual dimension occur? The border separating history and biography has always been uncertain and anything but peaceful. In the Attic period, Thucydides expressed absolute contempt towards biography. There is little space for a narrative genre which tries to captivate a popular public in his programme of precise, impersonal, and universal historiography. Two centuries later, Polybius wrote that biographical history, founded on the means of tragic theatre, created confusion between poetry and history. His considerations were part of a much wider discussion that took place in Greek historiography and which opposed the ideal of the true to that of the appearance of truth (*verisimilem*), the latter being pursued by the Sophist Gorgias. Unlike the affirmations of some historians of the fourth and third centuries B.C. (such as Phylarchus or Duris of Samos), who aimed careful to make history into drama, by looking for an accurate representation (*mimesis*), the story dramatic, to look for the *mimesis*, Polybius meant to establish and hand down the objective truth.¹⁰

The distinction between history and biography is sometimes also reiterated from the other side of the barricade by those who write biographies. In the Imperial Age, Plutarch displayed little interest in structural factors and claimed the primacy of the signs of the soul over political history. 'For it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles when thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities. Accordingly, just as painters get the likenesses in their portraits from the face and the expression of the eyes, wherein the character shows itself, but make very little account of the other parts of the body, so I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of

9 Isaiah Berlin, 'The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History', in: Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly ed., *Russian Thinkers* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 22–81.

10 Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests.’¹¹

The words of the ancients have had alternating fortune with early modern historians. In 1599, John Hayward, the so-called English Tacitus, expressed his diffidence towards biography in his *The first part of the life and reign of King Henrie III*, and advised not to confuse ‘the government of mighty states’ with ‘the lives and acts of famous men.’¹² However, not everyone accepted the separation between biography and history proclaimed by Polybius. In the eighth century, the Venerable Bede stated that biography was nothing more than history seen from a closer point of view. In the early modern period, the main paleography, diplomacy, and historiography manuals considered biography a legitimate form of historical writing. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Stanley, the English philologist, defined the biography of legislators, condottieri, and sages as the highest form of history.¹³ That the individual destiny of illustrious men makes the choices of a nation intelligible was also a widely shared opinion in the following century. David Hume was convinced that the spiritual nature of Charles I was fatal for the absolutist cause in England. And several decades later, Voltaire wound his historical narration around Louis XIV, Charles XII of Sweden, ‘excessively great, unfortunate and mad’, and the glorious adversary of Poltava, Peter the Great. Unlike many of his successors, Voltaire didn’t celebrate any cult of heroes but he was convinced that through great souls we can gain access to the surprises of history, that is, those unexpected occurrences that are so essential to the broad picture when ‘the verosimile doesn’t always occur’. Thus in the pictures of Théodore Géricault or Jacques-Louis David, only the hero’s face, hewn by the anonymous madman who lives in background, expresses the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age.¹⁴

In sum, for centuries the border between biography and history was contested, until it became the focal point of several intellectual conflicts precisely at the moment when historical thought and writing touched its apex. In what follows, I would like to examine two key moments of this battle over the border between history and biography. The first dates to the late eighteenth and the

11 Plutarch, *Greek Lives* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

12 John Garraty, *The Nature of Biography* (London: Knopf, 1957), p. 70.

13 On Mediaeval and Renaissance historiography, see Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship. Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970); Denis Hay, *Annalists and Historians. Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Methuen & Co., 1977).

14 On Enlightenment historiography, Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1965, original 1936).

early nineteenth centuries and is especially linked to the impact and success of philosophical history. The second lies at the heart of modern historiography and coincides with the divorce of social history from political history, which occurred in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In both cases, totality became the explanatory category of becoming.¹⁵

Philosophy

The first push toward the annihilation of the individual came from philosophy. In his short essay on the finality of history, written in 1784, Immanuel Kant portrayed man as a means through which nature achieves its ends, and stated that history must raise itself above the individual and think on a grand scale, as what appears confused and irregular in individuals is a succession of unitary and systematic events in the totality of the species: 'Individual men and even entire nations little imagine that, while they are pursuing their own ends, each in his own way and often in opposition to others, they are unwittingly guided in their advance along a course intended by nature. They are unconsciously promoting an end which, even if they knew what it was, would scarcely arouse their interest.'¹⁶ With the rise of a providential vision of history, biography became even more marginal. After reiterating the a priori unity of history, Fichte denied the independent value of the individual in the face of the universal – only the progress of the life of the species counted, 'that of individuals in no way'. Marxism did not break with classical German philosophy on this point, 'since Marx himself had already settled his accounts with the "German ideology" of post-Hegelian philosophy, he felt confident in anticipating the future philosophy which realizes the unity of reason and reality, of essence and existence, as it was postulated by Hegel.'¹⁷

In this providential conception of becoming, according to which humanity will achieve its superior aims by passing through a gradual but necessary arduous path, the individual remains completely crushed by the law – a dramatic

15 Judith Schlanger, *Les métaphores de l'organisme* (Paris: Vrin, 1971).

16 Immanuel Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, in: *Kants Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1902, original 1784). Engl. trans., 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', in: *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On the peculiarity of Kantian finalism, Ludwig Landgrebe, *Phänomenologie und Geschichte* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968), chapter 3.

17 Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), p. 35 and 55–56.

and implacable law which is immune from accidents. The oblivion of the person almost always coincides with the denial of the hazard or, at least, with its partial reduction. For example, the outcome of the battle of Waterloo was certainly conditioned by the torrential rain which fell during the night of 17/18 June 1815, but those drops of water were sent by the god of History.

Historians in the nineteenth century began to react against this providential and teleological conception of the philosophy of history. Particular notable is Wilhelm von Humboldt who, in two essays on universal history of 1814 and 1818, and in his famous speech of 1821 on the task of the historian, rebuked the philosophical systems of Fichte and Kant, for being founded on an abstract image of Man which aims 'to reduce the apparently casual and dispersed events of the world to a single point of view and deduce one from the other on the basis of the principle of necessity'.¹⁸ In contrast, Humboldt advocated a sort of physics of history which is heedful of men as rational beings but also as sensitive ones.

Certainly, Humboldt recognized the uniform elements recalled by Kant. Individual human beings, particularly when they act globally as a mass, conform to a certain uniformity. It follows that nature also conditions the moral character



ILLUSTRATION 6.3 *Men of history: On the base of the Obelisk of Theodosius, Istanbul, Turkey. (Photo: Joshua Treviño)*

¹⁸ Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Betrachtungen über die Weltgeschichte*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Behr's Verlag, 1904, original 1814), Vol. 3, p. 350.

of a person. If we examine apparently fortuitous events in series – such as weddings, deaths, illegitimate births or crimes – we find a surprising regularity that can only be explained by the fact that there is a natural component in men's actions, and this component is manifested cyclically, according to uniform laws. However, history is not just a product of nature; it is also dominated by the creative force of human personality: the individual cannot be explained 'on the basis of one of the influences suffered (it is rather the reaction of individuality which determines these last).'¹⁹ In other words, human actions always modify nature, even if in unknown and unexpected ways. Moreover, when he spoke of human actions, Humboldt did not think solely about the actions of great men: 'It is undeniable that the action of the genius and deep passion belong to an order of things other than the mechanical course of nature [but], taken strictly, this is what happens in every result of human individuality.'²⁰

Through these reflections, Humboldt suggested two extremely important points. First, he commented on the ethical dimension of history. History is not about moral: it does not have to offer examples to be followed or abhorred; examples are of no use or risk having a misleading effect. But history is ethics because, as Leopold von Ranke would say in 1860, it unveils the drama of freedom: 'The element in which history operate is the sense of reality [*Sinn für Wirklichkeit*] and it contains the awareness of the transience of existence in time, and of dependence upon past and present causes; at the same time, there is the consciousness of spiritual freedom.'²¹

Secondly, Humboldt reminded us that the historian's sense of wholeness does not coincide with the concept of an ideal totality; it is neither unique nor conciliatory but always manifold, full of life, conflictual, made of differences and contrasts. Humboldt's reflection would be taken up by other historians, such as Johann Gustav Droysen or Jakob Burckhardt, in the years to come. From certain points of view, the attempt of the philosophy of history to go beyond the individual tracks of the past and, therefore, eliminate its differences, met effective resistance from historians and nurtured a series of extremely rich reflections which aimed at defending the plurality of the past.

The second crucial turning point in the widening of the divide between history and biography dates to the end of the nineteenth century. As Droysen,

19 Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Betrachtungen über die bewegenden Ursachen in der Weltgeschichte*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* (1904, original 1818), p. 360.

20 Von Humboldt, *Betrachtungen über die bewegenden Ursachen*, p. 360.

21 Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* (1904, original 1821). Engl. trans. 'On the Historian's Task', in: *History and Theory* 6(1967)1, p. 60.

the most reflexive historian, sensed, 'our science has just been liberated from the philosophical-theological embrace and, lo and behold, natural sciences want to appropriate it'.²² In reality, rather than from science, the danger came from some young social disciplines such as demography and sociology, which wanted to acquire an unquestionable scientific statute.

In the 1830s, Lambert Adolphe Quételet coined the idea of the average man, with the hope of elaborating social mechanics, or a social science that would be able to define the laws which govern intellectual and moral phenomena in ways not unlike the law of physics.²³ In the following decades, the idea of the average man enjoyed a great success. Convinced that human beings cannot escape the universal law of causality, Henry Thomas Buckle, Grant Allen, and Louis Bourdeau insisted on the force of external limits, in particular geographic ones, and portrayed human beings as ants, which weave the warp of social life in an anonymous manner.²⁴ According to Herbert Spencer, the same constraints also applied to great men: 'Along with the whole generation of which he forms a minute part – along with the institutions, language, knowledge, manners and its multitudinous arts and appliances, he is a resultant of an enormous aggregate of forces that have been cooperating for ages.' It followed that science had the task of explaining the average man of every race, renouncing all morphological variations and individual differences. Even though each individual person may be important, individuals' thoughts and actions have no historical meaning. With a significant linguistic drift, Plutarch's 'signs of the soul', now became 'personal idiosyncrasies' to be leveled and, perhaps, eliminated.

In the nineteenth century, many historians joined this new battle against biography in the name of science. These historians shared the idea of confirming, once and for all, impersonality as a fundamental criterion of being scientific, even if they did not appreciate the extreme determinism of Buckle, Spencer or Bourdeau. In the United States, John Fiske, the author of several

22 Johann Gustav Droysen, *Historik. Die Vorlesungen von 1857*, P. Leyh ed. (Stuttgart and Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977); Johann Gustav Droysen, *Texte zur Geschichtstheorie. Mit ungedruckten Materialien zur 'Historik'*, G. Birtsch and J. Rüsen ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972).

23 Adolphe Quételet, *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés ou Essai de physique sociale* (Paris: Bachelier, 1835), p. 51.

24 Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1858); Grant Allen, 'Nation Making', in: *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1878 (in: *Popular Science Monthly Supplement*, 1878, p. 121–126); Grant Allen, 'The Genesis of Genius', in: *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1881, XLVI, p. 371–381; Louis Bourdeau, *L'histoire et les historiens. Essai critique sur l'histoire considérée comme science positive* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1888).

works of American history, hoped, in this way, to create a 'great historiographical revolution': 'Since the middle of the nineteenth century the revolution which has taken place in the study of history is as great and as thorough as a similar revolution which, under Mr. Darwin's guidance, has been effected in the study of biology. [...] Yet in the principal works by which this immense change has been brought about [...] biography plays either an utterly subordinate part or no part at all.'²⁵

In France, Émile Durkheim recognized an important political function of great men, but Durkheim thought that great men were a disturbing element for the social sciences, which had to study ways of thinking, feeling, and acting independently from individuals.²⁶ A few years later, the sociologist and historian François Simiand took up the same idea, this time to advocate the unification of all social sciences. Although he recognized the specific interpretative quality of history, Simiand maintained that historians had to study what is objective, not individual spontaneity. Politics, individuals, and chronology were without reality and had to be replaced by other key concepts, such as repetition, regularities and tradition. For Simiand, moreover, historical causality no longer had the form of motivation but that of the law.²⁷

The dream of writing impersonal history also seduced some German historians. In 1896, Karl Lamprecht, founder of the *Kultur-und Universalgeschichte*

25 John Fiske, 'Sociology and hero-worship', in: *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1881, p. 81. To this end, it's interesting to note the double image of Darwin. Fiske used it in an antibiographical key – for him, all that is individual assumed a superficial aspect which is too fast. But other authors appealed to the theory of evolution to criticize geographical determinism. William James did this in two short essays in which he defended the notion of the great man through the concept of spontaneous variation: 'I affirm that the relation of the visible environment to the great man is in the main exactly what it is to the "variation" in the Darwinian philosophy. It chiefly adopts or rejects, preserves or destroys, in short, selects him. And whenever it adopts and preserves the great man, it becomes modified by his influence in an entirely original and peculiar way.' William James, 'Great men and their Environment', in: *Atlantic Monthly*, 1880, p. 226. Also William James, 'The Importance of Individuals', in: *Open Court*, 1890. Both texts were republished in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York and London: Longmans, 1897). A similar position was supported by Henri Berr, 'La méthode statistique et la question des grands hommes', in: *Nouvelle Revue* 1 and 15 June 1890.

26 Émile Durkheim, *Le rôle des grands hommes dans l'histoire* (1883), in: *Textes. 1. Éléments d'une théorie sociale* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1975); Émile Durkheim, *Les règles de la méthode scientifique* (Paris: Puf, 1963, original 1895), p. 10.

27 François Simiand, 'Méthode historique et science sociale', in: *Revue de synthèse historique* 6(1903)16, p. 1–22 and 6(1903)17, p. 129–157, republished in *Annales ESC* 15(1960)1, p. 87, 91, 95 and 105.

Institut of the University of Leipzig, extrapolated a regulatory and absolute concept of science from the natural sciences and applied it to all social disciplines. He suggested that causality became a primary and systematic fundamental so that history could acquire an unquestionable scientific status. As science has the task of knowing the necessary concatenation of causes and effects, which is shown as uniform in all special processes, history should also only be concerned with what is comparable – the historical-cultural method also coincided with the acceptance of an absolute causality in the spiritual field and ‘works with the specific methods of comparative sciences; with synthesis and inductive comparison and generalization’. In Lamprecht, this perspective led to the sacrifice of all differences. Historians can, or rather, must stop detecting what separates things in order to discover what unites them. Therefore, they should not consider each individual as a particular being, with a precise, unique, unrepeatable character, much less as a being able to impress change on the course of history, but as a generic sample equivalent to others, only dominated by ideas, feelings, and impulses that are common to the group he belongs to.²⁸ Unlike Marxist historians, who preferred the notion of class, for Lamprecht the determining social unit able to explain all the rest was the nation, which he understood not in a juridical or political sense, but in a romantic sense, as an organism which evolves according to its own laws. This was an interesting point of disagreement: the concept of nation was no longer an element of individualization of the past, as it had been for many historians in the early decades of the nineteenth century, but a regular dimension of historical life.²⁹

To be sure, in this period too there were dissenting voices, who were reluctant to sacrifice the concreteness of human existence in the name of science. But, unfortunately, many of those who defended the individual nature of history continued to cultivate the rhetoric of personal greatness. In other words, the great politicians able to shape events were set against the anonymous social forces invoked by Simiand and Lamprecht. Even those who did not succumb to the heroic ideology dreamt of improbable individuals, all intentional and free. It is noteworthy that the primacy of great men almost invariably coincides with the primacy of politics. Only the State seems worthy of historical investigation. As the German historian Eberhard Gothein wrote ironically, the

28 Karl Lamprecht, ‘Was ist Kulturgeschichte? Beitrag zu einer historischen Empirik’, in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, new volume (1896–97)1, p. 75–150.

29 Jürgen Kocka, ‘Ideological repression and methodological Innovation: Historiography and the Social Sciences in the 1930s and 1940s’, in: *History and Memory* 2(1990)1, p. 130–138, on the link between social history and ethnic nationalism in the following decades.

actions of great importance, State facts, are the prerogative of political historians, while cultural historians confined themselves to the rubbish bin and the 'wardrobe of old things'.³⁰ In a period marked by a steady growth of State power and the affirmation of the masses as a political subject, the articles of the *Historische Zeitschrift* ignore social problems (there are no courtyards, factories, families, suburbs etc.) and flatten politics, identifying it with the manifest, formal ideology of State institutions.³¹

It seems to me that, in many ways, history emerges profoundly weakened from the methodological debate of the late nineteenth century. The main figures of that epoch obfuscated the richest and most complex views, such as those of Otto Hintze. Thus, the historiographical landscape quickly regrouped around a rather debatable conceptual distinction, that between social and political history. In the following decades, the former would cultivate its impersonal vocation while the latter would continue to populate the past with decorative, upright characters (forgetting Bismarck's warning, 'My influence is generally greatly exaggerated [...] but, despite everything, no-one will think of requiring me to make history').³²

Biography & History

During the twentieth century, the image of biographical history was further damaged. The apex of this suspicion against biography was probably reached in France.³³ The battle against the *histoire historisante* started on the pages of the *Revue de synthèse historique* and was won by the historians of the *Annales*, who tried to collect the deep under-layer of history (social structures, mental representations, and long-lasting phenomena) beyond individual personalities and events. In a short time, biography became the emblem of traditional

30 Eberhard Gothein, *Die Aufgaben der Kulturgeschichte* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1889).

31 We find this type of setting also in T.C.W. Blanning and David Cannadine ed., *History and Biography. Essays in Honour of Derek Beales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

32 Bismarck's declaration, made on 16 April 1869 to the Reichstag of Northern Germany, was given by Gheorgi V. Plechanov, *Über die Rolle der Persönlichkeit in der Geschichte* (Berlin: Verlag Neuer Weg, 1945, original 1898). Engl. trans. *The Role of the Individual in History* (New York: International Publishers, 1940).

33 Josef Konvitz, 'Biography: The Missing Form in French Historical Studies', in: *European Studies Review* 6(1976)1, p. 9–20; Marc Ferro, 'La biographie, cette handicapée de l'histoire', in: *Le Magazine littéraire*, avril 1989.

history, what Fernand Braudel called *histoire événementielle*, one which was more attentive to chronology than structures, to great men than the masses. For Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, the aim of history was man or 'disons mieux: les hommes. Plutôt que le singulier, favorable à l'abstraction, le pluriel, qui est le mode grammatical de la relativité, convient à une science du divers'.³⁴ But after Bloch and Febvre, the second and third generations of the *Annales* historians subsumed all individual tensions in the long-lasting collective structures. Fernand Braudel defined the events as nothing more than dust, 'une agitation de surface', and treated individuals as a patina of reality, brilliant but superficial. His insistence on the illusory nature of human actions arose from this: 'tout effort à contre-courant du sens profond de l'histoire est condamné d'avance'.³⁵

Social historians were not the only ones to mistrust individuals. In the 1960s and 70s, during the boom of quantitative historical methods, some historians also hoped to assess cultural phenomena in quantitative terms. François Furet maintained that the notion of subordinate classes evoked, above all, an idea of quantity and anonymity. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie hoped for an 'histoire sans les hommes'. Jacques Le Goff (later, author of two important historical biographies) wrote that the history of collective mentalities studied 'le quotidien et l'automatique, ce qui échappe aux sujets individuels de l'histoire parce que révélateur du *contenu impersonnel de leur pensée*, ce que César et le dernier soldat de ses légions, saint Louis et le paysan de son domaine, Christophe Colomb et le marin de ses caravelles ont en commun'.³⁶ For several decades, the taste of singularity only survived in a few hidden corners of historiography. One of these was the field of prosopography. Diffident towards the philosophy of history and the history of ideas alike, Lewis Namier believed that social facts could only be explained scientifically by exploring the roots of individual behavior. His microanalytical method provided for the fission of social facts in a myriad of particular existences, which eventually were to be reintegrated in much larger totalities. The historian 'has to get acquainted with the lives of

34 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993, original 1949), p. 83.

35 Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris, Armand Colin, 1990, original 1949) Vol. II, p. 21–23, 512–520. Cfr. the critical observations of Jacques Rancière, *Les mots de l'histoire. Essai de poétique du savoir* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992), p. 26–27.

36 François Furet, 'Pour une définition des classes inférieures à l'époque moderne', in: *Annales ESC* 18(1963)3, p. 459–474; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le territoire de l'historien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973) Vol. IV; Jacques Le Goff, 'Les Mentalités: Une Histoire ambiguë', in: Le Goff and Nora ed., *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) Vol. III, p. 80.

thousands of individuals, with an entire ant-heap, see its files stretch out in various directions, understand how they are connected and correlated, watch the individual ants, and yet never forget the ant-heap'.³⁷ Nevertheless, Namier's *pointilliste* conception – taken up essentially by the historians of Ancient Rome and the scholars of the English aristocracy – often assumed an anti-biographical dimension in the sense that the variety of the past was sacrificed in the name of regularities.

Another interesting experience sprang from sociology. At the end of the 1910s, William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki wrote a monumental work, *The Polish Peasant*, starting from the personal testimonies of Polish immigrants to the United States.³⁸ The book had a difficult life, partly because of political vicissitudes: Thomas, a militant pacifist, was arrested for adultery in 1918 and only rehabilitated ten years later, and partly because, for scientific reasons, American sociology soon decided that personal documents were not reliable. The coup de grace came in 1939, when Herbert Blumer decreed that biographical material founded on irremediably subjective procedures did not allow valid and reliable generalizations to be made.³⁹

Just when it seemed to be officially dead and buried, the biographical message was taken up by a series of free players who intended to let all those forgotten by History with a capital H speak.⁴⁰ It was from this perspective, so far from the traditional one of political history, that the individual slowly found its way back. Initially tied to the memory of the excluded (as in the case of oral history, the studies of popular culture or of women), biographical reflection progressively moved to the core of the historical discipline during the last two decades of the twentieth century. The crisis of marxism and structuralism led many historians to ask themselves about the notion of the individual. In 1987,

37 Lewis B. Namier, 'The Biography of Ordinary Men', in: Lewis B. Namier, *Skyscrapers and other Essays* (New York: MacMillan, 1968, original 1931), p. 46–47.

38 William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 1918–1920).

39 Herbert Blumer, *An Appraisal of Thomas and Znaniecki's 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America'* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1939); Howard S. Becker, 'The Life History and the Scientific Mosaic', in: Howard S. Becker, *Sociological Work. Method and Substance* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1970), original 'Introduction', in: Clifford R. Shaw, *The Jack-Roller* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), on the discredit of personal documents in sociology.

40 Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Changing Patterns in English Mass Culture* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1961); Danilo Montaldi, *Autobiografie alla leggera* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961); Danilo Montaldi, *Militanti politici di base* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971); Oscar Lewis, *The children of Sanchez: autobiography of a Mexican family* (New York: Random House, 1961).

Bernard Guenée wrote that 'l'étude des structures [lui] semblait donner une place trop large à la nécessité' and, a few years later, Le Goff clarified that 'la biographie [lui] semble en partie libérée des blocages où des faux problèmes la maintenaient. Elle peut même devenir un observatoire privilégié.'⁴¹ Even social historians, traditionally more sensitive to collective historical experiences, were disappointed and dissatisfied by the *overpowering* categories of social class or mentality – categories which reduce the sense of human actions to a sub-product of economic forces and cultural milieu. So they, too, started to reflect on personal destinies.⁴²

I suggest that two contradictory thrusts characterized these new historiographical tendencies. On one hand, we can recognize more than an echo of gigantic hopes which go well beyond the *normal* work of scientific understanding. The French sociologist Daniel Bertaux described it very well. In 1968, biography seemed to him to be a means of alternative and anti-authoritarian knowledge of the past, and also as an instrument of the struggle to change society.⁴³ On the other hand, we can identify a resigned, *minimalist* view founded on the strange conviction that studying an individual is an easy task. Thus, in a conference organized at the Sorbonne in 1985, the profound reasons that had once more pushed individual destinies to the forefront of historical investigation were liquidated as emotional and linked to psychological needs. Biography was presented as a pleasant expedient, 'a modest instrument, that can help [the historians] to illustrate long-term trends and structure but certainly cannot profess to becoming an intellectual lever'.⁴⁴ According to these characterizations, life-history would simply have a function of suggestion (of preliminary exploration of the problem) or illustration (theories are established through other research procedures and the personal anecdote is

41 Bernard Guenée, *Entre l'Église et l'État. Quatre vies de prélats français à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), p. 14; Jacques Le Goff, *Saint-Louis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 15; Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); Alain Corbin, *Le monde retrouvé de Louis-François Pinagot, sur les traces d'inconnu, 1798–1876* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).

42 [Editorial], 'Tentons l'expérience', in: *Annales ESC* 44(1989)6, p. 1317–1323.

43 Daniel Bertaux, 'From the Life-History Approach to the Transformation of Sociological Practice', in: Daniel Bertaux ed., *Biography and Society. The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981).

44 Hubert Bonin, 'La biographie peut-elle jouer un rôle en histoire économique contemporaine?', in: François-Olivier Touati and Michel Trebitsch ed., *Problèmes et méthodes de la biographie* (Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, [1985]), p. 173; also Felix Torres, 'Du champ des *Annales* à la biographie: réflexions sur le retour d'un genre', in: Touati and Trebitsch ed., *Problèmes et méthodes de la biographie*, p. 141–148.

used as an ornament, as the icing on the cake). In both cases, life-history is not used to understand social life but as an example for a general reasoning; it is the 'sandwich' technique which slips in a piece of individual existence between one piece of context and another.⁴⁵ With the help of critical reflections by scholars of the calibre of Bourdieu, most historians increasingly moved beyond their *naïvité* and began to raise two sets of fundamental questions.⁴⁶ The first series of questions concerns biographical analysis. What is important and unimportant in the life of a person? What are the categories that explain it? Freedom, national independence, and democracy? Army, school and family or social classes, capitalism and who knows what other external elements (noise, pollution...)?⁴⁷ The second series of questions concerns the relationship between biography and history: can the life of an individual illuminate the past? Can personal witnesses enable a general hypothesis to be formulated?

Microhistory has emerged as a historical approach concerned with both these sets of questions. Like the history of women and that of popular culture, microhistory has tried to restore personal dignity to the losers of history, the victims of the past.⁴⁸ In 1976, Carlo Ginzburg used Bertolt Brecht's famous question ('who built Thebes of the seven gates?') to give voice to a sixteenth-century miller. In the following years, Giovanni Levi further complicated the issues at stake. If Ginzburg had studied a fairly exceptional individual (Menocchio), Levi chose to focus on 'a banal place' (a small seventeenth-century village) and 'a common history' (a rather rough exorcist priest).⁴⁹ In both cases (Ginzburg and Levi), political passion went hand in hand with methodological commitment. Both used biographical information in new ways, we could say more aggressively, in order to question the apparent homogeneity of secular and ecclesiastical institutions, local communities, social groups, and

45 The expression 'sandwich technique' was coined by the English historian Charles Firth: Godfrey Davies, 'Biography and History', in: *Modern Language Quarterly* 1(1940)1, p. 79–94.

46 Pierre Bourdieu, 'L'illusion biographique', in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 11(1986)62/63, p. 69–72; Jean-Claude Passeron, 'Biographies, flux, itinéraires, trajectoires', in: *Revue française de sociologie* 31(1990)1, p. 3–22.

47 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Chandler Publishing Company, 1972), p. 475.

48 Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, 'Il nome e il come. Mercato storiografico e scambio diseguale', in: *Quaderni storici* 14(1979)40, p. 181–190.

49 Carlo Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976). Engl. trans. *The Cheese and the Worms: the Cosmos of a Sixteenth-century Miller* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Giovanni Levi, *L'eredità immateriale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1985). Engl. trans. *Inheriting Power: the Story of an Exorcist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

other entities, and, in so doing, to reassess the balance between personal destinies and social structures. Searching in the cracks of normative frameworks, microhistory discovered that social contexts resemble a connective tissue with electric fields of different densities rather than a compact and coherent unit.⁵⁰

This contribution is extremely important, both for history as a discipline and for the *polis*. It unveiled the poverty of all naturalized concepts of *belonging*. Social life appears as a series of circles or steps, each intersecting with one another, the centre of one circle being the periphery of another, and so forth. In this scheme, the individual, each individual, is a *hybrid*, a meeting point for different social experiences.⁵¹ But this perspective contains something dizzying: the work of contextualization appears inexhaustible (every space and all time refers to another space and another time). I am not sure whether in the last few years, we have really been able to come to terms with this sense of dizziness. I wonder whether we haven't tried to weaken or even deny this sense too often, up to the point of compensating dizziness with two utopias.

The first utopia is that of biographical representativeness: it promises to discover a point that encapsulates all the qualities of the whole. The historian should work in two times: first to find the representative individual (the normal peasant, the normal woman, etc.), then to extend the qualities of the representative individual to a whole category (the class of peasants, the female gender, and so on) through an inductive process.⁵² Whoever has worked on biographical sources (diaries, correspondence, memories, etc.) knows that, if we follow this utopia, we inevitably end up by smoothing the specificity of personal lives and treading on the variety of the past. In an apparently innocent manner, we ignore, or rather we correct, the egoistic elements of biography. The result of this daily censorial work is rather melancholic: the historical time appears to be an immobile base, without fingerprints.⁵³

The second utopia is the naturalist one. In this case, historians do not look for a miraculous point able to reflect history as a whole (an age, a society, a social group, and so on) but tell themselves that they 'want the history of each

50 Jacques Revel, 'Microanalyse et construction du social', in: Jacques Revel ed., *Jeux d'échelles. La microanalyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 15–36.

51 Edoardo Grendi (another of the founders of microhistory) coined the oxymoron 'normal exceptional'. Edoardo Grendi, 'Microanalisi e storia sociale', in: *Quaderni storici* 12(1977)35, p. 506–520.

52 On the implicit risks in this 'typing' operation Bernard Lepetit, *De l'échelle en histoire*, in Revel ed., *Jeux d'échelles*, p. 78; Alain Boureau, *Histoires d'un historien. Kantorowicz* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 75–76.

53 Giovanni Levi, 'Les usages de la biographie', in: *Annales ESC* 44(1989)6, p. 1325–1336; Engl. trans. chapter 5 of this volume.

one'. When Giovanni Levi suggested that we reconstruct the 'biographical stories of *every* inhabitant of the village of Santena who had left a documentary trace', he may not have predicted that the second generation of microhistorians would end up competing with the Registry Office (to use Balzac's famous expression).⁵⁴ In a benevolent interpretation, we could say that historians hope to describe the past in all its details and elaborate interpretative categories that respect the full integrity and complexity of empirical reality. But this idea of knowledge as an integral copy of reality rather recalls the cartographers evoked by Jorge Luis Borges who, wishing to design a perfect map of the empire, set up one 'which had the size of the Empire itself and coincided with it point by point'.⁵⁵

Methods

Faced with these utopian dead ends, which risk driving us away once more from biographical history, it seems to me important that we again take a step back and return to the *Methodenstreit* of more than a hundred years ago. Today, as political subjects, we are all obliged to ask ourselves about the limits of the concept of belonging. Perhaps for this reason, we are more prepared to accept some of Wilhelm Dilthey's reflections that, at the time, historians ignored. All his reflections suggest how the historic world cannot be understood in terms of belonging, and even less in terms of ownership or assimilation. An individual cannot *explain* a group, a community or an institution and, vice versa, a group, a community or an institution cannot *explain* an individual. There is always a disparity, and this is inexhaustible. On the one hand, the creations of collective life are suffered, lived and achieved by individuals but transcend their control and cover a human space which is wider than the biographical one. They were here before us and will continue after our demise: 'These relationships go through individuals, exist within them, but also reach beyond their life and possess an independent existence and development of their own through the content, value and purpose which they achieve.'⁵⁶ On the other hand, each and every individual is always a *hybrid*, a point where webs of relationships intersect. Although an individual is saturated to the bone by his social experiences, he can never be reduced to just one of them. Referring to this, Dilthey gave the

54 Levi, *L'eredità immateriale*, p. 4–5.

55 Jorge Luis Borges, *El hacedor* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1960). Engl. trans. 'On Rigor in Science', in: *Dreamtigers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

56 Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, p. 180–181.

example of the judge who, in addition to fulfilling his role in the court, also lived in various other dynamic unities. He takes care of his family, looks after his economic interests, has a political function, and he sometimes amuses himself by writing verse.

Moreover, for Dilthey, the relationship between a community or an institution and an epoch or a civilization cannot be defined in terms of belonging. Certainly, each epoch expresses a dominant figure, it is unilateral and, at certain times, the harmony between the different spheres of life is particularly intense. For example, the rational and mechanistic spirit of the seventeenth century influenced literature, politics, and war strategy. But these are exceptions because the various spheres have a certain independence: 'Each individual system of interactions [...] has, through the positing of values and their realization, its centre within itself.'⁵⁷ A civilization is not a compact entity; it is not made of a single substance that can be summarized in a fundamental thought but is an interweaving or precarious mixture of various activities in continuous movement (the economy, religion, law, education, politics, the trade union, family, etc.).

Dilthey elaborates this fundamental plurality of the historical world also on a temporal level. In the wake of Johann Gottfried Herder, who thought that every phenomenon has its own specific temporality, Dilthey wrote that historical time is neither a straight line nor a homogenous flow. For example, the Enlightenment, Bach, and pietism coexisted during the eighteenth century. This epoch 'in which the dominant address of German Enlightenment is expressed in the different fields of life doesn't, however, determine all the men belonging to that age and, even where it influences, it finds other forces alongside it. The oppositions of the previous ages impose their worth and the forces reconnecting to ancient situations and ideas prove to be particularly effective, trying, however, to give them a new form.'⁵⁸ Far from a compact and conciliating image of becoming, Dilthey thinks of the historic whole as a plastic, conflictual entity in which dissonant forces live together, rebelling against the *Zeitgeist*.

Profoundly sensitive to the peripheral vitality of history, Dilthey was forced to face the feeling of dizziness which nurtured the whole biographical history. But, faithful to the example of the judge who writes poetry, he succumbed to neither the illusion of representativeness nor to the naturalistic illusion. We are offered another road – that of accepting the circular character of knowledge. To understand the whole, we have to understand the parts, but to

⁵⁷ Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, p. 183.

⁵⁸ Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, p. 282.

understand these, we have to understand the whole. There is reciprocal dependence between these two operations, one feeds the other: 'a universal-historical survey of the whole presupposes the understanding of the parts united in it', however, 'understanding of the particular depends on knowledge of the general'.⁵⁹ Dilthey suggests that the fact that the work of contextualization is interminable (that each space and time refer to another space and time) is not necessarily an inconvenience or, worse still, a curse. Perhaps it is a human richness that hides an opportunity of knowing.

Accepting this suggestion, that is, welcoming the unfinished nature of history, is anything but simple. It means recognizing that every interpretation implies a hermeneutic art and, therefore, accepting the importance of historical imagination. In this way, we return to the starting point, to Wilhelm von Humboldt who in a 1821 discussion of the historian's task reminded us that, to find the truth of the past, 'an enumeration and depiction of events' is not enough. To 'work the collected fragments into a whole', historians must use their imagination. This does not mean that they can or should invent what happened. It only means – but the 'only' is anything but simple – that they should enlarge their own humanity as much as possible so that they can let themselves be impregnated by past realities. Like artists, historians also create a work of imitation; they also seek the real inner truth. But their aim is quite different, 'the artist merely takes its ephemeral appearance away from reality, merely touches reality in order to fly away from it; the historian is searching for reality alone and has to plunge deeply into it'. Instead of hovering above reality, historians subordinate their imagination to its investigation: 'in this subordination, the imagination does not act as pure fantasy and is, therefore, more properly called the intuitive faculty or connective ability'.⁶⁰

59 Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, p. 196, 188.

60 Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, p. 57–60.

Contemporary Values of Life

Biographical Dictionaries in the Nineteenth Century

Hans Renders

The term biography used to designate the description of a life in the form of a book was probably first used in 1721 in the *Dictionnaire universel françois et latin*, more commonly referred to as the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*.¹ A biography is not just a description of a life, but also a book. But this has not always been the case. Let's take the nineteenth century, for example. A biography was, at the end of that age, a feature in the newspaper; a mobile movie theatre in a tent where the first movies were shown; two, three or even four volume biographies; but also a portrait in twenty or twenty-five pages of someone people found interesting. In the nineteenth century, such a portrait of around twenty pages was usually handed out as a sort of pamphlet at fairs, exhibits or during other such public events. We know of the phenomenon in the eighteenth century of biographies being handed out as pamphlets at the market during or directly after the execution of a sentenced criminal.² This so-called crime biography or, even more misleading, 'criminal biography' almost always had the features of a report. Often those portraits were sold as separate periodicals and (after ten or twenty editions) combined into a book by the publisher at the end of the year, with the addition of an introduction, corrections and supplements, to be put on the market. Such a series was *Mannen van Beteekenis in onze dagen* [Men of Significance in our days], published from 1870 until 1875 by the well-known publisher A.C. Kruseman (see Illustration 7.4).³ After 1875 the series was continued by Kruseman in collaboration with his fellow-townsmen, the publisher from Haarlem Tjeenk Willink, from 1895 to 1921, under the title

1 Antoine Furetière and Etienne Souciet, *Dictionnaire universel françois et latin*, eight volumes (Paris: La Compagnie des Libraires Associés, 1704–1771). Although the word biography not in the specific meaning of a book, was not used officially before the second half of the eighteenth century; see chapter 2 of this volume.

2 P.J. Buijnsters, *Levens van beruchte Personen. Over de criminele biografie in Nederland gedurende de 18e eeuw* (Utrecht: H&S, 1980), p. 11.

3 Things sometimes disappeared, too, in the subsequent collection. Thus, the periodical installment about Otto, Count of Bismarck-Schönhausen, was accompanied by a facsimile of the 'Geheim tractaat tusschen Frankrijk en Pruisen, tot verdeeling van België en Nederland'.

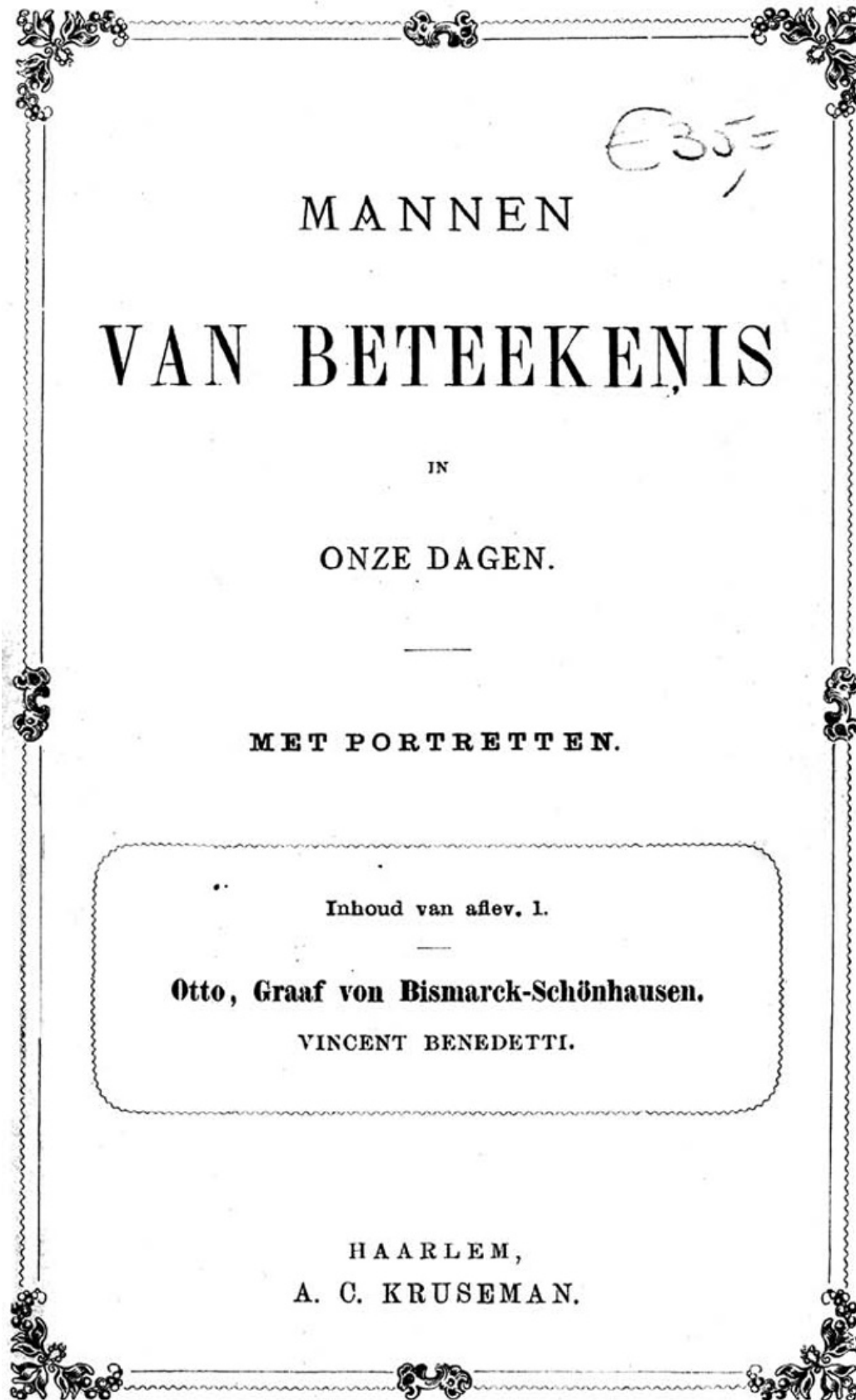


ILLUSTRATION 7.4 Cover of: H. Tiedeman ed., *Mannen van Beteekenis* [*Men of Significance*] (Haarlem: Kruseman, 1870).

Mannen en Vrouwen van Beteekenis in onze dagen [Men and Women of Significance in our days], although George Sand already featured in the first series, about men. ‘The mind knows no gender and for the mind alone is the pantheon accessible’, was the resourceful argument for including her.⁴ In that sense, the editors followed topicality: women played no role of any consequence in public life, but when the newspapers copied (mostly) foreign obituaries, the editors of the fortnightly periodical *Mannen van Beteekenis in onze dagen* did not want to remain behind.

Mannen van Beteekenis and other biographical dictionaries show us what the role and the intended goal of such biographical texts was and which values and qualities the selected individuals represented. These biographical texts in the nineteenth century were products of journalistic activities.

It is precisely this journalistic approach which makes it possible for us to define a watershed in the history of the biographical encyclopedia. Biographies were already being written in the classical period, the best known being those by Plutarch and Pliny the Elder. In the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries biographical encyclopedias of martyrs, saints and royalty appeared worldwide. Vasari’s sixteenth century *Lives of the Artists* was imitated throughout Europe.⁵ And in the eighteenth century, almost every country in the West had its own version of *The Lives of the Most Eminent Persons Who Have Flourished in Great Britain and Ireland*. Up to the nineteenth century, these dictionaries can be classified into various categories: religious, nationalistic, didactic, historical and so forth. The most important thing that these surveys have in common is that, at a different pace in every country, but all in the nineteenth century, they slowly came to reflect current affairs. The subjects were still selected on the basis of their elite status, but the entries, by contrast, were more independent and factual. That had consequences for the style in which the entries were written. Flowery literary language gave way to a more detached journalistic style. The biographical entries which had always been associated with commemorative literature, whether written on assignment or not, were relocated into another domain, a domain in which public opinion and a desire for learning and factuality were becoming more and more significant. These values were no longer served by flowery literary language. Literature and biography parted company. The nineteenth-century French journalist J. Barbey d’Aurevilly called attention to the disadvantages of this separation, as well as

4 *Mannen en Vrouwen van Beteekenis in onze dagen*, part 3, p. 197.

5 Julie F. Codell, ‘Biographical Dictionaries’, in: Margaretta Jolly ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London [etc.]: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. 107–108.

the advantages. Biographical research carried out by journalists produced, in his opinion, useful information on topical issues, but attention for private lives also fed the undesirable phenomenon of the cult of the personality.

Barbey d'Aurevilly spoke about the Siamese twins of vanity, by which he meant biography and photography. His conclusion was that biography had nothing to do with literature and much to do with journalism, especially as a result of the popularization of history.⁶ He was probably right: the democratization of society had resulted in popular curiosity about those who played a role in public life, and that means biography. As early as 1850, the American photographer and gallery owner Matthew Brady published a book in installments with photolithographs to which he gave the title *The Gallery of Illustrious Americans*. Publishers were tapping into the public demand for portraits of famous people by producing books of photographs with titles like *Men of mark: a gallery of contemporary portraits of men distinguished in the senate, the church, in science, literature and art, the army, navy, law, medicine etc.* (London 1876), *Galerie contemporaine, littéraire, artistique* (Paris 1876–1894) and in the Netherlands, *Onze hedendaagsche letterkundigen*, a collection by Jan ten Brink (Amsterdam 1883–1887). The portraits in these collective albums, which appeared in installments, are sharp and unadorned. The object was to express the character of the person being portrayed. In addition to statesmen and scientists, we also find, in these 'photo-galleries', writers like Victor Hugo and Jules Verne.

We are dealing with the following contradistinction: biographical approaches to literature versus literary approaches to biography.⁷ It is an interesting antithesis, one that incorporates much more than wordplay. The biographical approaches to literature came into existence with the birth of literary criticism in the eighteenth century. Since the beginning, newspaper reviewers have been captivated by biographica as a means to make their judgments on literary texts more plausible, to attract readers and because in a certain way, they wanted to ascribe 'truth' to literature and compare this with the reality outside of literature. For that reason, the reviewers writing for the learned eighteenth-century periodical *Journal Littéraire de la Haye* adorned their analyses of scholarly books with biographical information.⁸ That information could be checked and it gave their reviews an element of solidity.

6 J. Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Les Ridicules du temps* (Paris: Éd. Rouveyre et G. Blond, 1883). The seventh edition appeared in 2003 as a reprint by Phénix Éditions.

7 Ann Jefferson, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 83.

8 Léonie Maass, *Het Journal Littéraire de la Haye (1713–1723). De uitwendige geschiedenis van een geleerdentijdschrift* ([Nijmegen]: n.p., 2001).

The literary approaches to biography exist in harmony with the esteem of literature. When literary texts are held in great respect, biographers want to establish themselves as literary authors who, like novelists, forge their material from reality into a piece of art. In choosing this approach, they do the exact opposite of what critics of novels do. They choose not to rely above all on 'truth' based on objective reality, but rather on a literary working method. That is why usually only novelists are mentioned as examples of biographers by those who favor the view of biography as a literary genre.

Still, the reader of biographical texts will read them differently from the way they read novels. It is not so much the factualness of biographies that distinguishes the genre from novels as it is the claim that the information that has been brought to the fore is reliable. Many of the biographies in *Mannen van Beteekenis* were written by experts, historians, biographers but also by novelists well-known at the time. The canvas or the style of those biographies, however various in nature they might be, does not reveal whether they were written by a literary writer or someone else. Fiore della Neve (the pseudonym of M.G.L. van Loghum) and Pol de Mont worked as brothers on the series together with a selection of people who are not known as novelists but as essayists and journalists, people like P.L. Tak, J.A. Albertingk Thijm and H. Tiedeman.

Why is it that we do not find evidence of this difference in the texts? In the nineteenth century, the so-called biographical encyclopedias took root in Germany, England, France, and probably a number of other countries as well. The focus on a single individual is not the most characteristic form taken by biography in this period, and the generic prestige of biography is predominantly a collective phenomenon.⁹ Indeed, many sizeable biographies were written during the second half of the nineteenth century, but prior to that the genre of the biographical encyclopedia was very popular. It also was an impressive example of commemorative biography. Nigel Hamilton notes in his *Biography: A Brief History* the appearance of such works as *Lives of Distinguished Shoemakers* (1849), *Heroes of Industry* (1866), *Lives of the Electricians* (1887) and *Heroes of the Telegraph* (1891).¹⁰

Considering the early origin of the word 'dictionary', first used in the fourth decade of the fifteenth century by antiquarians who collected biographical facts and added them to their lists of English writers, it is striking that the phenomenon was only elevated to a respected genre in the eighteenth century, by

9 Jefferson, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France*, p. 83.

10 Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 128.

the French encyclopedists.¹¹ The word 'dictionary' in France was, in any case, used for the first time in a title in Louis Moreri's *Le Grand Dictionnaire historique, ou, le mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane* of 1681.¹² It was only in the nineteenth century that the specific – biographical – variant came to be widely used, first in France and thereafter in various other European countries.

Between 1811 and 1834, Louis-Gabriel Michaud's fifty-two part *Biographie universelle ancienne et modern* was released. In England, the development got under way somewhat later. Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf's father, and his successor, Sidney Lee, were responsible for the sixty-six volumes of the *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)* that were released between 1885 and 1901. Stephen has been considered by researchers to be a source of inspiration as a theoretician of biography until well into the twentieth century.¹³ He took pride in the fact that the *DNB* 'obliged contributors to seek information from first-hand authorities, and often from unpublished papers and records, making it an indispensable condition that writers should append to each article a full list of the sources whence their information was derived.'¹⁴ Numerous comments by Stephen and Lee testify to their insistence that the *DNB* should not only satisfy the 'commemorative instinct', but that it was at least as important that it serve 'as a contrivance to guide burgeoning scholarship in an age where archives of printed books and manuscripts were expanding apace'.¹⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary*, produced after 1884 by Herbert Coleridge (grandson of the poet), contained, from the beginning, an extraordinary amount of biographical information. It was this tradition that caused Kruseman to start his *Mannen van Beteekenis* in 1870. In 1875 in Germany, publication began of the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*. By 1912, fifty-six volumes of this series had appeared.

11 Simon Winchester, *The meaning of everything. The story of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 20 dates the first use to 1538, while Donald J. Winslow in his book *Life Writing. A Glossary of terms in Biography, Autobiography and Related Forms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1980, second edition 1995), p. 6, dates the first use to 1533.

12 Codell, 'Biographical Dictionaries'.

13 See Sidney Lee's inaugural address, *Principles of Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), p. 7.

14 Sidney Lee, 'The Dictionary of National Biography: A Statistical Account', in: *Dictionary of National Biography*, (63 vols, 1885–1900), LXIII, p. LXIV., cited in: Brian Harrison, 'A Slice of Their Lives: Editing the DNB, 1882–1999', in: *English Historical Review* 119(2004)484, p. 1179–1201.

15 David Amigoni, 'Distinctively queer little morsels: Imagining distinction, groups, and difference in the *DNB* and the *ODNB*', in: *Journal of Victorian Culture* 10(2005)2, p. 279–288.

It is striking that in these encyclopedic biographies, literature did not get a privileged status with respect to other products of human activity. And there are no signs that the writers of these biographical texts had any literary aspirations, even though novelists were industrious contributors to these biographical series. Happy to earn some extra money, just as when the massification of the press was taking place, writers were eager to write articles for newspapers to earn something extra. This latter point is also important in a different respect.

Biographies existed in another, less prestigious but equally collective and widely recognized form: they were a regular feature in the press where they constituted a journalistic subgenre on a par with the *chronique* or the *roman-feuilleton*, which became established with the growth of the press. Halfway through the nineteenth century, Eugène de Mirecourt presided over the publication of a series of pamphlets in France, of which a hundred issues appeared, under the title *Les Contemporains*. De Mirecourt was a journalist, but he promoted himself as 'le biographe'.¹⁶

On the 27th of September 1869, Kruseman wrote to the Parisian publisher Hachette: 'Je me propose de publier au commencement de 1870 un nouvel ouvrage périodique, intitulé *Histoires de nos jours*.' It had to be a periodical, so Kruseman wrote to Hachette, containing important biographies and obituaries of illustrious personalities.¹⁷

In the short editorial concerning the book series *Mannen van Beteekenis*, the editors wrote: 'People, whose names appear in the dailies on a daily base, cannot be strangers to the readers; [...] for the rest a remembrance of that which they already know might be pleasant.'¹⁸ So the intention was not to provide new information, but to emphasize once more what others had said about these important people. They said explicitly that topical value was considered to be more important than accuracy, resulting in significant mistakes in the original texts of the periodical. But this remark seems to have been an argument to boost sales, because, now that the biographies were combined into a book, the editors had corrected all the mistakes. This way, the readers of the periodical absolutely had to buy the collection!

Moreover, it was stated that the initial plan had been to include only men of significance who were still alive, but gradually the editors found out that the

16 See chapter 3 of this volume.

17 J.W. Enschedé, *A.C. Kruseman*, Vol. 2 1863–1894 (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen & Zoon, 1902), p. 251.

18 'Voorberigt', in: *Mannen van Beteekenis*, H. Tiedeman ed. (Haarlem: Kruseman, 1870).

real selection only takes place after death. It is likely this was also an occasional argument to keep the book release of the magazine topical.¹⁹

The editorial in the first publication of *Mannen van Beteekenis* in book form makes clear that journalism here developed into historiography, but that the process of accomplishing this was not entrusted to historians. The periodical version of *Mannen van Beteekenis* appeared under various editors-in-chief, but without exception they were all journalists. Kruseman had asked them to do this work because they 'could be considered to have the necessary resources next to being skillful stylists'. In 1875 N.C. Balsem became the editor-in-chief. It was under his rule that the series had such great success; so great that *Mannen van Beteekenis* became a standard expression.²⁰

From encyclopedia to biographical dictionary to biography takes the same route as the attention for the individual in the press and in society. Halfway through the nineteenth century we see increasing interest in self-consciousness in poetry, politics and therefore also in individuals. Biographical periodicals like *Mannen van Beteekenis* and biographical dictionaries like the *DNB* are manifestations of that development, preparing for the critical modern biographies of the twentieth century. Current affairs remain a reason to pose new questions about lives which have already been described. Old lives raise new questions. For that reason the need continues to exist for new biographies of lives from long ago.

19 Editor, 'Voorberigt', *Mannen van Beteekenis in onze Dagen*, November 1870.

20 J.W. Enschedé, *A.C. Kruseman*, p. 263 cites: H.A. Woelders, *Spreuken en gezegden van mannen van beteekenis op het gebied der lichamelijke opvoeding* (1877).

SECTION 3

Biography and Microhistory



What Is Micro in Microhistory?

Matti Peltonen

In 1979 the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg published the first version of his essay ‘Spie: Radici di un paradigma indiziario’.¹ The essay received an enthusiastic reception on all sides, was immediately translated into several languages, and was published in several versions, each of them including at least a few new endnotes. It has often been read as one of the founding texts of new microhistory, although the word microhistory is not mentioned in it even once. I use the expression *new* microhistory to stress the conscious distinction between the micro and macro aspects of historical events. The expression new microhistory is useful in distinguishing between these new manifestations of microhistory in the 1970s and some older ideas of, for instance, local history as microhistory, where the described community was taken as typical or representative of some larger area. The aim of Ginzburg’s essay was, however, quite limited: to attach attention to the break-through of a new epistemological model in human sciences at the end of the nineteenth century. This new mode of knowledge was labeled as a paradigm, using the term made popular by the American historian of science Thomas S. Kuhn. That is why the theme of the essay is so often mentioned as ‘evidentiary paradigm’.

‘Evidentiary paradigm’ or ‘the method of clues’ means reading seemingly insignificant and marginal, unconsciously or routinely made actions as clues. Ginzburg compared common features in the methods used by the art historian Giovanni Morelli, the fictive detective Sherlock Holmes (crime-writer Arthur Conan Doyle), and the creator of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, and suggested potential common contacts among these thinkers. Ginzburg described his article as a first report ‘from ongoing research’. The thesis in this text was, however, so fascinating to others that it began to have a life of its own and its

¹ Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Spie: Radici di un paradigma indiziario’, in: Aldo Gargani ed., *Crisi della ragione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), p. 57–106. One of the first English translations of Carlo Ginzburg’s essay was ‘Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method’, in: Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok ed., *Dupin, Holmes, Peirce: The Sign of Three* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 81–118.

writer began to be seen as the father of a specific method of clues.² In his essay, Ginzburg compared the ‘method of clues’ which had a splendid history all the way to the distant past with its hunters, sooth seers and sages, to the experimental method of natural science, which did not wish to say anything about the individual or unique cases. Criticism leveled against Ginzburg’s hypothesis about a remarkable break in the epistemological thinking of late nineteenth century human sciences (or proto-sciences) has pointed out that he did not pay enough attention to the philosophy of science at that time, and forgot that there has been a lively discussion concerning the philosophy of history also in the twentieth century.³ This criticism is correct as such, but does not take into account that Ginzburg promised only to present a hypothesis about the conditions of the emergence of this new evidentiary paradigm at the end of the nineteenth century in different fields of social thinking.⁴

The idea of microhistory as a special approach in historical research was introduced at the end of the 1970s in an article written together by Ginzburg and Carlo Poni and published in the journal *Quaderni storici*.⁵ The important common feature of the new microhistory advocated by Ginzburg and also his Italian colleague historian Giovanni Levi is the ‘method of clues’. By this they mean starting an investigation from something that does not quite fit, something odd that needs to be explained. This peculiar event or phenomenon is taken as a sign of a larger, but hidden or unknown, structure. A strange detail is made to represent a wider totality. In Levi’s words: ‘The unifying principle of all microhistorical research is the belief that microscopic observation will reveal factors previously unobserved [...]. Phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings by

2 In an interview conducted by Adriano Sofri in 1982 Carlo Ginzburg tells how he experienced the reception of his article: ‘Geschichte und Geschichten: Über Archive, Marlene Dietrich und die Lust an der Geschichte. Carlo Ginzburg im Gespräch mit Adriano Sofri’, in: Carlo Ginzburg, *Spurensicherungen: Über verborgene Geschichte, Kunst und soziales Gedächtnis* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1983), p. 7–24.

3 Paola Zambelli, ‘From Menocchio to Piero della Francesca: the Work of Carlo Ginzburg’, in: *The Historical Journal* 28(1985)4, p. 983–999.

4 Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Spuren einer Paradigmengabelung: Machiavelli, Galilei und die Zensur der Gegenreformation’, in: Sybille Krämer, Werner Kogge and Gernot Grube ed., *Spur: Spurenlesen als Orientierungstechnik und Wissenskunst* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), p. 257–280.

5 Carlo Ginzburg and Carlo Poni, ‘Il nome e il come: scambio e mercato storiografico’, in: *Quaderni storici* 14(1979)40, p. 181–190. The English translation of this article was published in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero ed., *Microhistory & the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) as ‘The Name and the Game: Unequal Exchange and the Historical Marketplace’.

altering the scale of observation. It is then possible to use these results to draw far wider generalizations although the initial observations were made within relatively narrow dimensions and as experiments rather than examples.⁶

We can consider this first feature of microhistory, the relationship of a particular or peculiar event to a larger context, as its temporal aspect. By choosing this expression I am not inventing something new but only following the example of methodological thinking in many social sciences where it is natural to see the relationship between micro and macro levels of society as temporal.⁷ This aspect of the microhistorical approach is easily lost if one, for instance, sees it as a representative of some kind of postmodernist historiography celebrating discontinuity in an absolute sense.

Despite of its popularity as one of the fundamental writings of new microhistory (or Italian microhistory) Ginzburg's essay 'Clues' did not elaborate all of the important features of this methodology. It gives, of course, attention to the method of clues and hints to the idea of 'normal exception' – first formulated by the Italian historian Edoardo Grendi – because this idea is so close to the method of clues. But the third new idea of microhistory, 'the reduction of scale of observation in experimental purposes' (Levi) is not mentioned. Furthermore, as I already indicated, the concepts 'micro' and 'macro' are not used in Ginzburg's essay. Where did these ideas about the scale and the concepts of micro and macro come from and what consequences had their emergence in historical methodology for the idea of microhistory?

Micro and Macro

The distinction micro-macro came to more general use in all social sciences (including history) from the methodology of economics after the Second World War. The concepts 'micro' and 'macro' were introduced in their contemporary meaning in the late 1940s and early 1950s. At first some economists made a distinction between 'micro-dynamics' and 'macro-dynamics'. These new concepts were used instead of an older distinction between short-term and long-term change in the economy. The established school of economics (the so-called neo-classical school of economics) had focused on the short-term change in the market (or the so called market-period), because this was

6 Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory,' in: Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 93–113, 97–98.

7 For a more thorough treatment of this proposition, see: Matti Peltonen, 'Carlo Ginzburg and the New Microhistory,' in: *Suomen Antropologi* 20(1995)1, p. 2–12.

mathematically more convenient. The short period did not allow any changes in technology or in the tastes of consumers. The long-term change in an economy was left to be elaborated later.⁸ The short-term view of economics analyzed the actions of a single economic unit, either a household (or even an individual) or a firm.

The difference between short-term and long-term change in the methodology of economics before the late 1940s and early 1950s was temporal, related to time. When economists started to use the concepts micro and macro, the distinction between these units of economic theory became spatial, and the older distinction based on temporary criteria was quietly put aside and forgotten. Since the 1950s it was thought that micro meant a single person or a single firm, and macro was a larger group of these basic units. The macro units were established by aggregation from the micro units. The problem, however, was how to add together qualitatively quite different micro units. This problem in the aggregation procedure was based on the fear of doing totally trivial operations when moving from micro to macro level and not gaining any new information.⁹ How, for instance, did one look at monopolistic or oligopolistic competition in the market if the firms concerned had to be considered as similar (or only a single eternal firm could be taken into consideration)?¹⁰ Already Alfred Marshall, the creator of modern short-term economic theory at the end of the nineteenth century (now usually called micro theory of economics) solved this problem by analyzing the so called 'representative firm', a totally fictitious analytical unit. When economists were not able to discuss economic units which actually existed with the required mathematical sophistication, a fictive solution was (and is) used instead.¹¹

The academic success of economics in the twentieth-century social sciences influenced other social and human sciences as well. The methodological ideas about the micro-macro distinction were adopted at least partly also in other social sciences and in historical research. The important aspect of this influence is that the micro level of social phenomena was considered to mean a single person or firm, an agent or a subject. Taking the micro level of social life somehow as the individual sphere of life was the consequence of the move from temporal to spatial thinking in methodological issues, the move from a

8 Peltonen, 'Carlo Ginzburg and the New Microhistory', p. 3–4.

9 Axel Leijonhufvud, *On Keynesian Economics and the Economics of Keynes. A Study in Monetary Theory* (London and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968).

10 Robert Solow, *Monopolistic Competition and Macroeconomic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 10.

11 The concept of the representative firm was introduced in the second edition of Alfred Marshall's *Principles of Economics* (London: Macmillan, 1891, 2nd edition, original 1890).

single phenomenon or a single event to the single person experiencing that event. This influence from academically successful economics to other fields of social thinking happened without anyone noticing it, between the lines and without any theoretical discussion.¹²

In sociological research the distinction between micro and macro phenomena became more pronounced in the 1960s. At that time sociology was rethought in a number of ways, several of which laid stress on the micro level of society (ethnomethodology, symbolical interactionism and so on).¹³ These new approaches were critical to the old 'macro sociology' and its reductive reasoning. This problem was often analyzed with the much older concept of 'methodological individualism', which means the acceptance of only such macro concepts of the society that could be derived from human behavior described on the individual level. This reductive view of the micro level (or individual behavior) implied that a move between macro and micro levels did not yield any new information and was in a way useless. The new approaches in the sociology of the 1960s, on the other hand, were intended to stress the fundamental importance of the micro level in social life. At times they were so radical that the analysis of the macro level phenomena was considered totally useless.¹⁴ In these new micro sociological approaches the micro level was perceived as the personal interaction, person to person communication which in principle is a short-term event in human behavior. In practice, however, even in sociology the temporal aspect of the definition of what is micro was quite easily forgotten and the spatial aspect got the upper hand. So, instead of personal interaction, the micro level of society is perceived as the level of social agents or subjects (compared to the macro level of social structures). This quiet move to the agent/structure distinction has every now and then been criticized by sociologists who are theoretically more alert and they demanded that the micro-macro link be specified in a more historical manner.¹⁵

12 Joan Huber, 'Macro-Micro Links in Gender Stratification', in: Joan Huber ed., *Macro-Micro Linkages in Sociology* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1991), p. 12.

13 As a guide to micro approaches in sociology, Brian Roberts: *Micro Social Theory* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2006).

14 Richard A. Hilbert, 'Ethnomethodology and the micromacro order', in: *American Sociological Review* 55(1990)6, p. 794–808.

15 Nicos Mouzelis in his *Sociological Theory: What Went Wrong? Diagnosis and Remedies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) and *Modern and Postmodern Social Theorizing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Mouzelis defines micro and macro thus: 'macro refers to cases where the impact of institutionalized rules (when instantiated) or actors' practices stretch widely in time and place; micro applies where this impact is very limited' (*Sociological Theory*, p. 155).

The problems in the micro-macro distinction in economics and in sociology – the problems of aggregation and reductionism – leading to the loss of information or making the discovery of new information difficult are in a way the two sides of the same difficulty reflecting the different histories of those disciplines. This problem is in seeing the micro-macro link as a relation between agent (or subject) and structure, and in the underlying move from temporality to spatiality in conceptualizing the micro-macro distinction. Historical sociologist Norbert Elias captured this difficulty already in his *What is Sociology?* although he did not refer to the micro-macro link when discussing it.¹⁶ Elias suggested the concept of ‘figuration’ to solve the difficulties created by discourses of ‘individual’ and ‘society’ as phenomena antagonistically opposed to each other.

Micro Approach in Historical Research

In the field of historical research the specific problems of the micro-macro link were introduced for the first time in late 1970s and early 1980s. The most innovative ideas and the boldest formulations came from Italy, where historians adapted their new methodological terminology from social scientists. The concept of microhistory started its life in Italy in a series of monographs edited by Levi and Ginzburg.¹⁷

The idea of microhistory was also discussed, however, at the beginning of the 1970s among English-speaking historians but without the use of the concepts of micro and macro. Good examples are Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson, who both formulated ideas reminiscent of microhistorical methodology. What is interesting is that they were relying on the more temporally determined connection between short-term exceptional phenomena and more hidden or unconscious long-term structures. They emphasized how useful the study of some exceptional events like riots or revolutions could be for the craft of historians, with their capability to expose hidden structures and produce ample documentation of aspects of life normally kept in silence.¹⁸

16 Elias describes Talcott Parsons's problem of reduction (the individual as a reflection of the structures of the society and vice versa) in an extensive endnote in his *What is Sociology?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978, original 1970), p. 180–181.

17 See also Carlo Ginzburg, ‘Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It’, chapter 11 of this volume.

18 Eric Hobsbawm, ‘From Social History to the History of Society’, in: *Daedalus* 100(1971)1, p. 20–45; E.P. Thompson, ‘History and Anthropology’, in: E.P. Thompson, *Persons & Politics: Historical Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1994).

In *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (1959) Hobsbawm wrote that these quite secretive societies and sects that he studies are known only partially through ‘only that small corner of them which has, by some accident, been uncovered in the law-courts, or by journalists in search of sensation, or by some student with an eye for “offbeat” matters’.¹⁹ It is also interesting to notice how microhistorical in its methodology is Thompson’s *Whigs & Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (1975) which appeared from the press at the same time as other pioneering works of the new microhistory, for instance Natalie Zemon Davis’s *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (1975) or Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou* (1975).

Among the better known microhistories, Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou* comes nearest to the kind of historical approach the French historian Michel de Certeau advocated, when introducing his interesting concept ‘significant deviation’, which is not actually very far from the ‘exceptional normal’ proposed by Italian microhistorians.²⁰ There is no doubt that *Montaillou* was in many respects – geographically, climatically, and socially – a marginal example of French peasant society at the beginning of the fourteenth century. But according to Le Roy Ladurie the village of *Montaillou* belonged at the same time to several larger communities. The inhabitants of the village were Catholics or Cathars, they spoke Occitan and followed many Occitan traditions. They were also representatives of Chayanovian peasant households, which populated ‘the West before Adam Smith’.²¹

The potential importance of exceptional, violent events like revolutions or natural disasters was also discussed by Marc Bloch in his *The Historian’s Craft* (1949) with a humorous tone and with critical although silent references to his teachers Langlois and Seignobos and their historical book of methodology *An Introduction to Historical Research* (1898). Bloch wrote: ‘the peaceable continuity of social existence is much less favorable to the transmission of memory than is sometimes supposed. Revolutions force the doors of safes, and put ministers to flight before they have had time to burn their secret papers. [...] A good cataclysm suits our business better.’²² Bloch reminded his readers of the fate of the town of Pompeii, which was so well preserved only by the

19 Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965, original *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels*, 1959), p. 9.

20 Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 77.

21 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village 1294–1324*, trans. Barbara Bray (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), p. 354.

22 Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954, original *Apologie pour l’histoire*, 1949).

terrible natural disaster of the volcano Vesuvius nearby. Of all other Roman small communities we know almost nothing compared to Pompeii.

A comparison between the methodological terminology of Italian historians and British social historians shows that their thinking belongs to two different periods in the theory of history, and the similarity of views among British social historians and Bloch's book of methodology confirms this judgment. It is also possible to notice that not even Ginzburg – not to speak of Le Roy Ladurie or Zemon Davis – used the concept of microhistory in his pioneering monograph *The Cheese and the Worms*.²³ It seems that when considering the emergence of the new microhistory and its specific terminology the late 1970s are the crucial point of time. At this point four methodological features were included in the same idea: 1) the use of the concepts 'micro' and 'macro' (and of course 'microhistory'); 2) the 'method of clues' introduced in Ginzburg's pioneering 1978 essay; 3) the emphasis on the reduction of analysis on a smaller 'scale' (for experimental purposes, as Levi always added to the phrase); and 4) the idea of the normal exception as defining the special characteristics of the event or phenomenon under view in microhistorical research.

Here I want to pay attention especially to the idea of the reduction of the scale of observation and its background, because it is intimately related to the micro-macro distinction. According to Levi it seems that the idea of reducing the scale of observation originates from the theoretical discussions of anthropologists and has roots going back at least to the 1940s.²⁴ The French historian Roger Chartier used the concept of 'scale' when describing how the new historians of mentalities had reduced the field of their research to an individual village or even to an individual person.²⁵ Chartier referred to examples like

23 The reviews written of the English edition of *The Cheese and the Worms*, trans. J. and A. Tedeschi (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), did not mention microhistory as a reference. Of the six reviews published during 1981–1982 two mentioned Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* (1975), because of the similarity of the documents used. Only one review mentioned Ginzburg's essay on 'the method of clues'. The concept 'micro' was used in 1976 in Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978), in order to capture the level of individual encounters and the omnipresent nature of power relations in society.

24 Levi, 'On Microhistory'; Matti Peltonen, 'Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research', in: *History and Theory* 40(2001)3, p. 347–359.

25 Roger Chartier, 'Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories', in: Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan ed., *Modern European Intellectual History. Reappraisals & New Perspectives* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 13–46; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, Basic Books 1986).

The Cheese and the Worms and to *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*. With reference especially to discussing Zemon Davis's work he stressed how the 'reduction of scale of observation' made possible the examination of the relationship between religious affiliation and social position.²⁶ The reduction of the scale of observation was already mentioned in 1979 by Ginzburg and Poni as one of the characteristics of microhistorical approach.²⁷ They also commented on the new closeness of anthropology and historical research, which was regarded as a new and exciting phenomenon at the time. They observed how the data used by historians was reminiscent of the field material collected by anthropologists.

One of the important texts often cited by the new microhistorians was the essay 'Thick Description' by the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz. This essay was the leading article in his widely discussed collection of articles *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973).²⁸ It was written specifically for this collection and took its title from the English philosopher Gilbert Ryle. Geertz, of course, as an anthropologist was familiar with the concepts of small and large scale as part of the tradition of anthropologist theory formation after the Second World War. He developed, however, a new slogan to characterize more accurately the observation on a small scale. Geertz proposed the concept of 'microscopic' observation. But even Geertz did not yet use the concepts micro and macro or micro-macro link, which only became popular in the latter part of the 1970s. His micro concept referred to the microscope.²⁹

Geertz's introductory chapter on 'thick description', however, discussed several critical ideas that later became important in the new microhistory. Many microhistorians have cited his slogan that anthropologists study *in* villages, they do not study villages. A single village or an individual person as such is not 'micro' because they also participate in social processes that are understood as

26 Jacques Revel discussed the aims of microhistory ten years later and mentioned the 'reduced scale of observation' as the most obvious characteristic of microhistory. Jacques Revel, 'Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social', in: Jacques Revel & Lynn Hunt ed., *Histories. French Constructions of the Past* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 493–502.

27 Ginzburg and Poni, 'The Name of the Game', p. 8.

28 Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture', in: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 21.

29 The microscope can be one of the sources for using concepts like micro and macro. Theodor Adorno uses the concept 'micro-organisms' of behavior in *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1974, original 1951), p. 180. Adorno refers to small mistakes in etiquette that nevertheless make one feel ashamed, even if nobody notices. The microscope is also used as an analogue for microhistory in Peter Burke's recent textbook *What is Cultural History?* (London: Polity Press, 2004), p. 43–44.

'macro'. The distinction must be made according to different criteria. In fact we can speak of the new microhistory only on the condition that reduction of the scale of observation reveals social structures that are relevant on a larger scale than the person or locality under view. Accordingly the concept of new microhistory supposes that macro level phenomena are also present in the events that are illuminated in the micro approach. Otherwise the whole project of microhistory would be futile and meet difficulties similar to those of the methodological thinking about the micro-macro link in economics or in sociology.

Anthropological discussions have influenced the methodological vocabulary of the new microhistory in an important manner. One of the most important lessons is to consider micro and macro as relative concepts. A small incident, a peripheral and obscure clue that the microhistorian starts to follow is not small as such but only relative to something bigger or longer. It is self-evident that we can only define micro with the help of some micro-macro distinction. These distinctions are, however, difficult to make, if one follows the idea that an individual person somehow could be defined as being 'micro' or building the 'micro level' of society.³⁰

Microhistory and Biographical Research

The ideas about micro approach provided above motivate some considerations about what is, in the end, micro. If we look at certain famous works in the field of microhistory, we can also say just as Geertz did, that microhistorians do not study villages, but they study in villages. Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* is not the local or village history of this remote small community, but an analysis of peculiar data created by the inquisition in this region during the early years of the fourteenth century. The inquisition tried to turn local people from their unorthodox beliefs and save their souls. These extremely rare protocols that were published in 1965 by an equally rare gesture of the Vatican contained much information which could also be interpreted with a totally different purpose than they were originally prepared for. In an equally creative act of reading Thompson searched in his *Whigs & Hunters* for an explanation for the so called Black Act of the 1720s. This quite well-known piece of legislation is equally famous for its cruelty and for the difficulty legal historians have experienced to explain why this aggressive law was needed during the most peaceful

30 This also seems to be the suggestion of Jacques Revel in his essay 'Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social', in: Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt ed., *Histories: French Constructions of the Past* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 493–502.

period, one without internal turmoil and rebellion. Instead of studying the political struggles in the capital Thompson turned his gaze to the countryside, to the 'war' between poachers and royal game-keepers and similar phenomena which could be detected outside the political arena proper. It is, however, quite clear that Thompson is not writing the history of royal hunting parks or similar areas, but the relationship between events in the countryside and their effects on the work of the government.

We can also establish that Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* was not a peasant biography and not even a history of peasant millers in sixteenth-century Northern Italy. Rather it is a study in which Ginzburg considers with the help of locally preserved inquisition protocols the worldview of a sixteenth-century peasant miller. His conclusion, or hypothesis on the basis of the material at hand, was that it revealed much older structures of peasant beliefs. A quite insignificant event brought light to previously unknown and still mysterious structures of popular culture concerning the most important aspects of the worldview of that period. In a similar fashion one can argue that Levi's monograph *Inheriting Power* (1984) or Zemon Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983) are not biographies of individual persons but investigations that seek interpretations of certain unexpected or peculiar behavior among the people in the villages that they are concerned with. But it is true that they all use every possible piece of information about the 'leading personalities' in their research to improve their own interpretations. These works are not reminiscent of biographical literature, because much more general hypotheses or theories are sought in them. It is quite obvious that even when it is not specifically stressed, most of these works each in their own way question the so called theory of modernization.

These observations give rise to the question of how biography and the new microhistory are related. If they so obviously appear as quite different points of view, one can still ask if there is some non-trivial point of contact. I am not the first one to formulate this question. I am referring, for instance, to the essay by the American historian Jill Lepore about the influence of microhistory on biographical research and to the collection of articles on biography edited by Volker Berghahn and Simone Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency*.³¹ Lepore treats biography in the same way as I have treated both biography and local history in this presentation – as ready-made and unchanging modes of

31 Jill Lepore, 'Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography', in: *The Journal of American History* 88(2001)1, p. 129–144; Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig ed., *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York and London: Berghahn Books, 2008).

writing and, accordingly, something quite different from the new microhistory. On the other hand, we do know that biography has by and large followed the development of historical research in general and its changing points of view. Could we also imagine that this new approach to historical research, the new microhistory, has a restructuring effect on biographical writing? There are, indeed, remarks made in discussions among biographers that express some dissatisfaction with the unchanging and traditional forms of biographical conventions, and some biographers have discovered in microhistory a new invigorating force that could perhaps give new life to biography.³² One idea is that microhistory could provide an example of a mode of writing that discards chronology and shows how to write biography 'sideways' (or in a stand-still mode). According to Lässig, in contemporary writing of biographies, the 'trend is toward discontinuity instead of linear narrative approaches, toward montages and constructions with emphatically multiple perspectives, in which the same life is related and interpreted for different viewpoints'.³³ Also Barbara Caine in her recent *Biography and History* (2010) notices the similarities of microhistory and new styles in biography.³⁴ Caine has unfortunately adopted only the introductory part of the definition of microhistory and accordingly thinks microhistory is only 'the study of a small town or village, but it includes the study of little-known individuals'.³⁵ Paying only attention to the object of historical research this definition is highly unsatisfactory. Furthermore, it is not the case that microhistory as a methodological approach would be interested only in 'little-known' or 'obscure' individuals. There are famous microhistorical studies concerning Piero della Francesca or Galileo Galilei.³⁶ Furthermore, there are other circumstances that make the definition of microhistory advocated by Caine problematic. It can be argued that biographers have already for a long time been interested in marginal or obscure persons and their experiences.³⁷ Consequently, microhistorians can not argue this kind of approach to be new.

32 Kathryn Hughes, 'The death of life writing', in: *The Guardian* 28 June 2008.

33 Simone Lässig, 'Introduction: Biography in Modern History – Modern Historiography in Biography', in: Berghahn and Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency*, p. 10.

34 Barbara Caine: *Biography and History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 24.

35 This definition is given in the glossary part of Caine's book on p. 126.

36 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Enigma of Piero: Piero della Francesca* (London: Verso, 2002, 2nd edition); Pietro Redondi, *Galileo: Heretic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

37 Juliette Atkinson has recently shown how Victorian biographers also recorded humble and hidden lives. See Juliette Atkinson, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered. A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

One example of this kind of biographical research is Charles Nicholl's work *The Lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street* (2007), which is also often, in the marketing of the book, described as a detective story (but never as microhistory).³⁸ Nicholl uses as his 'clue' the only case in which one can find William Shakespeare in contemporary archival material. He appeared as a witness in a court case involving his landlord family from Silver Street, where Shakespeare had lived as a lodger at the beginning of the seventeenth century for six years. Nicholl uses this court case as a clue and starts to follow its lead by gathering information of Shakespeare's landlord family and persons that appeared as witnesses in the case along with Shakespeare. The back-cover text tells us that Nicholl uses 'a powerful biographical magnifying glass' and writes 'the best kind of detective story'.³⁹ Nicholl himself calls the documents of the court case 'a micro-story of marital ups and downs'.⁴⁰

Is it, however, also possible to question whether these biographical studies written 'sideways' still are biographies? Do not such works already have a name? At least they could be called microhistories. It also seems that biographical literature sells so well that publishers do not want to commit commercial suicide by changing the label 'biography' to 'microhistory'. The way in which Nicholl's work on Shakespeare is defined by its publisher and critics alike, seems to suggest this.

There is still one aspect in the micro-macro distinction that gives the methodology of the new microhistory a special nature. This is not apparent when cataloguing the features of microhistory alone, but when comparing it to, for instance, social sciences it comes into view. Here we can refer back to the essay on the 'method of clues' by Ginzburg. This essay introduced the hypothesis of a new methodology emerging at the end of the nineteenth century. It gave an important role to clues as a means to gain new information, to discover masterworks or expose frauds, to decide who is guilty of a certain crime or what life experiences give rise to the suffering of a patient. Ginzburg himself stressed the difference between the historical approach and the approach of (positivistic) natural science. In his view historical research investigates the individual and the concrete, even the unique, compared to the natural sciences which is based on repeatable experiments and observations based on these carefully defined experiments.

I would, however, take up another difference that becomes clear when reading Ginzburg's essay on the method of clues. The art historian Giovanni Morelli,

38 Charles Nicholl, *The Lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

39 Quote from a *Daily Telegraph* review.

40 Nicholl, *The Lodger*, p. 251.

the novelist Conan Doyle or even the physician Freud did not formulate general theories of society.⁴¹ Ginzburg here quite rightly stresses the method of clues as epistemological learning. And it reminds us of the difference between the methodological thinking in social sciences and in microhistory (perhaps all history). In most social sciences it is customary to create theories on how society works or how individuals act. These theories are usually never discussed in the epistemological sense. But the microhistorical approach is for the most part epistemological, providing instructions on how to gain new information in order to create new interpretations or hypotheses.⁴² In social sciences the micro-macro distinction is a doctrine to confirm beliefs about social structures, for historians the micro-macro distinction is a tool.

41 Franco Moretti has made the interesting discovery that the detective stories written by Arthur Conan Doyle differed from most of the other stories of the same period. They used clues as important constitutive parts of the plot of the story. Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 72–75.

42 In social sciences, however, the so called case study method, which also has roots in Sigmund Freud's famous case-studies, somewhat reminds one of the micro approach popular among historians. See Charles C. Ragin and Howard S. Becker ed., *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge

Richard D. Brown

Historians, like others, are shaped by fashion though we may be slower to adopt the latest theories than scholars in literary studies, anthropology, sociology, and political science.¹ In the past decades this has been especially true of post-modern theory and the works of Foucault, Derrida, and Bakhtin. The same might be said of our embrace of Habermas on civil society and Geertz's 'thick description' and emphasis on 'local knowledge'. This is not surprising. Many of us have been trained in an unselfconscious variant of British empiricism. We may have been drawn to study history precisely because American historians, in contrast to scholars of literature, sociology, and anthropology, have often been wary of theoretical discourse.

For myself, having witnessed the rise and decline of a number of fashions, from the consensus national narrative of the 1950s, to modernization theory in the 1960s, to neo-positivist quantification in the 1970s, as well as the approaches just mentioned and the 'return to narrative', I am impressed that some part of a fashion – an outlook, a caution, a reaction, an approach – is usually assimilated into the discipline so as to exert lasting influence, even though the fashion fades from active consciousness. So it may be with microhistory – my present historical passion. What follows is an examination of why, with many persuasive and respected alternatives, I have become a convert to microhistory.

Let me begin by de-constructing the remarks of one of the foremost scholars of the early republic, Henry Adams, who, by the time he had reached his late fifties, was so deeply skeptical of historians' pretensions to factual accuracy and objectivity that he may fairly be called an early post-modernist.² Like post-modernists, he recognized that though historians might pose as

1 The title of this essay echoes that of Robert Berkhofer Jr.'s first chapter, 'The Postmodernist Challenge', in: *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). The author thanks the following scholars for comments on the original of this essay: Bernard Bailyn, Irene Quenzler Brown, Richard L. Bushman, Frank Costigliola, Margaret Gilbert, Robert A. Gross, Karen Halttunen, Daniel Walker Howe, W. Guthrie Sayen, and Alan Taylor.

2 Gordon S. Wood, 'A Century of Writing Early American History: Then and Now Compared; Or How Henry Adams Got It Wrong', in: *American Historical Review* 100(1995)3, p. 678–696.

'scientific', historical writing is a subjective, imagined construction. In 1896 he declared 'the field of knowledge which is called History', was in reality 'chaotic and unintelligible [...] a sort of Chinese Play, without end and without lesson'.³ Inevitably, he believed, historians were always more or less 'inaccurate' and even the best scholars 'must always stand in terror of the blunders which no precaution and no anxiety for truth' can prevent. 'Error' and 'confusion', he claimed, are so pervasive and cumulative, that distortion is not the exception but the rule. Facts are so elusive, their initial creation so subjective, their subsequent survival so accidental, and their selection and organization by historians so constrained by the politics or predilections of author and audience, as to make history writing little more than invention or, as Adams put it, 'an inextricable mess'.⁴

Though it is tempting to dismiss the observations of our profoundly skeptical predecessor as 'cynical and jaded', that would be a mistake.⁵ Like the post-modernism of our own day, whose influence is receding with the rise of the 'New Historicism', we should not place Adams on the 'ash heap of history'.⁶ To do so would be to dismiss his and the post-modernists profoundly important and persuasive insights. History is, we must admit, a subjective construction derived from 'facts' that were selectively recorded to serve a wide range of purposes, and which often survive by chance. Moreover we make selections from the universe of facts according to our own logic. The very subjects we choose to recover – African-American liberation, frontier dissidents, Indian religious revivals, internal improvements, newspaper controversies, parades, women's politics and work, the list is endless – are based on our politics broadly conceived, our judgments of what is important, and the tastes of our audiences. Though we decry 'gross presentism', we have long recognized that, as the first essay in the first *American Historical Review* asserted, 'history will not stay written. Every age demands a history written from its own standpoint'.⁷

But after admitting all that, is the work of historians really so inaccurate, unintelligible, and chaotic as to be simply a mess? Not really. Nor should our work properly be described as fiction. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob note that 'History is crucially distinguished from fiction by curiosity

3 Henry Adams to John Franklin Jameson, Nov. 17, 1896, in: J.C. Levenson, ed., *The Letters of Henry Adams* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982–1988), Vol. 4, p. 440. Scientific theories are also partly subjective, since theories are not determined by data, but by the theorist.

4 Wood, 'A Century of Writing Early American History', p. 678–679.

5 Wood, 'A Century of Writing Early American History', p. 696.

6 Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story*, chapter 1.

7 Wood, 'A Century of Writing Early American History', p. 696 and 679.

about what actually happened in the past', whereas fiction writers start from scratch. They are free to tell any story they can imagine. Their only constraint is finding a willing audience for their fabrications, which may be highly plausible or utterly fantastic. Historians, by contrast, start with 'a landscape cluttered with the detritus of past living'.⁸

Some would argue that these written and physical objects that record facts are so profusely distributed across the past as to approximate the stars in the sky. Perhaps like the ancients, historians merely connect factual dots according to their prevailing myths so that, like the constellations, our accounts take the shape of the hero Orion or the princess Andromeda. Indeed there are 'historical' works we regard as myth-based, but they are not our models. Leaving aside manipulation or fraud, no one who honestly peruses the records of American public life in the early republic could claim that women, blacks, Indians, or the poor controlled the levers of power and ran the state. Not even the most hyper-critical post-modernist would conscientiously assert the contrary. Historians' claim that propertied white men and a few of their female relatives ran public affairs is not just presentist and politically correct, it is sustained by virtually all the information we have gleaned over generations of archival research.

But obvious though the point may be, it is crucially important because it serves as a baseline. Despite the skepticism of our critics toward our claim to represent reality, we cannot freely invent our stories of the past because we must ground them in evidence from the period. And though the evidence is uneven, various, and supports many interpretations – the Federalists were men of little faith, or not, and Thomas Jefferson was antislavery, or not – the evidence will not support any interpretation we may imagine.⁹

In contrast to fiction writers, we start with facts that we deploy as evidence supporting our claims of truth. And though fiction writers may also use facts, they possess the freedom to move far beyond facts, to invent episodes, conversations, people, and outcomes. We, too, move beyond facts in constructing our interpretations, but we move on a short leash. Historical accounts must be based on 'documentary evidence, which has itself been subjected to critical scrutiny'. Unlike writers of fiction, historians are 'constrained by the evidence'.

8 Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), p. 259.

9 Cecelia M. Kenyon, 'Men of Little Faith: The Antifederalists on the Nature of Representative Government', in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 12(1955)1, p. 3–43; Gordon S. Wood, 'Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution,' in: Richard Beeman [et al.] ed., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), p. 69–109; Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p. 144–152, p. 263–268.

Our capacities are imperfect and our claims may be exaggerated, but we ‘may approach the truth’. Though ‘the reality of the past can only be partially represented’, it is our truth claim that distinguishes us from fiction writers.¹⁰ This claim supplies the distinctive appeal and power of historical writing.

But what are the facts, what is the evidence? By ‘facts’ we mean truth, reality, actuality. And according to Webster’s *New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*, the first definition of ‘evidence’ is: ‘That which enables the mind to see the truth; proof arising from the perception of the senses, or from the testimony of others, or from inductions of reason; as, the senses furnish evidence of the existence of matter.’¹¹ Clearly that there are many kinds of facts, all sorts of evidence: from the fact that the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia in 1787 – for which evidence abounds in newspapers, letters, diaries, personal journals, and official proceedings – to the fact that after ratification one observer reported women had favored it because of their admiration for George Washington.¹²

In the first case we can agree as to the fact of a Constitutional Convention, its date and location. In the second case, while we can agree that these observations were in fact made, we will differ as to their significance. Some might claim this report as evidence of women’s extra-legal, extra-official role in national politics, whereas others might discount the observation as idiosyncratic, too slight a fragment to serve as evidence for anything other than the mind of its author. If evidence is ‘proof arising from the perception of the senses,’ it must be subject to error since the senses are not always reliable. Indeed Nietzsche scoffed that ‘History is nothing more than the belief in the senses, the belief in falsehood.’ Seeing is not always believing. Evidence is even more subject to error when it is based on ‘the testimony of others’ because, apart from the problem of falsehood, human testimony is inevitably in some measure subjective. And finally, the ‘inductions of reason’ do not necessarily converge on a single, indisputable point. So if our claims to truth are based on something as problematic as evidence, our claims must be heavily qualified. We cannot mean absolute, certain truth of the sort that would satisfy a mathematical proof.

10 Nigel Penn, *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth-Century Cape Characters* (Cape Town: David Philip/Verloren, 1999), p. 5.

11 Webster’s *New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Standard Reference Works, 1956), p. 605.

12 Saul Cornell, ‘Reflections on “The Late Remarkable Revolution in Government”’: Aedanus Burke and Samuel Bryan’s Unpublished History of the Ratification of the Federal Constitution’, in: *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 112(1988)1, p. 103–130.

Should that trouble us? Of course not. Everyone lives in a world of conditional, partial truths; so we must accept a certain sloppiness. Moreover some events are so exhaustively documented that only an absurd philosophical exercise would challenge their reality: the fact that in 1787 there was a Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, or that George Washington was inaugurated as the first president under it in 1789. These are not fictions or even probabilities, they are facts based on mountains of admittedly imperfect evidence. Based on accumulations of evidence, we make truth claims.

But what truth claims? So far I have been modest, claiming only the fact of a Constitutional Convention in 1787 in Philadelphia. Suppose I were bolder. What if I claimed that mid-eighteenth-century British America was an essentially aristocratic society, and that during the independence movement and the creation of the United States it came to be dominated by republican ideals and practices that in subsequent generations yielded to a democratic regime? If amply illustrated by anecdotal evidence, could that be the truth? Or is that account merely a construction, like the ancients who saw heroes in the constellations – a myth fabricated for our own time?

The real difficulty resides in the level of abstraction that any synthesis requires. Simply put, when one is operating at a high level of synthesis, one's method resembles that of the ancients who saw heroes in the heavens. Certainly the constellations are based on real, factual shining stars; and so, too, are synthetic interpretations based on undeniable facts like the Continental Congress, the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, the national Constitution of 1787, the political parties, and the presidents. But can we say with the assurance of truth that we see a three-part succession – aristocracy, republicanism, democracy – presented for example in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* by Gordon Wood as a coherent reality in those shining stars? Or are we projecting our own mythic themes onto the planetarium roof?

Right now you may think this author is a literal-minded enemy of synthesis who cannot grasp the necessity of organizing scholarly investigations into larger patterns of interpretation with broad explanatory meaning, both for historians and the public. We must synthesize.¹³ Otherwise we confirm the canard that 'historians know more and more about less and less'. That is a dead end. We must seek to know more than what we can confirm as fact; we must think beyond the boundaries of evidence. History is only partly scientific. It is also an art in which 'the exercise of empathy' enables historians to grasp 'the

13 Thomas Bender, 'Strategies of Narrative Synthesis in American History', in: *American Historical Review* 107(2002)1, p. 129–153.

imbeddedness of events in a flow of experience'.¹⁴ Great and inspiring historical writing has always done this. So in spite of its limitations, synthesis is both desirable and necessary.

Truth may be relative because it is often indistinguishable from belief. If we believe with absolute certainty, something may be 'true', though we cannot know with total assurance. Our truths have only higher or lower degrees of probability; and sometimes truths that possess a high degree of uncertainty supply crucial insights for understanding the past. We do not know for sure, for example, whether Native Americans and their foodstuffs enabled the earliest British settlers in Virginia and New England to survive, but the likelihood that they did shapes our understanding of the history of Anglo-America.¹⁵

There is also the problem of scale in representation. When we see pictures in newspaper photos, the images may be 'truthful' representations. But if we examine them under a magnifying glass we see a grid of dots of varying size. Similarly, if we measure a coastline in millimeters, so as to include the contours of the tiniest indentations, we multiply its generally understood length.¹⁶ So what is the problem? Am I taking the post-modern critique too seriously? Possibly. In three earlier works I confidently engaged in synthesis.¹⁷ Perhaps I am a 'recovering synthesizer', who has developed a convert's zeal. Perhaps only a true believer in synthesis would see post-modernism as a challenge. But what is the challenge: what do I mean by 'microhistory'; and how does it answer post-modernism?

The challenge is to the legitimacy of historians' truth claims. Although post-modern criticism is a passing fashion, we cannot assume the world will accept our truth claims in an era of spurious advertising, of popular culture awash in exaggeration, and when everyone believes that others are 'spinning' the truth to advance their agendas.¹⁸ In this context synthesis, however essential for

14 John Higham, 'The Limits of Relativism: Restatement and Remembrance', in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56(1995)4, p. 669–674.

15 Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 13–14; Alan Taylor, *American Colonies* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 2001), p. 130–132.

16 N. Katherine Hayles ed., *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1991).

17 Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600–1865* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) and Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650–1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

18 Roger Chartier, *On the Edge of the Cliff. History, Language, and Practices* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 8–9, 25–27.

historical understanding, is suspect and so puts the discipline at risk. Syntheses cannot make the strongest truth claims because they are based on such selectively chosen facts. Specialists and non-specialists can dismiss them as being simply political, claiming that facts are being marshaled, lawyer-like, to serve a cause.¹⁹ Moreover syntheses necessarily depict the historical landscape from afar. Though the historical synthesizer may employ detailed anecdotal devices for exposition, the synthesizer can only portray large patterns by adopting a distant point of view.

The synthesizer also faces another daunting problem: the absence of a systematic array of secondary sources from which to draw. Necessarily one must envision the large picture by assembling monographs, which only permit a sure grasp of fragments of the whole past. When we write about the political mobilization that resulted in American independence, for example, we generalize based on perhaps 25 or 30 state and local studies, each of which displays distinct biases due to authorship, sources, and date of composition. We have no alternative. But the broad generalizations of grand narratives and syntheses cannot make the most powerful truth claims since they stand, necessarily, on a footing of uneven, disparate monographs.²⁰

Of course there is no escaping criticism, and historical synthesis and grand narrative are so essential that they must continue, notwithstanding challenges to their veracity. Still, microhistory can offer a powerful corrective to post-modern skepticism about historical truth. Though we may never persuade the deepest skeptics like Henry Adams that history is more than 'an inextricable mess', we can convince others that history is deservedly an authoritative source of truth.²¹

What is a microhistory? The record of the past thirty years indicates there are several kinds of microhistory, and that scholars who led the way have understood it variously.²² Some have concentrated on the exhaustive

19 'Forum: How Revolutionary Was the Revolution? A Discussion of Gordon S. Wood's *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*', with comments by Joyce Appleby, Barbara Clark Smith, Michael Zuckerman, and a reply by Gordon S. Wood, in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 51(1994)4, p. 677–716.

20 Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Back and Beyond: Reversing the Cultural Turn?', in: *American Historical Review* 107(2002)5, p. 1476–1499.

21 This is one of Carlo Ginzburg's objectives. See Edward Muir, 'Introduction: Observing Trifles', in: Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero ed., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. xiii–xvii.

22 Matti Peltonen, 'Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research', in: *History and Theory* 40(2001)3, p. 347–359.

investigation of a particular locality over an extended period of time.²³ This approach, though then labeled ‘the new social history’ or ‘community studies’ has permitted exploration of structural questions related to family, property, and politics. By studying small places intensively these historians discovered facts that were often unknown to participants and invisible to earlier scholars.

A significant kind of early microhistory, such as Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum’s *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (1974), and Robert Gross’s *Minutemen and Their World* (1976), employed intensive community analyses to illuminate and explain particular events. Though often classified with Greven and Lockridge under the ‘community studies’ rubric because they, too, studied small communities and their structures, Gross’s and Nissenbaum’s books did more. By concentrating on the analysis of unusual episodes, not everyday social processes, they anticipated the ‘exceptional-normal’ microhistory that Carlo Ginzburg would later elaborate in early modern Italy. Though the authors mentioned did not call their work microhistory, from a current perspective that is what they were.

Effectively, the term ‘microhistory’ was invented by Italian historians of the early modern period, winning international acclaim with Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (1976). The genealogy of this approach reaches back into earlier work by Ginzburg and other Italian scholars, as well as French historians, especially Georges Duby, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, and Natalie Zemon Davis, particularly the latter’s influential *The Return of Martin Guerre*.²⁴ For these historians, deviant cases, recovered especially from Inquisitorial and other court records, permitted access to experiences and *mentalités* of peasants, giving voice to hitherto silent people, silent because of the paucity of sources revealing their experiences. Today, scholars of the early republic know the microhistory genre well.

In an age of ‘hype’ and easy generalization, microhistorians are attracted to a kind of minimalism. Avoiding the broad claims and overarching titles that belong to grand narrative synthesis, they prefer to lower readers’ expectations

23 Philip Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), is an influential early American example as was Sumner Chilton Powell’s *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1963) and Kenneth Lockridge’s *A New England Town, the First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636–1736* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970). On a more comprehensive scale, see the works of David Warren Sabean on Neckarhausen, Germany, and the review article by Marion W. Gray, ‘Microhistory as Universal History’, in: *Central European History* 34(2001)3, p. 419–431.

24 Edward Muir, ‘Introduction: Observing Trifles’, p. vii–xxvii.

so as to make sure that they can, at least, live up to their titles. Though microhistorians may be as ambitious as synthesizers, their approach is based on a different strategy of persuasion. By exploring a finite subject exhaustively (though not definitively), the microhistorian commands the evidence on that subject beyond challenge; so within that topic readers learn to accept her or his authority. From this laboriously earned position of authority and trust the microhistorian can assert broader interpretive statements.

Beyond their modest, 'minimalist' starting point, microhistorians are also motivated by a skepticism that often leads them to doubt the large generalizations of synthesis that, they suspect, may be oversimplified or reductionist. Here, surely, microhistorians share aspects of the post-modern view that history is an invention. But in contrast to post-modernists, microhistorians reject the view that history is only, or even primarily an invention. Yes, they admit, they cannot stand outside of time, and every representation of reality can only be a representation – not the reality itself. But they take what they believe is a constructive approach. Though some of historians' large generalizations are fictions, microhistorians believe that is a consequence of generalizing from scattered, inadequate evidence. It is as if biologists were to judge the cleanliness of a lake by looking over the side of the boat as they traversed the surface, rather than by dipping an ounce of the water for microscopic and chemical analysis. Yes, gross visual inspection, like grand narrative, tells you some important things that you could never learn by dipping an ounce of water – but it also conceals important realities. A lake that looks pure may harbor dozens of organic and inorganic materials perceptible only through close analysis. From the beginning, European and American microhistorians have used their work as case studies to test whether theories of behavior, often Marxist in Europe or Progressive or ideological in the United States – actually describe historical experience.

So is 'case study' simply a more modest, old-fashioned term for 'microhistory'? Possibly, in some instances. But a case study pursues more narrowly-defined objectives, such as the testing of particular generalizations: whether the Federalists of a district were wealthier and more cosmopolitan than the Antifederalists, or whether religious affiliation, ethnicity, or socio-economic status determined voting behavior. Case studies rarely seek to pose wholly new questions or to assert original interpretations. Nor have case studies been so fully engaged in the use of the narrative form.

The glory of microhistory lies in its power to recover and reconstruct past events by exploring and connecting a wide range of data sources so as to produce a contextual, three-dimensional, analytic narrative in which actual people as well as abstract forces shape events. Because the microhistorian narrows

the scope and shrinks the scale of research, she or he can justify the time spent pursuing stray facts so as to link data found in census records, vital records, town meeting and selectmen's records, tax records, probate records, land registries, court documents, diaries, letters, as well as printed sources – newspapers, pamphlets, book subscription lists, local histories, and individual biographies. These linkages can provide an understanding, however subjective, of the multiple contexts in which people made decisions and acted out their lives. Here one recognizes that behavior rests on more than one or two planes selected from among the usual suspects – class, race, gender, economic interest, religious or ethnic identity. Microhistorians are aware that every event embodies an existential moment in which the course of history intersects with individual action; and when participants' past experiences shape their current perceptions, and their behavior.

The Limits of Representativeness

Biography, Life Writing, and Microhistory

Hans Renders

A study about a military operation in the Second World War (*Operation Mincemeat*) shows how microhistorical and biographical research can amend fixed historiographical narratives with regard to specific topics. Skilled biographers in their research also problematize the representativeness of the studied life and thus of historiographical concepts. Life Writing claims to bring into the limelight individuals and groups of people hitherto neglected by scholarship by using autobiographical documents. Unfortunately, many Life Writing researchers leave out the historical context and historiographical practices. In contrast with this approach, examples of biographical research in this article illustrate how the human dimension and agency perspective within history can be put in a powerful interpretative framework through microhistory and biography. The particular positions of these two fraternal methods within past and contemporary historiography do not detract from their potentially challenging qualities for historiography.¹

In 2010 appeared *Operation Mincemeat*, a study that meticulously reports on a plan by the British secret service in the midst of the Second World War to deceive the Germans through a dead British soldier.² The corpse had to be washed up deliberately on the coast of Spain. The aim was to pass the corpse via the Spanish authorities into the hands of the Germans, while personal and official documents on this corpse indicated that the Allied invasion would take place on Crete, and not on Sicily – like the Allies planned to do and like Hitler also expected. The Nazis indeed became confused and the Allied invasion of Sicily eventually was a success. This relatively small incident, that has been brought out into the open in *Operation Mincemeat* by means of extensive

1 Hans Renders (in collaboration with Binne de Haan), ‘The limits of representativeness. Biography, life writing and microhistory’, in: *Storia della Storiografia* 29(2011)59–60, p. 32–42.

2 Ben Macintyre, *Operation Mincemeat. How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010). The remarks on Operation Mincemeat in this chapter are based on the study of Macintyre. In the same year a second book on Operation Mincemeat appeared: Denis Smyth, *Deathly Deception: The Real Story of Operation Mincemeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

biographical research, does not only take back the history of the Second World War to a smaller scale, it also provides information that would have remained veiled when investigated by another method than the biographical one. MI5, the department that prepared Operation Mincemeat, did not prepare the operation overnight. Major William Martin was the new name given to the corpse of the social outcast Glyndwr Michael, who shortly before died in squalid conditions, and for this major a complete fictional biography was devised in a few months time. Behind every note in the few letters and bills that could be found in his clothes, a reality was created that indeed was fake, but on the other hand ought to be so realistic and concrete that the German secret service would not suspect anything was wrong. So the picture of his girlfriend referred to a real existing young girl whose friend was 'at the front', the ironic remark in a letter from a colleague of the major about General Montgomery (that something had to be wrong because Montgomery had not announced new decisions for 48 hours) was based on the prevailing idea that Monty showed off an excessive desire for action. Examining clues in letters, clothing and an identity card, a social reality could be reconstructed that covered 27 witnesses who would know about the existence of the so-called William Martin, when thorough detective work was carried out.

What can we learn from this piece of constructed microhistory? A lot. For example, that this spying plan was almost a literary experiment for those carrying out this plan. How little according to the MI5 the German intelligence service was infiltrated in London, how the command structures between American and British military and secret services functioned, what technological innovations MI5 was capable to produce (Q in the later James Bond books was based on MI5 technician Charles Fraser-Smith), how the German culture was esteemed, what was considered as German humor in England, how Spain – officially neutral – at local level (the coast where Martin washed ashore) in almost all cases collaborated with the Nazis, and last but not least, what kind of agents were recruited by the British secret service. Indeed: eccentric, boisterous and artistic men. The planners had read about a similar venture earlier in a detective and one of the executives, Ian Fleming, also became the famous author of the James Bond books. The personal backgrounds of the secret agents had a significant impact on the fictitious person that was created for the anonymous corpse. *Operation Mincemeat* is a piece of microhistory that is not just representative for the great history between the Nazis and the Allies, by scaling down the author opened up different sources, searched for other documents and added to the invasion of Sicily a new element, and as a result of that the grand narrative of history should be corrected. In recent military histories of the liberation of Europe Operation Mincemeat is not

mentioned, not even in those studies that pay extensive attention to the invasion of Sicily that began on July 10, 1943.³ Ben Macintyre, author of *Operation Mincemeat*, is not a biographer, but through biographical research he has produced a fine piece of microhistory, by illuminating in a new way a great event by means of a relatively small incident. Not only because the story has been written down in a suspenseful way, but also because he has not made the mistake to describe Operation Mincemeat as an heroic epic because it simply ended well. In many ways, Macintyre shows that MI5 made amateurish mistakes, even while the outcome of the operation was successful. The assumption for example that the German secret service had no spies at hand in London, was the reason that the bill of a jeweller from New Bond Street was printed on authentic stationery, but simple inquiries about the engagement ring would have made clear that the order for this ring never could have been placed at this jewellery store.

Such criticism of Macintyre about the MI5 plan is the result of microhistory; he makes use of seemingly insignificant autobiographical documents and subjects them to critical examination. That is exactly what a good biographer would do too. Biography too often has been used to confirm the general picture of history. The biographee then is an illustration of a phenomenon, an event or a trend. Over the centuries, this view has yielded many commemorative and therefore confirmative biographies. That is to say that Hitler indeed was a devilish politician and that Hemingway was a tough man and the cyclist Lance Armstrong indeed is a shining example for all cancer patients. Even more, due to the biographies written about them, Hitler became an even worse person, Hemingway became even tougher and Armstrong a greater warrior than we already thought.⁴ The case of Armstrong (who recently conceded, under great pressure, that he had been doping extensively during his cycling career) illustrates once again how biographies are time-bound. To say this in a less friendly way: one might ask hard questions about the danger of commemorative biography, which is based not on thorough research but largely on reputation.

3 Andrew Roberts, *The Storm of War. A New History of the Second World War* (London and New York: Allen Lane, 2009); Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007). Operation Mincemeat actually only is mentioned in studies that specifically deal with military intelligence during World War II, cf.: Thaddeus Holt, *The Deceivers: Allied Military Deception in the Second World War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004).

4 Hans Renders, 'Did Pearl Harbor Change Everything? The Deadly Sins of Biographers', in: *Journal of Historical Biography* 2(2008)3, p. 88–113; Hans Renders, 'De biograaf tussen context en actualiteit', in: Wouter Beekers ed., *Christelijk-sociaal in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2010), p. 9–16.

This is not surprising, because the choice to pick Napoleon, Marilyn Monroe and Joseph Stalin as a subject for a biography is often the result of an aggregate of ideas already prevalent. Traditional historiography has not in the first place ignored marginal or anonymous persons, but rather integrated them into the institutional story, told from a teleological point of view. One who knows the outcome or the result, is inclined to interpret the journey differently than someone who doesn't know the eventual outcome of a process.

About how 'marginal' people have experienced history, we still know too little, for the simple reason that we know little about the perspectives of other participants in history other than those of the leading figures. From *Operation Mincemeat* we learn that most employees of MI5 had unreal and romanticized ideas of war, very different from the impressions General Montgomery and Winston Churchill had about war. Historiography from the perspective of the participant or agent, is exactly what microhistory and biography share with each other. In other words, what is the meaning of the grand historical narrative related to a real life, painting or village? Asking this question takes us to a theoretical problem. Microhistorians proceed with this problem by using the term 'normal exception'. This concept means that from the perspective of mainstream history many individuals are regarded as obscure and strange.⁵

Microhistorians, however, try to detect the social environment in which these people are fully accepted. This way these figures become a 'normal exception' in their social environment. In a similar way you can look at criminals, plague victims or other individuals in historiography that often have been dismissed as marginal. The staff members of MI5 were eccentric indeed, but they fitted very well in the decadent student-like surroundings of the metropolis that London already was by that time. That made them a 'normal exception'.

In recent years, the academic school of so-called Life Writing has emerged, wherein the 'exceptional typical' is considered as representative of certain groups. Life writers bring into the limelight discriminated groups of people, by using autobiographical documents of those discriminated people as a reliable source, without critical examination of these sources. So a diary of a disabled person or a gay person according to Life writers tells us something about all people with disabilities and all homosexuals, regardless of their historical

5 Sigurdur Gylfi Magnússon, "The Singularization of History": Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge, in: *Journal of Social History* 36(2003)3, p. 701–735. The Italian historian Edoardo Grendi first introduced the slightly different concepts 'exceptional normal' or 'exceptional typical', discussed by Matti Peltonen, 'Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research', in: *History and Theory* 40(2001)3, p. 347–359.

context. Life writers from all over the world, especially in the United States, with backgrounds in cultural studies, gender studies, comparative literature, sociology and psychology are studying individual lives on the basis of autobiographical documents. The results of their work show that the people who have produced these personal 'ego-documents' have always been victims of their social context, like black slaves in the nineteenth century or raped women on Haiti. Choosing to investigate the ego-documents of a certain sort of person has a liberating effect, but simultaneously means that the method of Life writers apparently is not as universal as they suggest it is. There is an ideological agenda behind the work of Life writers. Especially the deprived people of the earth receive attention and in this sense Life writers accomplish their self-imposed task to correct history. Precisely because Life writers omit to study the historical context, they leave room for researchers of all kinds – except historians – to project contemporary views about these groups of people on the past.

Ben Macintyre also wrote *Operation Mincemeat* as a result of a suitcase filled with autobiographical documents he discovered a few years ago in the properties of one of the descendants of the MI5 agents who were involved. He has subjected those diaries and letters to a critical examination and used them as a source and illustration for *his* story. A Life writer would have embraced this documentation as the truth and would have described the social world of a secret agent in wartime, as representative for the British secret service. Any boastful and blustering comment about the creation of this plan would have been presented as representative for all British secret agents. In the hands of a Life writer, the whole story about the invasion of Sicily would have remained a vague background, without the experiences of this secret agent being tested to the grand story of the Second World War for the benefit of the reader. (We now of course exaggerate to clarify the difference between Life Writing and microhistory. Life writers never would investigate secret agents.)

Microhistorians like the Finnish historian Matti Peltonen regard the 'exceptional typical' and the 'normal exception' rather as an incentive to study phenomena that previously were not subjected to investigation, potentially to trace homogenous patterns that are significant in mapping a social environment.⁶ The Italian historian Giovanni Levi also indicated that Life Writing and microhistory have little in common: 'Microhistory is not, therefore, necessarily the history of the excluded, the powerless and the far away. It needs to be the reconstruction of moments, situations and people who, studied with an analytical eye, in a defined context, regain both weight and colour: not as

6 Peltonen, 'Clues, Margins, and Monads'.

examples, in the absence of better explanations, but as points of reference within the complex contexts in which human beings move.⁷

There are numerous examples that show that the dominant historical narrative must be put into perspective. Life writers tell the story of minorities by means of individual autobiographical sources, microhistorians study individuals using actually all the resources they can find, in order to gain better insight with regard to general issues, without considering their heroes as representative for large groups, like Life writers use to do. The eventual outcome of microhistorical research, which also can be biographical research, should not be known in advance. Biography needs not be debunking in order to be valuable for history. Traditional historiography and traditional biography sought confirmation of the social representativeness of a human being from the past, but by studying an individual not in the first place as a writer or a general but as a member of a small village community or a member of a student union, one perhaps acquires a different image of this person. In other words: questioning this representativeness, opens up new vistas.

As an example of this proposition one can take the typical Dutch historiography of accommodation or pillarisation. Basically, public life in the Netherlands between 1870 and 1970 was divided into Protestant, Catholic and socialist segments or pillars. And those who fell outside these segments, were placed in the remainder pillar, like liberals and freethinkers. Political parties, schools, housing associations and the entire public life was divided into those pillars. Social, cultural and political life was parceled out.⁸

This classification of historian Arend Lijphart is clear and convincing. But the fact remains that there is a different story to tell. Only since 1980 the story of Lijphart has been put in perspective to some extent.⁹ Assessing the regional level instead of national politics, it appears that the segmentary aspects of the pillarisation were less omnipresent than expected, and there was indeed interaction between the different segments of Dutch society. Investigations into local communities proved that the interaction between different sections of the population in Dutch towns like Harderwijk, Naaldwijk or Woerden did not proceed according to the patterns Lijphart had identified in his study of

7 Giovanni Levi, 'Documento Amsterdam', unpublished discussion paper for specialized theme Biography and Microhistory at the 21st International Congress of Historical Sciences 2009, distributed among participants.

8 Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).

9 Hans Blom, 'Balans', in: J.C.H. Blom and J. Talsma ed., *De Verzuiling Voorbij. Godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000), p. 201–236.

national institutions. For example, national newspapers except *De Telegraaf* were strongly pillarized, but most inhabitants of the Netherlands read a regional – or city newspaper and those were not pillarized at all.¹⁰ The concept of ‘pillarisation’, as historian Hans Blom noted in his concluding article that appeared in a volume in which the alleged effects of the pillarisation at the local level are being investigated, is a metaphor that is being used to characterize a complicated reality.¹¹

Yet little research has been conducted concerning representatives of Catholics or Protestants who have experienced history in a different way than the historiography of Lijphart suggests.¹² If we consider agency with regard to the religious sphere, there is no study available that indicates the importance of this concept. Yet faith and agency as combined concepts can serve as an illuminating way to take a closer look at public life during the era of pillarisation. What influence exercised individuals who lived in a tight organization of Catholic, Protestant and socialist institutions and felt uncomfortable with it? Are the individuals who can be designated by this definition only marginal figures? There are good reasons to believe this is not the case. Consider literature; not only daily life at the time was parceled out, the history of literature was divided in pillars as well. There are numerous examples of biographies of Catholic or Protestant writers in which the upbringing and education are used to describe a career in a Catholic and Protestant context. There are some examples of biographies in which writers clashed with their social environment on moral grounds (Anton van Duinkerken who left seminary or Willem de Mérode who because of his pedophilia collided with the church wardens in his village), but we rarely see in these biographies a rigorous different perspective on the concept of pillarisation.¹³ In the biography of Van Duinkerken the rich Catholic Roman life is the steel-made context and when our hero steps outside this context, the biographer describes this as very exceptional, but he does not regard it as important enough to develop further interpretations or to find out whether more Catholic writers in effect lived against their will in that steel cage. As if these writers conformed to their pillar by birth, education and work and only clashed with their environment on substantive and moral grounds. And since

10 Hans Renders, *Wie weet slaag ik in de dood. Biografie van Jan Campert* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2004), p. 165–210.

11 Blom, ‘Balans’, p. 236.

12 Mathijs Sanders puts Lijpharts view to some extent in perspective in *Het spiegelend venster: katholieken in de Nederlandse literatuur, 1870–1940* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2002).

13 Hans Werkman, *De wereld van Willem de Mérode*, (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2011; original 1983); Michel van der Plas, *Daarom, mijnheer, noem ik mij katholiek. Biografie van Anton van Duinkerken* (Amsterdam/Tielt: Anthos/Lannoo, 2000).

cultural history is dominated by liberal arts, which previously were located in the small margins outside the 'pillarized' spheres (in the Netherlands with regard to literature the 'Tachtigers' [writers from the Eighties Movement], the periodical *Forum* and the 'Vijftigers' [writers belonging to the group of experimental Dutch poets in the fifties]), a writer who belongs to one of the pillars always loses out to the dominant liberal movement in macro-historiography. Now one can say that history has shown that liberal writers were better than the other writers from the pillarized segments of society, for example by considering publishers as gatekeepers or assessing literary criticism. But that would be too easy. Our view of the Dutch history of literature is heavily overstated by general concepts about pillarisation, without literary institutions at regional or local level being investigated. Approaching history at micro level tells us that a lot can be said against the macrohistory of pillarisation. In diaries and letters indications can be found that the typical characteristic of the most pillarized writer was that he or she indeed aspired to escape from the pillar he or she lived in. Writers of the Catholic or Protestant pillar, even authors who now are known as advocates of those pillars, have continuously made efforts to become part of the liberal pillar.¹⁴ We can consider the biography of the prominent Catholic writer Paul Haimon, who also thanks to his administrative and social positions was the undisputed patron of the arts in the Dutch province of Limburg. Biographical research and especially interpretation of his life leads to the conclusion that Haimon tried to enter the liberal pillar through a neutral publishing house. What new insights would emerge when instead of his representativeness Haimon would be investigated from the agency perspective? In other words: what results would it yield to not interpret Haimon from the perspective of the Catholic pillar but from his individual efforts precisely to escape this pillar? And especially his ambition to change his environment is meaningful, 'social change' in history is always a powerful force for change in any sense whatsoever. Biographers therefore more often should act like a microhistorian and deliberately ask themselves where the breaking points in the studied life can be found. They should try more often to interpret facts of life as being deviating instead of looking for a socially valid confirmation of life experiences. The misunderstanding behind almost every biography is that a theoretical basic assumption would not be necessary for a biographer, that the sources and facts speak for themselves, whereas those sources and facts in a certain way are being presented by invisible, institutionalized hands.

14 Hans Renders, 'Oude levens, nieuwe kwesties. De biografie in Limburg' in: Rob Bindels and Ben van Melick ed., *Oude levens, nieuwe kwesties. Dag van de biografie* (Maastricht: Huis voor de Kunsten Limburg, 2007), p. 14–27.

Biographers themselves are jointly responsible for this misunderstanding. In prefaces of biographies or in interviews biographers give after completing their work, it is often read that before writing the biography they first consulted 'the theory'. It goes without saying that a theoretical and methodical understanding when exercising a profession is commendable, even necessary. But these remarks about 'consulting theory' show the naive notion that all literature about biographies is easily united into a practical guide on how to write a biography.

Microhistory and biography is the sum of a scientific attitude and a penchant for creativity to place a story from the past into a powerful interpretative framework. The form certainly is very important, yet it is at the same time subordinate to the content. This is also the big difference between fiction and biography, regardless of the great importance of the narrative structure in a biography. In biography form is subordinated to its contents, whereas the main feature of fiction precisely is the dominance of form, it's even its only value. Life Writing aims to correct history from an ideological view of how the world should look like. Sources themselves are almost presented as research results, a historical examination of autobiographical documents with regard to their context is not considered important and therefore, contrary to what microhistorians and biographers do, no distinction is made between published and unpublished letters and diaries. Even the distinction between fiction and non-fiction within sources is not considered important. With equal ease Charles Dodgson, who wrote under the pseudonym name Lewis Carroll *Alice in Wonderland*, and James Barrie, the author of *Peter Pan*, are being charged by Life writers for child abuse, as diaries from lesbian teachers are used to demonstrate that sexual identity plays a significant role in transfer of knowledge.¹⁵

An innocent example in which the agency perspective from a microhistorical point of view can be tested against general history, is the story of Hans Jacoby and the Putsch of Hitler in 1923. Munich was on the morning of November 9, 1923 still in a shock after the failed Putsch of Hitler, but individual testimonials from residents of Munich at the time tell that almost nobody exactly knew where the excitement came from. Hans Jacoby worked as an apprentice at a bookstore in Munich. His boss thought it would be wiser for the young student to leave the city and bought a ticket for him in the morning. But in the afternoon the ticket could be returned, because the uprising already was

15 Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984); 'Queer Girls in Class: Lesbian Teachers and Students Tell Their Classroom Stories', call for papers IABA-listserv Hawaii, July 7, 2010.

over. What exactly had happened, the Jewish Jacoby only understood until much later.¹⁶

It is a fine example of scaling down, not in the sense of interpreting grand history from a 'small' perspective, but rather in scaling down a historical event back to a human dimension in which it is possible to test the experiences of an individual to the grand historical narrative. This almost automatically transforms microhistory into a socio-anthropological affair.¹⁷ Too often has been assumed that research on small social communities would teach us something about regional or national history. That is only partly the case, certainly from the perspective of representativeness, and more likely the concept of 'normal exception' fits better in these cases.¹⁸ It teaches us rather more about other social relationships which exercised unexpected impact on general history. For example, the German historian Joachim Fest shed with his memoirs a few years ago yet another light on the Nazi bureaucracy in Berlin, based on the vicissitudes of his own family. It differs for example from the observation of Daniel Goldhagen who concluded in *Hitler's Willing Executioners* that the entire German population quasi forced its leaders to conduct a National Socialist policy.¹⁹

But this downscaling also has been applied by microhistorians on other fields than the social level only. Carlo Ginzburg describes the publications of Giovanni Morelli, who in the nineteenth century under the pseudonym of Ivan Lermolieff would have discovered a method through which one could identify the authentic painter of old paintings. The publications of Lermolieff were translated into German by Johannes Schwarze, actually also a pseudonym of Morelli. In short, the theory of Morelli stated that one has to examine the details of a painting to reveal the identity of the painter, not the major themes of a painting. These major themes in fact are easy to imitate. In this way, Ginzburg tries to demonstrate in his study, microhistorians also should look at history.²⁰ And biographers too, I would like to add.

16 Hans Renders and Paul Arnoldussen, 'Toen kwam Colijn binnen. Kaart Abessinië!', in: Hans Renders and Paul Arnoldussen, *Jong in de jaren dertig. Interviews* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2003; original 1999), p. 144–145.

17 Jacques Revel ed., *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1996).

18 Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory', in: Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 97–119.

19 Joachim Fest, *Ich nicht: Erinnerungen an eine Kindheit und Jugend* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2006); Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

20 Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', in: Carlo Ginzburg, *Myths, Emblems, Clues* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 96–125.

Microhistory

Two or Three Things That I Know about It

Carlo Ginzburg

1. I believe that I heard of *microhistory* for the first time from Giovanni Levi in 1977 or 1978, and I adopted this previously unheard-of word without asking what it meant literally; I suppose I contented myself with the reference to a reduced scale suggested by the prefix *micro*.¹ I well remember, too, that in those early conversations we spoke of *microhistory* as if it were a label attached to an empty container waiting to be filled.²

Some time later Levi, Simona Cerutti, and I began working on a series entitled precisely *Microstorie* published by Casa Editrice Einaudi in Turin. Twenty-odd volumes by both Italian and foreign authors have appeared; a few of the Italian works have been translated into other languages. In some quarters there has been talk of an Italian school of microhistory. Recently, thanks to a small retrospective investigation into terminology, I discovered that this word, which we thought was free of connotation, had already been used by others.³

2. To the best of my knowledge, the first person to dredge up the word *microhistory* as a self-defined term was an American scholar, George R. Stewart, in 1959. Stewart, who lived from 1895 to 1980, and who for many years was a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, must have been an exceptional person. The vast bibliography of this liberal polymath includes, in addition to various novels (which I have not read), a precocious ecological manifesto; a recapitulation of universal history in the form of an autobiography of the human species; and a chronicle, written in collaboration with others, of the resistance by Stewart and other professors, including Ernst Kantorowicz, to the loyalty oath imposed by the University of California during the McCarthy

1 I should like to thank Patrick Fridenson, with whom I discussed these pages to great advantage while writing them. Perry Anderson read and criticized them before they took a definitive form; my debt towards him is once more very great.

2 Levi remembers the first discussions about the series that he had with Giulio Einaudi and me to have been 1974, 1975, or 1976, but this is a lapse in memory. See 'Il piccolo, il grande, il piccolo: Intervista a Giovanni Levi', in: *Meridiana* 10(1990) p. 229.

3 Made possible by ORION, the program on which the UCLA library computerized catalogue is based.

era.⁴ Stewart's best known books, *Names on the Land* and *American Place-Names*, are dedicated to the toponymy of the United States.⁵ In a lecture, taking as his point of departure the place names mentioned in a Horatian ode, he asserted that to interpret a literary text it is necessary first of all to decipher the background references – places, vegetation, meteorological conditions – that it contains.⁶ Stewart's passion for microscopic detail also inspired the book that interests me here: *Pickett's Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Charge at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863*. In it Stewart analyzes minutely for over three hundred pages the decisive battle in the American Civil War. The title refers to an event that lasted only about twenty minutes: the desperate, unsuccessful assault led by a Confederate battalion under Major General Edward Pickett. The account unfolds within a narrow time frame, a period of fifteen hours. The maps and diagrams that accompany the text are identified by captions such as 'The Canonade (1.10-2.55 P.M.)'. The outcome of the battle of Gettysburg is played out in a matter of seconds, between a clump of trees and a stone wall.⁷ Within this narrow compass in time and space, Stewart analyzes in almost obsessive detail what he defines as 'the climax of the climax, the central moment of our history' – and as such, part of universal history. If George Edward Pickett's failed charge had instead succeeded, Stewart suggests, the battle of Gettysburg might have ended differently, and 'the existence of two rival republics would probably have prevented the United States from turning the balance of two World Wars and becoming a global power'.⁸ Stewart's kind of microhistory could wind up as a reflection upon Cleopatra's nose.

4 George R. Stewart, *Not So Rich as You Think* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), *Man: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1946), and *The Year of the Oath: The Fight for Academic Freedom at the University of California* (Berkeley: Da Capo Press, 1971, original 1950). In the latter, Kantorowicz, who is not named but is easily recognized, makes a fleeting appearance. Compare Ernst Kantorowicz, *The Fundamental Issue: Documents and Marginal Notes on the University of California Loyalty Oath* (San Francisco: Parker Print. Co., 1950): 'This is not intended to be the history of "The Year of the Oath". This subject has been admirably dealt with by Professor George R. Stewart' (p. 1).

5 Stewart, *Names on the Land* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967, original 1945) and *American Place-Names* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). See also Madison S. Beeler, 'George R. Stewart, Toponymist', in: *Names* 24(1976), p. 77–85; Joseph M. Backus, 'Interview: George R. Stewart on Names and Characters', in: *Names* 9(1961), p. 53–57; and John Caldwell, *George R. Stewart* (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1981).

6 Stewart, 'The Regional Approach to Literature', in: *College English* 9(1948), p. 370–375.

7 Stewart, *Pickett's Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Attack at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), p. viii.

8 Stewart, *Pickett's Charge*, p. ix.

3. A few years later, independently of Stewart, a Mexican scholar, Luis González y González, inserted the word *microhistory* into the subtitle of a monograph. The book investigates, within the span of four centuries, the transformations experienced by a tiny, 'forgotten' village. But the minute dimensions are redeemed by its representative characteristics. Besides the fact that González y González was born and lived there, this is the element that justifies the choice of San José de Gracia over a thousand other villages just like it. Here microhistory is synonymous with local history, written, as González y González stressed citing Paul Leuilliot, from a qualitative rather than a quantitative perspective.⁹ The success enjoyed by *Pueblo en vilo* (reprinted and translated into French) persuaded its author to theorize about its methodology.¹⁰ González y González distinguished microhistory from the anecdotal and discredited *petite histoire*; and he reiterated its identity with what in England, France, and the United States is called local history, and which Nietzsche had defined as 'antiquarian or archaeological history'. Finally, to counteract the objections aroused by the word *microhistory*, he suggested two alternatives: *matria* history, suitable for evoking that small, weak, feminine, sentimental world of the mother which revolves around the family and the village; or *yin* history, the Taoist term that recalls all that is 'feminine, conservative, terrestrial, sweet, obscure and painful'.¹¹

4. Even while claiming for himself the basic paternity over the word *microhistory*, González y González recalled that it had already appeared in Braudel's contribution to the *Traité de sociologie* edited by Georges Gurvitch (1958–1960), but 'without known specific meaning' ('sin significación concreta reconocida').¹² Actually for Braudel *microhistoire* had a precise but negative

9 Luis González y González, *Pueblo en vilo: Microhistoria de San José de Gracia* (Guanajuato, Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1968): 'La pequeñez, pero la pequeñez típica' (p. 2). The reference to Leuilliot is on p. 16.

10 González y González, 'El arte de la microhistoria', in: *Invitación a la microhistoria* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1973), p. 8–53 and 'Teoría de la microhistoria', in: *Nueva invitación a la microhistoria* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), p. 31–46. For a perceptible echo of González y González's work in other Mexican publications of these years, see, for example, Luis Aboites, *La revolución mexicana en Espita, 1910–1940: Microhistoria de la formación del Estado de la revolución* (Tlalpan: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1982).

11 González y González, 'El arte de la microhistoria', p. 12, 14.

12 González y González, 'El arte de la microhistoria', p. 13. [An earlier, derogatory use of the word 'microhistory' (as A. Losev kindly reminded me) can be found in a passage by Claude Lévi-Strauss: 'Quand il [Franz Boas] réussit, ses reconstructions atteignent vraiment à l'histoire – mais une histoire de l'instant fugitif qui peut seul être saisi, une *microhistoire*,

connotation. It was synonymous with that 'history of events' [*histoire événementielle*], with that 'traditional history' that saw the 'so-called history of the world' dominated by protagonists who resembled orchestra directors.¹³ Braudel held that, within limits of brief and convulsive time, this traditional history was less interesting than microsociology on the one hand, and econometrics on the other.

Braudel had declared his hostility in regard to *histoire événementielle*, identified with political history, even from the time of his *Méditerranée* (1949). Ten years later he was once again harshly demonstrating the same displeasure. But he was too intelligent, too impatient to content himself with repeating what had now become for many an accepted truth due to his own authority. Suddenly putting aside what at this point seemed to him 'old misunderstandings', Braudel wrote: 'The incident (if not the event, the socio-drama) exists in repetition, regularity, multitude, and there is no way of saying absolutely whether its level is quite without fertility or scientific value. It must be given closer examination.'¹⁴ Twenty-five years had to pass before this suggestion would be acted on.¹⁵

Braudel excluded the possibility of scholarly apprehension of singularity: the incident, the *fait divers* could, perhaps, find acceptance simply because it was considered repetitive – an adjective that in González y González became 'typical'. But microhistory remained condemned.¹⁶ The word, obviously

qui ne parvient pas plus à se rélier au passé que la *macrohistoire* de l'évolutionniste et du diffusionniste ne parvenait à le réjoindre' ('Histoire et ethnologie', in: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958, original 1949, p. 12–13)].

13 Fernand Braudel, 'Histoire et sociologie', in: Georges Gurvitch ed., *Traité de sociologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1958–1960), Vol. 1, p. 86, 92; trans. Sarah Matthews, 'History and Sociology', in: Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 67, 74; rept. in part in Braudel, 'Histoire et sociologie', in: Fernand Braudel, *Écrits sur l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), p. 97–122.

14 Braudel, 'History and Sociology', p. 74–75. Braudel, *Le Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949); trans. Siân Reynolds, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

15 Section 'Fait divers, fait d'histoire', containing contributions by Maria Pia Di Bella, Michel Bée, Raffaella Comaschi, Lucette Valensi, and Michelle Perrot, *Annales ESC* 38(1983)4, p. 821–919. In his introduction to these essays, Marc Ferro juxtaposes the analysis of *fait divers* to works in microhistory as similar and inverse but complementary operations (p. 825). In the same issue Perrot, in 'Fait divers et histoire au XIX^e siècle' (p. 917), referred to the passage by Braudel quoted above.

16 Still today the term cannot free itself from ironic connotations, as emerges, for example, from an allusion by Georges Charachidze, *La Mémoire indo-européenne du Caucase* (Paris: Hachette, 1987): 'Ce que j'avais voulu appeler, par jeu, "microhistoire"' (p. 131).

modelled on *microeconomics* and *microsociology*, remained clothed in a technician's aura, as emerges from this passage of *Les Fleurs bleues*, perhaps the best novel by Raymond Queneau. The two speakers are the Duke of Auge and his chaplain:

'What is it exactly that you want to know?'

'What you think about universal history in general and of general history in particular. I'm listening.'

'I'm really tired', said the chaplain.

'You can rest later. Tell me, for example, is this Council of Basel universal history?'

'But of course: it is universal history in general.'

'And what about my small cannon?'

'General history in particular.'

'And the marriage of my daughters?'

'Scarcely "the history of events". At the most, microhistory.'

'What kind of history?' the Duke of Auge stormed. 'What the devil kind of language is this? What is today anyway? Pentecost?'

'Please excuse me, sire. The effects of exhaustion, as you can see.'¹⁷

The Duke of Auge, just like many readers of Queneau in 1965, had never heard of microhistory. For this reason, perhaps, ignoring the chaplain's precise classification, the publisher of the French translation of González y González's *Pueblo en vilo* did not hesitate to substitute in the subtitle and in the text the words *histoire universelle* for *microhistoire* with unintentional comic effects.¹⁸

5. *Microhistory, microhistoria, microhistoire*: from which of these independent traditions did the Italian *microstoria* derive? On the strictly terminological level that has occupied us thus far, the answer would seem to be clear: from the French *microhistoire*. I am thinking first of all of the splendid translation by Italo Calvino published in 1967 of *Les Fleurs bleues* [*I fiori blu*]; second, of a passage in Primo Levi in which, to the best of my knowledge, the word *microstoria* appears in Italian for the first time in an autonomous manner.¹⁹ It occurs at the

17 Raymond Queneau, *Les Fleurs bleues* (Paris: Gallimard, [1965]), p. 84–85. The Braudelian texts cited apropos this passage by Ruggiero Romano, 'Un Modèle pour l'histoire', in: Andrée Bergens ed., *Raymond Queneau* (Paris: L'Herne, 1975), p. 288, are relevant for *histoire événementielle*, not for *microhistoire*.

18 González y González, *Les Barrières de la solitude: Histoire universelle de San José de Gratia, village mexicain*, trans. Anny Meyer (Paris: Plon, 1977).

19 Salvatore Battaglia ed., *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1961–1978), Vol. 10, p. 365, refers to this passage apropos the entry for *microstoria* (defined as 'voce dotta,' that is, 'learned entry'). The definition that

beginning of the chapter 'Carbon', with which *The Periodic Table* concludes: "The reader, at this point, will have realized for some time now that this is not a chemical treatise: my presumption does not reach so far – *“ma voix est faible, et même un peu profane.”* Nor is it an autobiography, save in the partial and symbolic limits in which every piece of writing is autobiographical, indeed every human work; but it is in some fashion a history. It is – or would have liked to be – a micro-history, the history of a trade and its defeats, victories, and miseries, such as everyone wants to tell when he feels close to concluding the arc of his career, and art ceases to be long."²⁰

There is nothing in these calm and melancholy words to suggest that twelve years later their author would take his life. The reduction of scale suggested by the word *microhistory* fits in with the acknowledgement of the limits of existence, with the sense of one's own capacities that dominates this passage. Primo Levi probably encountered it in Calvino's Italian translation, which he must have checked against Queneau's original text. Knowledge of the translation of *Les Fleurs bleues* seems certain, given the close relationship that united Levi to Calvino; moreover, the last page of 'Carbon' in *The Periodic Table* echoes closely the last page of Calvino's *Il barone rampante*.²¹ A fresh encounter between Calvino and Primo Levi, by way of Queneau, occurred a few years later due to the Italian translation of the latter's *Petite cosmogonie portative*.²²

Shortly after its appearance in *The Periodic Table*, the word *microhistory* entered historical usage, losing, as often happens, its original negative connotation. Giovanni Levi (Primo Levi's distant cousin) was undoubtedly behind this

follows – 'particularly brief and succinct history, summary and essential account' – is definitely unsatisfactory.

20 Primo Levi, *The Periodic Table*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Schocken Books, 1984, original 1975), p. 224.

21 Italo Calvino, *Il barone rampante* (Milan: Garzanti, 1985). The similarity was not missed by Cesare Cases in his introduction to Levi, *Opere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987–1990), Vol. I, p. xvii. For his concern in regard to Levi, apprentice writer, Calvino, *I libri degli altri: Lettere, 1947–1981*, Giovanni Tesio ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), p. 382–383, as well as the letter (of a very different tone) on the revision of *Il sistema periodico*, p. 606. See also Severino Cesari, *Colloquio con Giulio Einaudi* (Rome: Theoria, 1991), p. 173.

22 Raymond Queneau, *Piccola cosmogonia portatile*, trans. Sergio Solmi (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), which includes Italo Calvino, 'Piccola guida alla *Piccola cosmogonia*', p. 162. See also Primo Levi, *L'altrui mestiere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), p. 150–154 (trans. Raymond Rosenthal, under the title *Other People's Trades* (New York: Summit Books, 1989), and the declaration by Carlo Carena in Cesari, *Colloquio con Giulio Einaudi*, p. 172.

transposition.²³ *Microhistory* rapidly replaced *microanalysis*, which had been used in these years by Edoardo Grendi, more or less with the same meaning.²⁴

6. It is a meaning still to be explained; the history of a word, obviously, determines its possible applications only in part. This is proved indirectly by the Zaharoff lecture that Richard Cobb devoted to Raymond Queneau in 1976: a species of historiographical manifesto that fits none of the trends discussed thus far. Cobb began with the ironic sympathy felt by Queneau for the timid, modest, provincial personages in his novels. He appropriated their words in order to counterbalance news of local happenings – the only kind that were of interest – with political events; and he concluded by assuming as his own slogan the colorful curse hurled by Zazie at Napoleon.²⁵ Basically, this is an exaltation of minor historiography (Cobb does not use the term *microhistory*) against the historiography that concentrates on the great and the powerful. The naiveté of this interpretation is obvious. Queneau does not identify in any way with his personages. The tenderness he felt for the provincial life of Le Havre coexisted in him with an omnivorous, encyclopedic passion for the most unforeseeable knowledge. His mocking curiosity for the *fait divers* did not stop him from proposing a drastic remedy for the prescientific character of historiography, and he elaborated a rigorous mathematical model to confine the disordered course of human acts.²⁶ But neither the author of *Une Histoire modèle* nor the auditor and later editor of Alexandre Kojève's courses on Hegel's *Phenomenology* appear in the portrait simplified to the point of distortion drawn by Cobb. Totally missing is the tension that runs through all of Queneau's work between the warmth of the narrator's intimate glance and the coldness of the scientist's detached observation.²⁷

23 At any rate it was an unconscious echo: to the question 'from what does the term 'microstoria' derive?' Giovanni Levi stated (private conversation, 29 Dec. 1991) that he knew only that the term had been used by Queneau. The last part of Queneau's passage quoted above was used as the epigraph for Raul Merzario, *Il paese stretto: Strategie matrimoniali nella diocesi di Como nei secoli XVI-XVIII* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), one of the first books published in the Einaudi series entitled *Microstorie*.

24 Edoardo Grendi, 'Micro-analisi e storia sociale', in: *Quaderni storici* 12(1977)35, p. 506–520.

25 Richard Cobb, *Raymond Queneau* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

26 Raymond Queneau, *Une histoire modèle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966, original 1942) and 'Lectures pour un front', in: *Front national*, 5 January 1945; rept. in: *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965, original 1950), p. 170–172.

27 See, instead, the fine introduction by Italo Calvino to Queneau, *Segni, cifre e lettere e altri saggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), esp. p. xix–xx (a different and larger collection than the French edition of the same title).

This is perhaps not so strange. Cobb is an empiricist who claims to be superior to theoretical questions; and, after all, for him the use of Queneau is a mere pretext.²⁸ But the proposal of a minor historiography made in the name of Queneau has a symptomatic importance that Cobb, confirmed cultivator of his own eccentricity, would be the first to reject. The contrast between Historiography with a capital *H* and Zazie's 'Napoleon mon cul' might suggest, apart from the obvious difference in tone, the contrast between *storia patria* and *storia matria* as outlined by González y González. To be sure, the latter's *microhistoria* focuses on typical phenomena, while Cobb's *petite histoire* focuses on the unpredictable and unrepeatable *fait divers*. But in both cases the choice of a circumscribed and close-up perspective reveals a dissatisfaction (explicit and aggressive in the case of Cobb, tactful and almost imperceptible in the case of González y González) with the macroscopic and quantitative model that dominated the international historiographical scene between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s, primarily through the activity of Fernand Braudel and the historians of the *Annales* school.²⁹

7. None of the relatively heterogeneous group of Italian scholars of micro-history would recognize his thought in George Stewart's close-up 'history of events,' in the local history of González y González, or in the *petite histoire* of Richard Cobb. However, it cannot be denied that even Italian microhistory, though very different (beginning with its theoretical goals), originated in opposition to the historiographical model just mentioned. The latter was presented in the mid-1970s, with Braudel's backing, as the culmination of the functional-structural approach, the supreme historiographical paradigm, the third to have occurred in the story of more than two millennia that began with Herodotus.³⁰

28 Richard Cobb, *A Sense of Place* (London: Duckworth, 1975), about which Edoardo Grendi, 'Lo storico e la didattica incosciente (replica a una discussione)', in: *Quaderni storici* 16(1981)46, p. 338–346.

29 Impatience with the pretenses of scientific historiography is more evident in a study by González y González that in its very title closely echoes Nietzsche's second *Untimely Meditation*: Luis González y González, 'De la múltiple utilización de la historia,' in: Carlos Pereyra ed., *Historia ¿para que?* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1990, original 1980), p. 55–74.

30 Traian Stoianovich, *French Historical Method: The 'Annales' Paradigm* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976, with an introduction by Fernand Braudel) where the two preceding paradigms are called, respectively, 'exemplar' and 'developmental' (p. 25). On microhistory as a response to the crisis of the 'great Marxist and functionalist systems', Giovanni Levi, 'On Microhistory', in: Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991; reprint Cambridge & Oxford: Polity Press, 2001), p. 93–113, esp. p. 93–94. See also Giovanni Levi, *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

But a few years earlier, the intrinsically ceremonial occasion of the publication of the *Mélanges* honoring Braudel (1973) revealed the existence of hidden tensions and anxieties at the very moment of the triumph. A parallel reading of two essays published on that occasion, one by Pierre Chaunu and the other by François Furet and Jacques Le Goff, seems instructive twenty years later. In both cases a historiographical program was being introduced and justified by some general historical reflections.³¹ Chaunu spoke of the end of the anticolonial wars (referring only to France) and to student revolts (in America and in Europe); of a disoriented Roman church following Vatican II; of an economic crisis in the most advanced countries that brought into question the very idea of progress; of challenge to the ideals of the Enlightenment that he interpreted consistently as a secularized transposition of an eschatological ideal. Furet, with words that we can suppose were shared by Le Goff, observed that the worldwide phenomenon of decolonization had placed the great nineteenth-century historiography, in its Manchesterian and Marxist versions, face to face with nonhistory; progress and change had run into inertia, stagnation. Common to both essays was a clear-cut rejection of theories of modernization (such as W.W. Rostow's, then in vogue, mentioned by Furet and Le Goff) that in Chaunu was coupled to a repudiation of modernity *tout court*. The research projects derived from these essays varied greatly. Chaunu proposed analyzing the traditional societies of the *ancien régime*, observing that the 'great continuity of Latin Christendom which has unconsciously [...] been transformed into a Europe of the West' was 'infinitely more tempting than the Nambikwaras or the Dogons', a statement that lumped together in disdainful rejection peoples from various continents being studied by ethnologists (Claude Lévi-Strauss and Marcel Griaule) from very different intellectual worlds.³² Instead, Furet

31 Pierre Chaunu, 'Un Nouveau champ pour l'histoire sérielle: le quantitatif au troisième niveau', and François Furet and Jacques Le Goff, 'Histoire et ethnologie', in: *Méthodologie de l'histoire et des sciences humaines*, Vol. 2 of *Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel* (Toulouse: Privat, 1973), p. 105–125, 227–243; the latter hereafter abbreviated 'H.' The text by Furet and Le Goff is divided in two parts that develop two communications 'préparées en collaboration', entitled respectively 'L'histoire et "l'homme sauvage"', and 'L'historien et "l'homme quotidien"'. In the first piece Furet outlines a general picture; in the second Le Goff proposes a program of research, with examples drawn from the sphere of medieval studies. Even if I distinguish between the two texts in my exposition, I am assuming basic agreement between their authors, as they have stated, except in cases where the opposite is indicated. On both Chaunu and Le Goff, one can read their self-portraits 'Le fils de la morte' and 'L'appétit de l'histoire', in: Pierre Nora ed., *Essais d'ego-histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

32 Chaunu, 'Un nouveau champ pour l'histoire sérielle', p. 109. In French, the term *ethnologie* is more widely used than its synonym *anthropologie*.

and Le Goff suggested reconnecting the long-sundered bonds between history and ethnology by adopting a generally comparative perspective based on the explicit rejection (especially by Le Goff) of a Eurocentric approach. But at this point the two positions begin to converge; both Chaunu and Furet were aiming at a 'serial history' based on the analysis of phenomena 'selected and constructed as a function of *their* repetitive character' ['H', p. 231]. Le Goff subscribed to the rejection of the single event on the part of the ethnologists and their concentration on 'events repeated or awaited'; Le Roy Ladurie's analysis of the carnival in Romans, though praised, was evidently considered an exception. Chaunu insisted that after studying economies and societies, the time had come, using similar methods, to deal with the third level, that of civilizations; and he spoke with strong approval of Michel Vovelle's examination of Provençal testaments. Le Goff stressed that the attention to everyday man suggested by ethnology 'naturally leads to the study of mentalities, considered as "that which changes the least" in historical evolution' ['H', p. 237]. Both essays ended up supporting the validity of the Braudelian paradigm, even while extending the range of its applicability.

8. It is not a simple matter to evaluate the import of this 'even while'. In all institutions, innovations, in fact ruptures with the past, make headway by means of the reaffirmation of a certain continuity with what has gone before. In the years that followed, precisely while Braudel's work was being translated into many languages (including English) and was reaching a public far beyond the world of specialists, the paradigm that out of convenience I have called Braudelian was rapidly declining. After Le Roy Ladurie had proclaimed that the school of French historiography founded by Bloch and Febvre must accept the American challenge and adopt the capacities of the computer, he published the enormously successful *Montaillou*: a piece of research conducted in craftsmanlike fashion on a medieval village, population two hundred.³³ Even Furet was dedicating himself to those themes of political history and the history of ideas that he had previously judged intrinsically resistant to serial history [see 'H', p. 232]. Questions that had been considered peripheral were popping up at the center of the discipline, and vice versa. The pages of the *Annales* (and the journals of half the world) were invaded by themes proposed

33 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, 'L'historien et l'ordinateur' (original 1968), in: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Territoire de l'historien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 14, trans. Ben Reynolds and Siân Reynolds, under the title 'The Historian and the Computer', in: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: the Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: G. Braziller, 1978).

by Le Goff in 1973: the family, the human body, relations between the sexes, cohorts, factions, charisma. Studies on the history of price fluctuations registered a brusque decline.³⁴

In France one has spoken of *nouvelle histoire* to describe this change in the intellectual climate that coincides significantly with the end of the long period of economic development that had begun in 1945.³⁵ The term is debatable, but the basic characteristics of the phenomenon are clear. In the course of the 1970s and 1980s the history of mentalities to which Braudel attributed a marginal significance acquired increasingly greater importance, often under the name of 'historical anthropology'.³⁶ The ideological 'ambiguity' emphasized by Le Goff in 1973 undoubtedly contributed to this success.³⁷ Philippe Ariès has devoted some telling words to the subject. The criticism of progress 'has passed from a reactionary right that had, moreover, abandoned it, to a left or, rather, a leftism with poorly drawn borders, rough, but vigorous. I do indeed believe (it's a hypothesis) that there is a connection between the new reticence of the 1960s in regard to development, progress, modernity, and the passion brought by young historians to the study of preindustrial societies and their mentalities'.³⁸

These words were implicitly autobiographical; as a young man Ariès had been a follower of Maurras and active in the ranks of *Action française*. Beginning

34 On this historiographical mutation, in a perspective partially different from the one expressed here, Jacques Revel, 'L'histoire au ras du sol', in: Giovanni Levi, *Le Pouvoir au village: Histoire d'un exorciste dans le Piémont du septième siècle*, trans. Monique Aymard (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. i-xxxiii, more fully developed in Revel, 'Micro-analyse et reconstitution du social,' in: *Ministère de la recherche et de la technologie: Colloque 'anthropologie contemporaine et anthropologie historique'* no. 2, p. 24-37; text prepared for the Marseilles colloquium of the same title, 24-26 September 1992.

35 For a recapitulation, Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier, and Jacques Revel ed., *La nouvelle histoire* (Paris: Retz, 1978). See also the introductory essay by Peter Burke, 'Overture: The New History, Its Past and Its Future', in: Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, p. 1-23.

36 Georges Duby, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines, 27 juillet 1214* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985, original 1973): 'L'histoire [...] qu'on devait dire, plus tard et abusivement, "nouvelle" (je dis abusivement, car la plupart des interrogations que nous fûmes si fiers de forger, nos prédécesseurs, avant que ne s'appesantisse la chape du positivisme, les avaient formulées dans le second tiers du XIX^e siècle)' (p. 7-8). See, in this regard, the extremely instructive book by Charles Rearick, *Beyond Enlightenment: Historians and Folklore in Nineteenth-Century France* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1974).

37 Jacques Le Goff, 'Les mentalités: Une histoire ambiguë', in: Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora ed., *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) Vol. 3, p. 76-94.

38 Philippe Ariès, 'L'histoire des mentalités,' in: Le Goff, Chartier, and Revel ed., *La Nouvelle Histoire*, p. 411.

in the 1970s this *historien du dimanche*, as Ariès dubbed himself, gradually became integrated into the group of *Annales* historians; he even was elected to the *École Pratique des Hautes Études*.³⁹ This academic anecdote can be viewed as one of the many symptoms of a much vaster transformation that was neither only French nor only academic. The frequently unconscious resumption of the themes of romantic opposition to capitalism on the part of leftist ecological movements is a component of it.⁴⁰

The 'new reticence' to which Ariès alluded could become translated into divergent postures. It may be remembered that Furet had proposed fighting the ethnocentric abstraction of theories of modernization with a dose of ethnology.⁴¹ Chaunu had suggested throwing overboard the ideals of modernity tied to the Enlightenment together with theories of modernization. The latter alternative – more radical from the ideological point of view – refused to bring the historian's research tools into the discussion. The former was moving in this direction but stopped half way. Retrospectively, speaking primarily from my personal experience, I think that Italian research into microhistory began from a diagnosis that agreed in part with Furet's but that arrived at a totally different prognosis.

9. The element of agreement lies in the rejection of ethnocentrism and of the teleology that for Furet characterized the historiography transmitted by the nineteenth century. The affirmation of a national entity, the advent of the bourgeoisie, the civilizing mission of the white race, and economic development furnished to historians a unifying principle of both a conceptual and narrative order, depending on the point of view and the scale of observation adopted. Ethnographic history conceived along serial lines proposed breaking with this tradition. Here the paths traveled by serial history and by microhistory diverge: a divergence that is at once intellectual and political.

To select as a cognitive object only what is repetitive, and therefore capable of being serialized, signifies paying a very high price in cognitive terms. First of all, on the chronological plane, ancient history, as Furet himself observed, precludes such treatment [see 'H', p. 233]; and medieval history renders it very

39 Philippe Ariès and Michel Winock, *Un historien du dimanche* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

40 Alf Lüdtke ed., *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1989), and Geoff Eley, 'Labor History, Social History, *Alltagsgeschichte*: Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday – A New Direction for German Social History?', in: *Journal of Modern History* 61(1989)2, p. 297–343.

41 'Il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce que, en même temps qu'elle [la grande histoire du XIXe siècle] cherche désespérément à sauver son impérialisme comme porteuse de la "modernisation", elle retourne à l'ethnologie comme consciente de ses échecs' ('H', p. 230).

difficult (for many of the themes suggested by Le Goff the documentation is fragmentary). Second, on the thematic level, areas such as the history of ideas and political history (again as Furet would have it) by definition elude this type of investigation. But the most serious limitation of serial history emerges precisely through what should be its basic objective: 'the equalization of individuals in their roles of economic or socio-cultural agents'. This idea of equalization is doubly deceiving. On the one hand, it distorts an obvious element: in any society the conditions of access to the production of documentation are tied to a situation of power and thus create an inherent imbalance. On the other hand, it cancels out many particulars in the existing documentation for the benefit of what is homogeneous and comparable. With a trace of scientific pride, Furet affirmed: 'the document, "facts", no longer exist for themselves, but in relationship to the series that precedes them and follows them; it is their relative value that becomes objective, and not their relationship to an ungraspable "real" substance' ['H', p. 231]. After the twofold filtering down of the data that has just been mentioned, it is not surprising if the relationship of the data in the series to reality becomes 'ungraspable'.

Historical knowledge, obviously, involves the construction of documentary series. Less obvious is the attitude that the historian must assume in regard to the anomalies that crop up in the documentation.⁴² Furet proposed ignoring them, observing that the *hapax legomenon* (that which is documentarily unique) is not usable in the perspective of serial history. But the *hapax legomenon*, strictly speaking, does not exist. Any document, even the most anomalous, can be inserted into a series. In addition, it can, if properly analyzed, shed light on still-broader documentary series.

10. In the early 1960s I began to study Inquisitorial trials in an attempt to reconstruct, in addition to the attitudes of the judges, those of the men and women accused of witchcraft. I quickly realized that this nonethnocentric approach would require comparison with the work of anthropologists, first among whom was Claude Lévi-Strauss. But the historiographical, conceptual, and narrative implications of such a choice became clarified for me only gradually, in the course of the years that separated *The Night Battles* (1966) from *Ecstasies* (1989).⁴³ Along the way I wrote a book in which I attempted to reconstruct the ideas and attitudes of a sixteenth-century Friulian miller who was

42 I discussed this theme in my 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', in: Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 96–125.

43 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

tried and condemned to death by the Inquisition (*The Cheese and the Worms*, 1976). The rejection of ethnocentrism had brought me not to serial history but to its opposite: the minute analysis of a circumscribed documentation, tied to a person who was otherwise unknown. In the introduction I took issue with an essay by Furet in the *Annales* in which he asserted that the history of the subaltern classes in preindustrial societies can only be studied from a statistical point of view.⁴⁴

Vovelle rejected as fictitious the alternative between individual biography and serial research.⁴⁵ In principle, I agreed. But in practice the alternative does exist. It consists of evaluating costs and benefits on a practical and, even more, on an intellectual plane. Roger Chartier wrote about *The Cheese and the Worms* that 'it is on this reduced scale, and probably only on this scale, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationships between systems of belief, of values and representations on one side, and social affiliations on another'.⁴⁶ Even someone not disposed to accept such an uncompromising conclusion has to admit that the experiment was not only legitimate but useful, if only for analyzing the results.

In reducing the scale of observation, that which for another scholar could have been a simple footnote in a hypothetical monograph on the Protestant Reformation in Friuli was transformed into a book. The motives that impelled me at that time to make this choice are not totally clear to me. I am diffident about those that come to mind today because I would not like to project into the past intentions that have been maturing in the course of these many years. Gradually I came to realize that many events and connections of which I was totally unaware contributed to influencing the decisions that I thought I had made independently: a banal fact in itself but always surprising, because it

University Press, 1983, original 1966) and Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1991, original 1989).

44 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, original 1976), p. xx. In the introduction to *The Night Battles* I had already stressed, against the undifferentiated notion of 'collective mentality', the importance of the development of specific beliefs on the part of single individuals.

45 Michel Vovelle, 'Histoire sérielle ou "case studies": Vrai ou faux dilemme en histoire des mentalités', in: *Histoire sociale, sensibilités collectives, et mentalités: Mélanges Robert Mandrou* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), p. 39–49.

46 Roger Chartier, 'Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories', in: Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan ed., *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 32; emphasis added.

contradicts our narcissistic fantasies. How much does my book owe (to take an obvious example) to the political climate in Italy during the early 1970s? Something, perhaps a lot; but I suspect that the motives for my choices should be searched for elsewhere.

To discover them, at least in part, I shall begin by stating what may not be totally obvious. *The Cheese and the Worms* does not restrict itself to the reconstruction of an individual event; it narrates it. Furet had rejected narrative and, more specifically, literary narrative, as an expression, typically teleological, of the 'history of events', whose time 'is made up of a series of discontinuities described in the mode of the continuous: the classic subject matter of the narrative [*récit*]' [H, p. 231]. Against this type of 'literary' narration Furet contrasted the examination of serial ethnographic history, problem by problem. He thus appropriated that widely accepted commonplace that still today tacitly identifies a specific form of narration, modeled on late nineteenth-century realist novels, with historical narrative *tout court*.⁴⁷ Granted, the figure of the omniscient historian-narrator, who unravels the slightest details of an event or the hidden motivations that inspire the behavior of individuals, social groups, or states, has gradually established itself. But it is only one of the many possibilities, as the readers of Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, and Robert Musil know, or should know well.⁴⁸

Before beginning *The Cheese and the Worms* I had mulled over at length the relationship between research hypotheses and narrative strategies (the recent reading of Queneau's *Exercices de style* had powerfully whetted my disposition for experimentation).⁴⁹ I had set out to reconstruct the intellectual, moral, and fantastic world of the miller Menocchio on the basis of sources generated by persons who sent him to the stake. This in some way paradoxical project *could* translate itself into an account that filled the gaps in the documentation to form a polished surface.⁵⁰ It could, but obviously it should not, for reasons that

47 This unstated identification is implied even in the famous essay by Lawrence Stone, 'The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History', in: *Past and Present* (1979)85, p. 3–24; this did not advance the subsequent discussion.

48 Here I elaborate some observations formulated in my 'L'Autre moyen âge de Jacques Le Goff' [review of *Pour un autre moyen âge*, by Jacques Le Goff], in: *Critique* 36(1980)395, p. 345–354.

49 Richard Cobb contemporaneously became aware of the methodological implications of the *Exercices de style*: 'apart from its brilliance both as parody and as conversation totally recaptured, [it] might also be described as an essay on the relative value and interpretation of conflicting or overlapping historical evidence' (Cobb, *Raymond Queneau*, p. 7).

50 I am speaking of lacunae in a relative, not absolute, sense (historical evidence is always lacunous, by definition). But new research questions create new lacunae.

were of a cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic order. The obstacles interfering with the research were constituent elements of the documentation and thus had to become part of the account; the same for the hesitations and silences of the protagonist in the face of his persecutors' questions – or mine.⁵¹ Thus, the hypotheses, the doubts, the uncertainties became part of the narration; the search for truth became part of the exposition of the (necessarily incomplete) truth attained. Could the result still be defined as 'narrative history'? For a reader with the slightest familiarity with twentieth-century fiction, the reply was obviously yes.

11. But the impetus towards this type of narration (and more generally for occupying myself with history) came to me from further off: from *War and Peace*, from Tolstoy's conviction that a historical phenomenon can become comprehensible only by reconstructing the activities of *all* the persons who participated in it.⁵² This proposition, and the sentiments that had spawned it (populism, fierce disdain for the vacuous and conventional history of historians), left an indelible impression on me from the moment I first read it. *The Cheese and the Worms*, the story of a miller whose death is decreed from afar, by a man (a pope) who one minute earlier had never heard his name, can be considered a small, distorted product of Tolstoy's grand and intrinsically unrealizable project: the reconstruction of the numerous relationships that linked Napoleon's head cold before the battle of Borodino, the disposition of the troops, and the lives of all the participants in the battle, including the most humble soldier.⁵³

In Tolstoy's novel the private world (peace) and the public world (war) first run along parallel lines, now they intersect; Prince André participates in the battle of Austerlitz, Pierre at Borodino. Thus Tolstoy proceeded along that path that had been splendidly opened up to him by Stendhal with his description of the battle of Waterloo seen through the eyes of Fabrizio del Dongo.⁵⁴

51 On the silences of Menocchio, Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. 110–112. These concluding words allude to my 'The Inquisitor as Anthropologist', in: Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, p. 156–164. The connection between 'échelle d'analyse' and 'écriture de l'histoire,' identified as 'questions majeures,' is grasped with great perspicacity in the anonymous editorial 'Histoire et sciences sociales: Un tournant critique?', in: *Annales ESC* 43(1988)6, p. 292.

52 Isaiah Berlin, 'The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History', in: Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly ed., *Russian Thinkers* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 22–81.

53 [Not a pope but a cardinal: see A. Del Col, *Domenico Scandella Known as Menocchio. His Trials Before the Inquisition (1583–1599)*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), p. cxii, note 201].

54 Tolstoy was well aware of his indebtedness: see *Paul Boyer chez Tolstoï: Entretiens à Iasnaïa Poliana* (Paris: Institut d'Études Slaves, 1950), p. 40; quoted in Berlin, 'The Hedgehog and

The romanticized personages were bringing to light the painful inadequacy with which historians had dealt with the historical event *par excellence*. It was a true and proper intellectual challenge, seeming to pertain to a past on which the sun has now set, including *l'histoire-bataille* and the polemic against *l'histoire-bataille*.⁵⁵ But reflection on the battle as a historiographical theme can still be useful. From it emerges indirectly a fundamental problem in the historian's trade.

12. To represent the *Battle between Alexander and Darius*, Albrecht Altdorfer selected a towering and distant vantage point, like an eagle's in flight (see Illustration 11.5). As if with the bird's keen sight he painted the light resplendent on armor, trappings, and harnesses, the banners' brilliant colors and white plumes swaying on warriors' helmets, the hordes of knights with their raised lances, resembling an immense porcupine, and then, gradually receding towards the background, the mountains behind the battlefield, the encampments, the waters and mists, the horizon arching to suggest the shape of the terrestrial sphere, the immense sky in which burn the setting sun and the waxing moon. No human eye will ever succeed in catching contemporaneously, as did Altdorfer, the historical specificity (real or presumed) of a battle and its cosmic irrelevance.⁵⁶

A battle, strictly speaking, is invisible, as we have been reminded (and not only thanks to military censorship) by the images televised during the Gulf War. Only an abstract diagram or a visionary imagination such as Altdorfer's can convey a global image of it. It seems proper to extend this conclusion to any event and with greater reason to whatever historical process. A close-up look permits us to grasp what eludes a comprehensive viewing, and vice versa.

the Fox', p. 56. Compare Nicola Chiaromonte, *Crede o non credere* (Milan: Il Mulino, 1971). I am grateful to Claudio Fogu for this reference.

55 DUBY, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines*.

56 OTTO BENESCH, *Der Maler Albrecht Altdorfer* (Vienna: Scholl, 1939): 'Makrokosmos und Mikrokosmos werden eins' (p. 31). I realize that I already broached this theme in speaking of a Bruegel landscape (*Dark Day*) and of the battle with which Rossellini's film *Paisà* concludes. See, respectively, Carlo Ginzburg, *Spurensicherungen: Über verborgene Geschichte, Kunst und soziales Gedächtnis*, trans. Karl Friedrich Hauber (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1983), p. 14 and 'Di tutti i doni che porto a Kaisare [...] Leggere il film scrivere la storia', in: *Storie e storia* 5(1983), p. 5–17. On the conclusion of *Paisà*, see also the anecdote reported by Federico Fellini, who had worked on the film as Rossellini's assistant director, in Federico Fellini, *Comments on Film* (Fresno, Calif.: California State University, 1988, original 1983), p. 66. On Altdorfer's battle see also Reinhart Koselleck's opening essay in his book *Vergangene Zukunft: zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979).



ILLUSTRATION 11.5 Albrecht Altdorfer, *Battle between Alexander and Darius*, 1529.

This contradiction is at the heart of a chapter ('The Structure of the Historical Universe') in Siegfried Kracauer's final book published posthumously with a foreword by Paul Oskar Kristeller: *History: The Last Things before the Last*. While avowing himself to be more optimistic on this point than his friend Kracauer, Kristeller had to admit that 'the discrepancy between general and

special history, or as he calls it, macro and micro history, represents a serious dilemma.⁵⁷ Queneau's *Les Fleurs bleues* dates from 1967, Kracauer's death from a year before. We probably find ourselves in this instance facing an independent invention. But what is important is not the term *microhistory*; it is the significance that it gradually comes to assume in Kracauer's mind.

At first for Kracauer *microhistory* seems to be synonymous with *monographic research*. But the comparison between *microhistory* and cinematographic close-up (an obvious thing for the author of *From Caligari to Hitler* and *Theory of Film*) introduces new elements. Kracauer observes that some research of a specific character, such as Hubert Jedin's on the Councils of Constance and Basel, are capable of modifying the comprehensive visions delineated by macrohistory. Are we compelled to conclude, then, with Aby Warburg that 'God is in the detail'? It is the thesis sustained by 'two great historians' such as the Tolstoy of *War and Peace* and Sir Lewis Namier (the pairing suggested by Kracauer is significant). But despite Kracauer's sympathy for these positions, he recognizes that certain phenomena can only be grasped by means of a macroscopic perspective. This suggests that the reconciliation between macro- and microhistory is not at all taken for granted (as Toynbee wrongly believed). It needs to be pursued. According to Kracauer, Marc Bloch offered the best solution in his *Feudal Society*: a constant back and forth between micro- and macrohistory, between close-ups and extreme long-shots, so as to continually thrust back into discussion the comprehensive vision of the historical process through apparent exceptions and cases of brief duration. This methodological prescription led to an affirmation of a decisively ontological nature: reality is fundamentally discontinuous and heterogeneous. Consequently, no conclusion attained apropos a determinate sphere can be transferred automatically to a more general sphere (what Kracauer calls the 'law of levels').⁵⁸

These posthumous pages of Kracauer's, a nonprofessional historian, still constitute today, in my opinion, the best introduction to microhistory. As far as I know they have had no influence in the emergence of this historiographical current.⁵⁹ Certainly not on me, since I learned about them with deplorable

57 Paul Oskar Kristeller, foreword, in: Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. viii; emphasis added. Esp. chap. 5, 'The Structure of the Historical Universe,' p. 104–138, which Kracauer left unfinished.

58 Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last*, p. 134.

59 In fact, they have not had much of an echo generally; but see the penetrating analysis by Martin Jay, who demonstrates most efficaciously that 'in many ways, *History* is one of Kracauer's most compelling and original works, which deserves to be "redeemed", if one

delay only a few years ago. But when I read them they seemed strangely familiar, for two reasons. First, an indirect echo of them had reached me long before by way of my decisive encounter with *Minima Moralia*, the masterpiece in which Adorno, despite his adherence to the idea of totality, one he never renounced, implicitly demonstrated his own indebtedness to the micrological tradition inaugurated by Simmel and carried on by his friend (and in a sense master) Kracauer.⁶⁰ Second, the latter's ideas on history, beginning with the crucial one of the discontinuity of reality, are an explicit and conscious development of key phenomena in the culture of this century, from Proust to the cinema. The fact that certain ideas are in the air suggests that, starting from the same premises, it is possible to arrive at similar conclusions independently.

13. It is often difficult to demonstrate the existence of intellectual convergence and, contemporaneously, the lack of direct contacts. Hence, if I am not mistaken, the interest (going well beyond the relevance of the object) in the intellectual genealogy that I have attempted to reconstruct thus far: in part true, in part fictional, in part consciously and in part unconsciously. Looking at things from a distance I realize that our researches were a fragment of a more general tendency, the parameters of which almost totally escaped me at the time. It may not be pure chance that the word *microhistory* was used first in the title of a work that describes a battle with almost maniacal detail (although the conclusion of Stewart's book on Gettysburg seems to evoke Conrad rather than Tolstoy). Even less casual is the fact that some years later, undoubtedly independently, Kracauer identified microhistory with Tolstoy; I read this, I must confess, with pleasure mingled with slight disappointment (my approach had not been so anomalous, after all).

I am aware of a difficulty. Tolstoy's extraordinary capacity to communicate to the reader the physical, palpable certainty of reality seems incompatible with

may borrow his own word, from an unmerited oblivion' (Martin Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer', in: *Salmagundi* 10/11(1975/1976)31/32, p. 87).

60 Jay, 'The Extraterritorial Life', p. 62, on *Minima Moralia*; p. 63, on Kracauer's diffidence towards the category of 'totality'; and p. 50, on the connection, in Kracauer's thought, between 'wholeness and death'. See also Martin Jay, 'Adorno and Kracauer: Notes on a Troubled Friendship', in: *Salmagundi* 13(1978)40, p. 42–66 and Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 245–246. The young Adorno read Kant under Kracauer's guidance: R. Bodei, introduction, in: Theodor W. Adorno, *Il gergo dell'autenticità [Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: Zur deutschen Ideologie]* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1989), p. vii. I have acknowledged my debt to *Minima Moralia* in the introduction to *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, p. ix.

the wholly twentieth-century idea that I have placed at the core of microhistory – namely, that the obstacles interfering with research in the form of lacunae or misrepresentations in the sources must become part of the account. In *War and Peace* just the opposite happens. Everything that precedes the act of narration (from personal reminiscences to the memorials of the Napoleonic age) is assimilated and fused to permit the reader to enter into a relationship of special intimacy with the personages and participate directly in their lives.⁶¹ Tolstoy leaps over the inevitable gap between the fragmentary and distorted traces of an event (a battle, for instance) and the event itself. But this leap, this direct contact with reality can take place only on the terrain of invention. It is precluded by definition to the historian, who has at his disposal only fragments of things and documents. The historiographical frescoes that seek to communicate to the reader, through expedients frequently mediocre, the illusion of a vanished reality, tacitly remove this constituent limitation of the historical profession. Microhistory chooses the opposite approach. It accepts the limitations while exploring their gnoseological implications and transforming them into a narrative element.

This approach had been anticipated in some respects by the Italian critic Renato Serra, in a brief but important essay written in 1912 and published posthumously: ‘Partenza di un gruppo di soldati per la Libia’ (‘Departure of a band of soldiers to Libya’).⁶² In a letter to Benedetto Croce, Serra explained that he had started from Tolstoy’s ideas on history as expressed in *War and Peace*.⁶³ In an article later included in the volume *History: Its Theory and Practice* Croce had repudiated Tolstoy’s position, defining it as absurd and skeptical: ‘we know at every moment all the history that we need to know’; consequently, the history that we do not know is identical to ‘the eternal phantom of the “thing in itself”’.⁶⁴ Serra, in sarcastically defining himself “a slave to the thing in itself”,

61 Viktor Shklovskii, *Materiali e leggi di trasformazione stilistica: Saggio su ‘Guerra e pace’*, trans. Monica Guerrini (Parma: Pratiche, 1978).

62 Renato Serra, ‘Partenza di un gruppo di soldati per la Libia’, in: Mario Isnenghi ed., *Scritti letterari, morali e politici* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 278–288. Here I am returning to observations that I made in ‘Just One Witness’, in: Saul Friedlander ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 94–95.

63 Renato Serra, letter to Benedetto Croce, 10 October 1912, in: Luigi Ambrosini, Giuseppe De Robertis, Alfredo Grilli ed., *Epistolario di Renato Serra* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1934), p. 453–454.

64 Benedetto Croce, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960, original 1915), p. 55.

confessed to Croce that he felt much closer to Tolstoy, 'only that', he added, 'my difficulties are, or seem to be, more complex'.⁶⁵

In effect, 'Partenza' hearkens back to ideas of Tolstoy (without naming him) but takes them in a completely different direction. Gruff letters from soldiers to their families, newspaper articles written for the pleasure of a distant public, accounts of military actions hurriedly scribbled by an impatient captain, the reworking by historians full of superstitious veneration for each of these documents: all these narratives, independently of their more or less direct character, have (Serra explains) a highly problematic relationship with reality. In sentences that become little by little more hurried and almost feverish, Serra registers the rhythm of a thought that turns around the unresolved contradiction between the certainty of the existence of the 'thing in itself' and distrust in the possibility of attaining it by means of the evidence: 'There are people who imagine in good faith that a document can be the expression of reality. [...] As if a document could express something different *from itself*. [...] A document is a fact. The battle is another fact (an infinity of other facts). The two cannot make *one*. [...] The man who acts is *a fact*. And the man who narrates is *another fact*. [...] Every piece of evidence provides testimony only of itself; of its proper moment, of its proper origin, of its proper end, and of nothing else. [...] All the critical judgments to which we subject history involve the concept of true history, of absolute reality. It is necessary to face up to the question of memory; not in so far as it is forgetfulness, but in so far as it is *memory*. Existence of things in themselves.'⁶⁶

14. I read Serra's piece only at the beginning of the 1980s. But the gist of it had reached me more than twenty years earlier through Arsenio Frugoni's teaching in Pisa. In his book *Arnaldo da Brescia nelle fonti del secolo XII* (1954) he had shown how the specific perspective of each narrative source contributes to present the same personage in an alternating, different light.⁶⁷ Today I feel that Frugoni's sarcasm over the naive efforts by positivist erudites to make the pieces fit together had as its point of departure Serra's antipositivist polemic ('Every piece of evidence provides testimony only of itself; of its

65 Renato Serra, letter to Croce, 11 November 1912, in: *Epistolario di Renato Serra*, p. 459. Serra's differences with Croce have been noted by Eugenio Garin, 'Serra e Croce', in: A. Brasini ed., *Scritti in onore di Renato Serra: Per il cinquantenario della morte* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1974), p. 85–88.

66 Serra, 'Partenza di un gruppo di soldati per la Libia', p. 286–287.

67 Arsenio Frugoni, *Arnaldo da Brescia nelle fonti del secolo XII* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989, original 1954), and Carlo Ginzburg, 'Proofs and Possibilities: In the Margins of Natalie Zemon Davis' *The Return of Martin Guerre*', trans. Anthony Guneratne, in: *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 37(1988), p. 114–127.

proper moment, of its proper origin, of its proper end, and of nothing else'), which it sought to surpass in its skeptical implications.

I am not certain that Frugoni knew Serra's 'Partenza'. But that it had been read by Italo Calvino seems to me to be obvious from his 'Ricordo di una battaglia' (1974), a writing of a completely different kind.⁶⁸ 'It is necessary to face up to the question of memory', Serra had written. Calvino takes up the question, even if his battle is an episode of partisan warfare that he is recalling at a distance of almost thirty years. At first everything seems clear to him, easily within reach: 'It is not true that I no longer remember anything, my memories are still there, hidden in the gray matter of the brain' ['R', p. 75]. But the negative statement ('It is not true') shows that he is already assailed by doubt, that recollections crumble as memory brings them to light: 'And my fear now is that as soon as some remembrance forms, it will immediately appear in a faulty light, contrived, sentimental, as war and youth always are, and become a segment in the story with the style of that time, which cannot tell us how things really were but only how we thought we saw them and said them.' ['R', p. 81–82]. Can memory abolish the mediation constituted by the illusions and distortions of our self of a bygone time to attain 'things in themselves'? The conclusion echoes, with a bitterly ironic twist, the false confidence of the beginning: 'Everything that I have written thus far serves to make me understand that of that morning I remember almost nothing' ['R', p. 85].

The closing words of 'Ricordo di una battaglia' ('The sense of everything that appears and disappears' ['R', p. 85]) underline the precariousness of our relationship with the past. And yet that 'almost nothing' suggests that the past, despite everything, is not unattainable. For me, who learned much from Calvino, this conclusion is important subjectively as well as objectively to explode the current image of Calvino (the later Calvino) as a postmodernist writer. The laborious and painful autobiographical reflection that takes form in the 'Ricordo di una battaglia' provides us with an image of him very different from the skeptical euphoria now in fashion.

15. In an essay in *History and Theory*, F. Ankersmit, a Dutch student of historiographical theory, argued that the tendency to concentrate attention on scraps rather than on larger entities is the most typical expression of 'postmodernist historiography'.⁶⁹ To elucidate this point Ankersmit used a vegetal

68 Italo Calvino, 'Ricordo di una battaglia', in: Italo Calvino, *La strada di San Giovanni* (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), p. 75–85; hereafter abbreviated 'R.' The piece was first published in *Corriere della Sera*, 25 April 1974, the anniversary of the liberation. The printing of Isnenghi's Einaudi edition was completed on 16 February 1974.

69 F.R. Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism', in: *History and Theory* 28(1989)2, p. 149; see also p. 143, 150. See also Perez Zagorin's comment: 'Historiography and

metaphor (one that actually goes back to Namier, and perhaps to Tolstoy).⁷⁰ In the past historians were preoccupied with the trunk of a tree or its branch; their postmodernist successors busy themselves only with the leaves – namely, with minute fragments of the past that they investigate in an isolated manner, independently of the more or less larger context (branches, trunk) of which they were part. Ankersmit, who accepts the skeptical notions formulated by Hayden White in the early 1970s, looks with great favor on this shift towards the fragment. In his opinion it expresses an antiessentialist or antifoundationalist attitude that brings to light (Ankersmit is not frightened by formal contradictions) the ‘fundamentally postmodernist nature’ of historiography: activity of an artistic type that produces narratives incommensurable among themselves. The ambition to know the past has set; the significance of the fragments is sought in the present, ‘the way in which their pattern can be adapted to other forms of civilization existing now’. As examples of this historiographical tendency Ankersmit cites two French books (Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou* and Georges Duby’s *Sunday of Bouvines*), an American work (Natalie Zemon Davis’s *The Return of Martin Guerre*), and a nonexistent book (*Microhistories*, by the undersigned).

In the past decade Giovanni Levi and I have repeatedly argued against the relativist positions, including the one warmly espoused by Ankersmit, that reduce historiography to a textual dimension, depriving it of any cognitive value.⁷¹ There is no contradiction between this polemic and the debt I have acknowledged in these pages towards Calvino and more generally towards the

Postmodernism: Reconsiderations’, in: *History and Theory* 29(1990)3, p. 263–274 and Ankersmit’s response, ‘Reply to Professor Zagorin’, p. 275–296, where we read this characteristic statement (apropos such constructivist theoreticians of historiography as Oakeshott, Goldstein, and Stanford): ‘the past as the complex referent of the historical text as a whole has no role to play in historical debate. From the point of view of historical practice this referential past is epistemically a useless notion. [...] Texts are all we have and we can only compare texts with texts’ (p. 281).

70 “Toynbee relates that Namier once told him: “Toynbee, I study the individual leaves, you the tree. The rest of the historians study the clusters of branches, and we both think *they* are wrong” (Kracauer, *History*, p. 110). But see also the passage in Tolstoy’s diary quoted by Berlin, ‘The Hedgehog and the Fox’, p. 30. For a precocious formulation of Namier’s program to study ‘individual leaves’ (the members of the House of Commons), L.B. Namier, ‘The Biography of Ordinary Men’, in: L.B. Namier, *Skyscrapers and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1931, original 1928), p. 44–53.

71 By Levi, see ‘I pericoli del geertzismo’, in: *Quaderni storici* 20(1985)58: p. 269–277 and ‘On Microhistory’. See also my ‘Description and Quotation’, and ‘Proofs and Possibilities’, in: Carlo Ginzburg, *Threads and Traces: True False Fictive* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2012), p.7–24, 54–71; ‘The Inquisitor as Anthropologist’, in: Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths,*

nineteenth- and twentieth-century novel. The experimental attitude that brought together, at the end of the 1970s, the group of Italian students of microhistory ('a history with additives', as Franco Venturi ironically dubbed it) was based on the definite awareness that all phases through which research unfolds are *constructed* and not *given*: the identification of the object and its importance; the elaboration of the categories through which it is analyzed; the criteria of proof; the stylistic and narrative forms by which the results are transmitted to the reader. But this accentuation of the constructive moment inherent in the research was combined with an explicit rejection of the skeptical implications (postmodernist, if you will) so largely present in European and American historiography of the 1980s and early 1990s. In my opinion the distinctive quality of Italian microhistory must be looked for in this cognitive wager.⁷² I should like to add that my own work of these years, even if in large part absorbed by a book decisively macrohistoric in approach (*Ecstasies*), proceeded, at least in intention, along this twofold track.

16. Piero della Francesca, Galileo, a community of nineteenth-century Piedmontese weavers, a Ligurian valley in the sixteenth century: these examples selected at random show that Italian research in microhistory has looked at subjects of acknowledged importance as well as themes that had been previously ignored or relegated to spheres considered inferior, such as local history.⁷³ What all these investigations have in common programmatically is the insistence on context – exactly the opposite of the isolated contemplation of the fragmentary advocated by Ankersmit. But while the choice of Galileo does

and the Historical Method, p. 156–164; 'Just One Witness', in: Friedlander ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation*, p. 82–96; and 'Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian', in: *Critical Inquiry* 18(1991)1, p. 79–92.

72 Burke emphasizes the cultural relativism of the 'new history' in Burke, 'Overture', p. 3–4.

73 See, respectively, Carlo Ginzburg, *Indagini su Piero: Il Battesimo, il ciclo di Arezzo, la Flagellazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper, under the title *The Enigma of Piero della Francesca: The Baptism, the Arezzo Cycle, the Flagellation* (London: Verso, 1985); Pietro Redondi, *Galileo eretico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), trans. Raymond Rosenthal, under the title *Galileo Heretic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Franco Ramella, *Terra e telai: sistemi di parentela e manifattura nel Biellese dell'Ottocento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984); and Osvaldo Raggio, *Faide e parentele: Lo stato genovese visto dalla Fontanabuona* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990). Alberto M. Banti, 'Storie e microstorie: L'histoire sociale contemporaine en Italie [1972–1989]', trans. Susanna Magri, in: *Genèses: sciences sociales et histoire* 3(1991)3, p. 134–147, esp. p. 145, emphasizes the presence in Italian microhistory of two tendencies, centered respectively on the analysis of social structure and of cultural implications. Banti assigns to my essay 'Clues' some of the responsibility for the ultimate failure of the microhistorical paradigm (the true one, the first of the two mentioned).

not require any prior justification, we inevitably ask ourselves: why precisely that community, why precisely that valley? In these cases, the reference, explicit or implicit, to a comparative dimension is inevitable. Franco Ramella (*Terra e telai*, 1984) and Osvaldo Raggio (*Faide e parentele*, 1990) have shown us that the in-depth study of the Val di Mosso and of the Fontanabuona can compel us to look with different eyes at such problems as protoindustry and the birth of the modern state. But to recognize the richness of the results is still not enough. An object, as we saw, may be chosen because it is typical (González y González) or because it is repetitive and therefore capable of being serialized (Braudel, apropos the *fait divers*). Italian microhistory has confronted the question of comparison with a different and, in a certain sense, opposite approach: through the anomalous, not the analogous. First of all, it hypothesizes the more improbable sort of documentation as being potentially richer: the 'exceptional "normal"' of Edoardo Grendi's justly famous quip.⁷⁴ Second, it demonstrates, as accomplished for example by Giovanni Levi (*L'eredità immateriale*) and by Simona Cerutti (*La Ville et les métiers*), that any social structure is the result of interaction and of numerous individual strategies, a fabric that can only be reconstituted from close observation.⁷⁵ It is significant that the relationship between this microscopic dimension and the larger contextual dimension became in both cases (though so diverse) the organizing principle in the narration.⁷⁶ As Kracauer had already foreseen, the results obtained in a microscopic sphere cannot be automatically transferred to a macroscopic sphere (and vice versa). This heterogeneity, the implications of which we are just beginning to perceive, constitutes both the greatest difficulty and the greatest potential benefit of microhistory.⁷⁷

74 Grendi, 'Micro-analisi e storia sociale', p. 512.

75 The Italian subtitle of Levi's book is *Carriera di un esorcista nel Piemonte del Seicento*. Simona Cerutti, *La Ville et les métiers: Naissance d'un langage corporatif* (Turin, 17e -18e siècles) (Paris: Éditions de l'ÉHESS, 1990). Some of the intellectual and political implications of this research could be clarified by a parallel reading of Vittorio Foa and Pietro Marcenaro, *Riprendere tempo: Un dialogo con postilla* (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), the dialogue between Foa and Marcenaro also published in the *Microstorie* series. The two are not historians, contrary to what Edward Muir states in the introduction to Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero ed., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. xxii n. 7, even though Foa, politician and trade unionist, is also the author of a book of history: Vittorio Foa, *La Gerusalemme rimandata: Domande di oggi agli Inglesi del primo Novecento* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1985). After having worked as a laborer for a time, Marcenaro is once again a trade unionist.

76 Compare Revel, 'L'histoire au ras du sol', p. xxxii, and 'Micro-analyse et reconstitution du social', p. 34-35.

77 Martin Jay has underlined this difficulty, citing Kracauer, in 'Of Plots, Witnesses, and Judgments', in: Friedlander ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation*, p. 103. Gwyn Prins has

17. Giovanni Levi, speaking of microhistory, concluded: 'this is a self-portrait, not a group portrait'.⁷⁸ I had proposed doing the same, but did not succeed. Both the boundaries of the group to which I belonged and my own boundaries of self seemed retrospectively shifting and uncertain. To my surprise I discovered how important to me were, unknowingly, books I had never read, events and persons I did not know had existed. If this is a self-portrait, then its model is Boccioni's paintings in which the street enters the house, the landscape into the face (see Illustrations 11.6 and 11.7), the exterior invades the interior, the 'I' is porous.

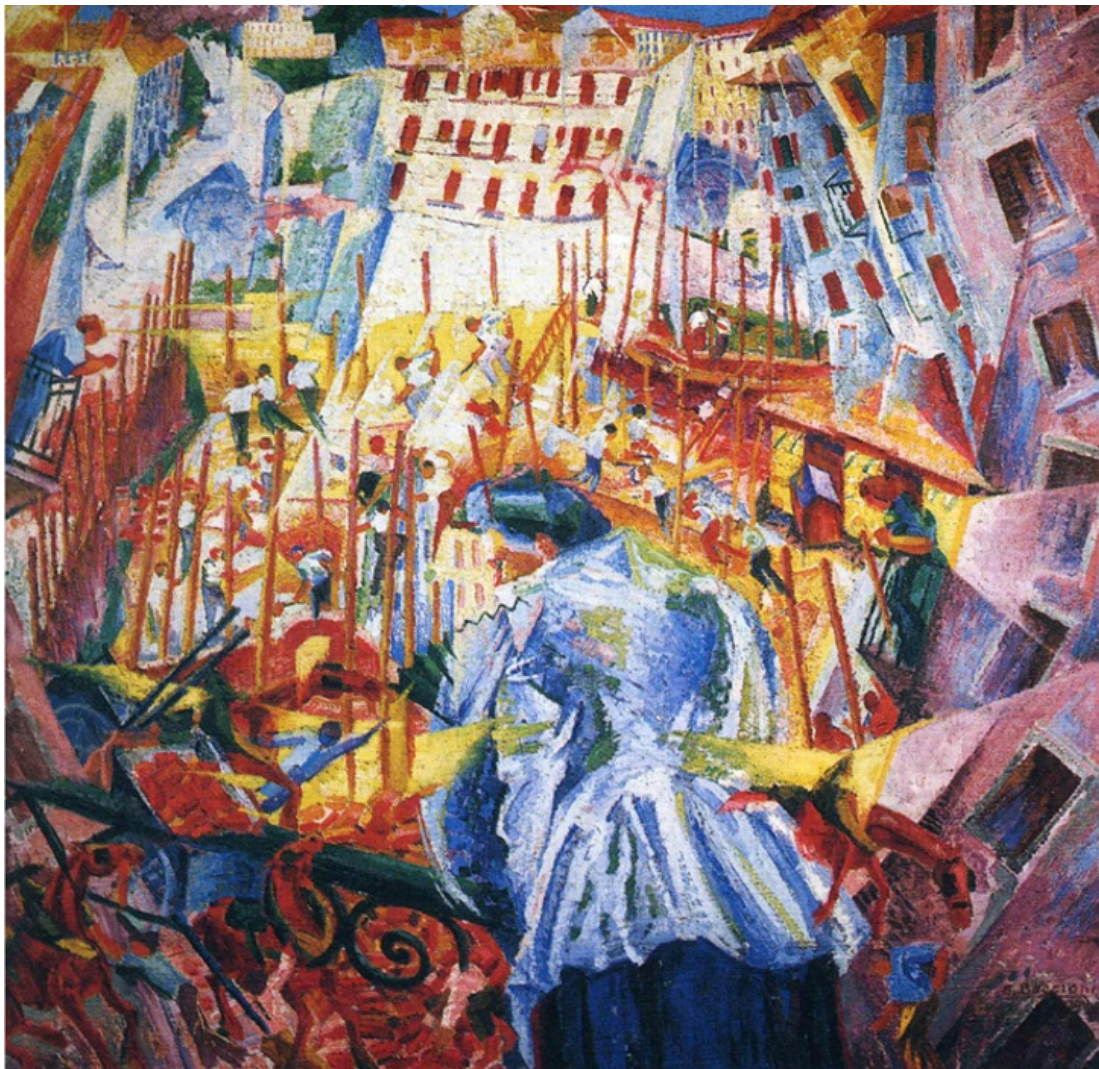


ILLUSTRATION 11.6 Umberto Boccioni, *The Street Enters into the House*, 1911.

called the 'small scale' a trap, observing, 'It is not there that the propulsive forces of historians' explanatory theories are to be found' (Gwyn Prins, 'Oral History', in: Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, p. 134).

78 Levi, 'On Microhistory', p. 111. It would be useful to have the versions of the other scholars involved in this enterprise, starting with Grendi (but see now 'Ripensare la microstoria?', in: *Quaderni storici* 29(1994)86, p. 539–549).



ILLUSTRATION 11.7 Umberto Boccioni, *Simultaneous Visions*, 1911.

SECTION 4

Biography and Life Writing



Biography in Academia and the Critical Frontier in Life Writing

Where Biography Shifts into Life Writing

Hans Renders

One characteristic that binds all biographers together is their similarity to serious journalists. This association becomes apparent in their striving to write readable stories, in their setting of high ethical standards regarding their interaction with research materials (a characteristic they share with scholars and scientists), and in their choice of sources. The latter include not only oral communications but also other research materials. Biographers and journalists alike are aware that knowledge about events comes to us in an institutionalized manner and through institutions in which people are not equally represented. This leads us to a complicated and delicate issue.

A biography, even about someone who lived in the remote past, always requires at least some understanding of the context of the biographee. Over time subsequent biographers ask different questions about the past and evaluate the answers they obtain depending on their norms and values. For instance, public opinion nowadays dictates that discrimination against coloured people, handicapped people, or women is wrong. As human beings historians and biographers may regret that discrimination exists. Until recently, however, the scholarly consensus was that in their role as historians and biographers they should, above all, try to understand how and why it occurs. Today, this assumption is quickly losing ground. Researchers in Life Writing centres at universities around the world, with backgrounds in Cultural Studies, Gender Studies and Comparative Literature, study individual lives on the basis of autobiographical documents with the ultimate aim to show that the authors of these autobiographical documents were victimized by their social context.

Yet it also means that the method of Life Writers (here to be understood as those who investigate Life Writing documents) may not be as universal as they suggest it is. For instance, one never reads studies or articles by Life Writers on autobiographical documents produced by Nazi soldiers on the Eastern Front or by incarcerated child-rapists or white farmers in South Africa. Representatives of these groups did (in for some groups: do) write letters and diaries. Moreover, they sometimes view themselves as victims of history. However, the agenda of

Life Writers seems to require that their research deals with women, coloured people, homosexuals, victims of the Holocaust, and so on – groups that according to our opinion were/are good, harmless or innocent.

A biography describes the evolution of a person as well as the context within which that person lived or at least the changing assessment of that context. The Dutch historian Ernst Kossmann once wrote that history especially focuses on change in the past.¹ The same holds true for the biographer who also focuses on change. This view implies that a biographer has to come to terms with the ephemeral nature of his work and with the certainty that sooner or later a subsequent biographer will write something partly or even totally different about her or his hero. Some biographers believe that they are working in the field of literature and therefore they think they write works that will stand the test of time forever. That is a misconception.² *War and Peace* continues to be a wonderful book, but most people would not enjoy reading a biography of Tolstoy that was written a century ago. Unlike a (successful) work of art a biography has an expiration date that is related to the topicality of the context. The skill of a biographer consists of reconstructing the life of a certain person while at the same time clearly representing the parameters of the age in which she or he works. Biographers of Stalin and Hemingway working today ask other questions about their subjects than, say, biographers who wrote about them forty years ago. They will incorporate the work of academic historians, even if they do not do so consciously, although it isn't necessary to state this explicitly.

There is another reason why the discussion about research materials is a complicated and delicate one. In classical biography the context contributes to a better understanding of the biographee just like the vicissitudes of a person's life may enhance our knowledge and understanding of the domain in which that individual was active. But in order to be able to understand the context, one needs to investigate more sources than the personal autobiographical sources only. In Life Writing the context is all too often reduced to a vague background against which various types of victimization are pictured.

Uniqueness Versus Representativeness

A crucial question in biographical research is the extent to which a biographee can be considered as unique versus representative for a group. Yet a biographer

1 Ernst Kossmann and Henk Wesseling, *Briefwisseling 1976–2003* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2009–2010).

2 Hans Renders, 'Het zelfbewustzijn van de biograaf. Waarom de biografie geen roman is' [The Self-Awareness of Biographers. Why a Biography is Not the Same as a Novel], in: *Zacht Lawijd, cultuur-historisch tijdschrift* 6(2007)2, p. 67–81.

constantly tries to refine his view of this relationship by testing it against the historical context. And it is precisely when the established hierarchy of research materials has been given a turn of ninety degrees that this testing gains an even more central importance. This means that the presupposed importance of autobiographical documents is checked and balanced by researching the context of a person to be able to interpret her or him in a better way. This prevents examining and declaring autobiographical documents as representative, with the ambition to rewrite history, or to describe autobiographical documents of one person as representative for a group.

Historians have always and routinely used autobiographical documents like letters and diaries as research materials of interest. Their use of autobiographical documents is illustrated, for instance, by a great number of books about victims of the Holocaust. These so-called ego-documents do not only change our view of history or deepen our understanding of it; they also introduce voices that previously have received little attention (although celebrities and political leaders also write letters and diaries). This is true for the very simple reason that large societal groups who never write articles for newspapers nor ever write books, are not united in organizations, and do not receive any attention from the media or historians, do write diaries. For this reason the letters and diaries of children of Nazis, homosexuals or other groups who once were the outcasts of history constitute an important addition to official research materials.³

Throughout their use of autobiographical documents, biographers tend to maintain at least some critical distance. Just like journalists, they take the stance of the outsider. In contrast, Life Writing scholars seem to use autobiographical documents without reservations as ready-made building blocks for the construction of a new perspective on the past. In the Life Writing universe dissatisfaction with injustice in the past motivates efforts to correct, through Life Writing, this historical injustice. This perspective produces a diverse stream of publications in which various therapeutic texts with a great capacity to inspire empathy are presented as a previously and undeservedly silenced truth. The British biographer Michael Holroyd (who wrote biographies of among others Lytton Strachey and Bernard Shaw) wrote on November 7 2009 in *The Guardian*: 'While Biography is merging with history in the general market place, in academe it is being reinvented as "life writing" and subsumed into sociology. The very word Biography strikes some academics as "elitist", as does its focus in the past on single remarkable or merely fashionably well-known people. Life

3 These materials for example in the Netherlands can be found in the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the International Institute of Social History, both situated in Amsterdam.

Writing has a different agenda and concentrates principally on people who belong to and represent categories or classes of people who have been victimized in the past. It offers retrospective justice.⁴ Even a cursory glance at calls for papers and publications by Life Writers indeed reveals an overwhelming attention for the deprived in history.⁵ These calls and publications focus on battered and raped women, 'patriographies' on fathers, 'Mothering Narratives', 'Jewish women and Comics', homosexuals, and people who suffer from climate change, from the traumas of racism, war and social exclusion, and so on. Holroyd therefore seems right by describing Life Writing as having a corrective agenda and thus attributing to it an ideological academic position. The desire to correct history by means of scholarship has its origin in a tradition that was originally founded by the Cultural Studies movement. This movement became popular in the eighties and nineties to wane as an independent tradition in the twenty-first century, many of its themes having become embedded in Life Writing. All disciplines have been drawn into this project. Strikingly enough, only historians have been carefully kept out of the door. In her book *Writing wounds* Kathryn Robson cited several female Life Writers who even wrote that it is reprehensible not to make yourself and your body the starting point in biographical research.⁶ Robson 'examines literary texts, texts not explicitly constrained by the demands of "truth-telling" or of healing, texts that do not simply recount the events of the past but foreground the very question of how the past can be narrated'.⁷ This ideological academic position stands in direct opposition to the scholarly imperative to analyze the world (including the past) as objectively as possible with the aim to understand it better and without assigning to the researcher the responsibility to correct injustice.

The biographical tradition, based on individuals like Hitler or Einstein, but also less famous persons, has thus been replaced by a research tradition that focuses on misunderstood individuals. These individuals represent social groups such as women, coloured people, transvestites, victims of the Holocaust and others.

Life Writers stress that the treasure rooms for research on lives are no longer those public archives in which treaties, published correspondence and other

4 Michael Holroyd, 'Changing Fashions in Biography', in: *The Guardian* November 7, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/nov/07/author-michael-holroyd-review>.

5 The International Auto/Biography Association distributes an intensive mailing list, <https://listserv.hawaii.edu/cgi-bin/wa?Ao=IABA-L>.

6 Kathryn Robson, *Writing wounds: the inscription of trauma in post-1968 French women's life-writers* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2004).

7 Robson, *Writing wounds*, p. 14.

traces of the elite are stored, but more private collections of family photographs, diaries, letters and therapeutic or judicial records. They conveniently forget that biographers never despised these research materials. Even without Life Writing theory the biographer examines diaries and memoirs for his research. Biography as an academic genre has destabilized the hierarchy of research materials; oral history is entitled to make a similar claim. Classical historians first consulted handbooks and then did supplementary archival research to fill in the historical picture. The biographer works the other way round: he first collects and studies material and research materials associated with an individual and then proceeds to investigate how unique or representative that individual was in the context of his time. The genre has also become to encompass a wider variety of individuals. It is not longer only heads of states and artists who get biographies. Ordinary people receive scholarly attention as well. Since Carlo Ginzburg has described the world-picture of a sixteenth-century Italian miller, interest in the so-called agency perspective has been on the raise.⁸ This form of microhistory often sheds a new or unprecedented light on contemporaneous changes in past attitudes towards faith, work et cetera. As such it may give rise to a re-writing of the history of a particular period, region or professional group. This is not to say that the perspective of an individual is the best perspective from which to study a period or a subject. It only provides the building blocks for the broader view of the biographer.

One advantage of biography over sociology and prosopography is that it may explain why one person becomes president and someone else does not, why one person goes bankrupt and the other devises a groundbreaking theory. This does not inevitably imply paying excessive attention for the elite of society, as Life Writers would so much like to make us believe.⁹ Personal events and major social changes in public life do affect people, but they do not have the same effect on everyone. It is a relic of Marxist scholarship to think that every individual human being responds in the same manner to large social structures and events.

Thanks to the emergence of scholarly standards in biography, the use of autobiographical documents has even become an accepted practice. There is nothing new about it: centres for autobiographical research are being established, such as the one at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

8 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980); Carlo Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It', chapter 11 in this volume.

9 G. Thomas Couser, 'Genre Matters: Form, Force, and Filiation', in: *Life Writing* 2(2005)2, p. 139–156.

Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker – who took the initiative for this centre – wrote an impressive book about the cultural and political upheavals in the last decade of the eighteenth century in the Netherlands, a period in which the foundations were laid for modern Dutch society.¹⁰ They approached this time of enlightenment and revolution from the perspective of a child, Otto van Eck. Based on his diary, they described the social reality of the era as well as the changes that took place in it. Already half a century ago, other inspiring studies were published based on diaries of people who were by no means part of the elite. These studies have provided insights into, among other topics, for example attitudes toward sexuality in the Victorian era. The impressive study *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870*, written by Walter E. Houghton and published in 1957, is an excellent case in point.¹¹ Similarly, the author Mirjam Pressler based her book about the family of Anne Frank published in 2009 on a non-elitist perspective. Using autobiographical documents she described the vicissitudes in the life of an ordinary middle-class German family in the thirties of the twentieth century. She thus described the daily life of the family of the girl who later became the world famous Anne Frank on the basis of small changes taking place around them.¹² Ego-documents related to marriage and death but also to the postal service and public life describe the life of this family. Obviously, studies like these did not require the ideology of Life Writing – because that is what Life Writing eventually is: an ideology.

It is clear, then, that diaries, letters and other personal primary research materials continue to be important for biographical research. For this reason alone it would be good to continue to argue for the incorporation of autobiographical documents within the domain of biography. Yet the researcher should always be the critical authority who transparently employs these research materials for his own purpose. In contrast, the Life Writer adopts the stance of a therapist. The subject is declared a sacred and infallible source. Every bit of information that the Life Writer obtains from the subject is considered exciting and worthwhile. The critical contextual analysis of research materials, so important for academic biography, is omitted. This cultural-historical confirmation of solidified victimization at its best is not only a fundamental watershed between biography and Life Writing, but also between

10 Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, *Child of the Enlightenment: Revolutionary Europe Reflected in a Boyhood Diary*, trans. Dianne Webb (Boston: Brill, 2009).

11 Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

12 Mirjam Pressler, *‘Grüße und Küsse an alle’: die Geschichte der Familie von Anne Frank* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2009).

scholarship and well-meant therapy. But what is the point of treating autobiographical documents as containing an absolute truth if the world becomes far more comprehensible through an active and critical interpretation of these self-representations? Individuals' attempts at self-representation vary depending on their culture, historical period and social group memberships. It is precisely by examining memoirs and diaries for changes that it is possible to establish broader insights. What forces created change and what motivated them? Which changes can be identified in a personal life? The hierarchy of research materials is of relevance here. Describing changes in a personal life requires the use of other research materials than describing changes in the historical context.

It is interesting to note that despite their differences, biographers and Life Writers have various elements in common. Just like biographers, Life Writers attach considerable value to the label under which a text is sent into the world. Someone who publishes memories as a victim of the persecution of Jews in a book is assumed to be doing so on the basis of his own experiences. When research brought to light that Binjamin Wilkomirski (pseudonym of Bruno Dössekker) made up the so-called memoirs he had published in his book *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, Life Writers also found this inexcusable.¹³ What if Dössekker honestly thought he had been in a concentration camp in Poland during World War II, however, even though this was objectively not the case? Even though the question is interesting to the biographer, simple historical investigation may reveal that reality differs from its description in the autobiographical document. The biographer fits reality and the perception of reality by his protagonist in a frame established by the biographer himself. The biographer maintains strict supervision over his research materials.

Biographies, novels, and travel books alike insist on their narrative forms. The question is whether Life Writers realize that their readers greatly benefit from the generic features of those narrative forms due to the existence of widely shared unconscious knowledge about genres. A reader has the confidence to interpret a newspaper article precisely because it is not written like a column or a pastiche. A biography with too many literary pretensions betrays the expectation that everything in the biography is actually true. This therefore is a plea for a reassessment of genres. One of the consequences of such a reassessment would be to abandon the goal of writing a biography like a novel

13 Binjamin Wilkomirski, *Fragments. Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996); Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York: Schocken Books, 2001).

(the genre that was once called *vie romancée*) and to emphatically consider autobiographical documents as research materials that are useful because the aim of every good biography is, among other things, to reconstruct how the biographee viewed the self. Biography should be regarded as a non-fiction genre, respecting the codes of reliability and transparency.

The Eclipse of Biography in Life Writing

Binne de Haan

Scholars and students who conduct research using personal written material like letters, diaries, memoirs and autobiographies, and life histories such as biographies, entries in biographical encyclopedias or obituaries, now inevitably stumble across the concept 'Life Writing'. Despite the increasing occurrence of this term in scholarly discussions, and the gradual expansion in recent years of centers and institutions in academia devoted to 'Life Writing', debates about its definition are far from being resolved.¹ It has nevertheless become clear that biography and the research devoted to it cannot be assigned to the domain of Life Writing. Institutional and theoretical developments have led to the gradual disappearance of biography as a subject of research for the academic field in which Life Writing texts are studied.

Growing out of several developments in the 1970s and 1980s, Life Writing emerged in the 1990s as a research field that gave a central place to the investigation of personal documents: autobiographies, memoirs, diaries, letters, travel accounts, and autobiographical novels. Even though Life Writing as a label for a specific research direction was first conceived in the English-speaking academic world, it has since been adopted by scholars worldwide. Those involved in Life Writing research are largely grounded in literary theory, Cultural Studies and research approaches that focus on identity, linguistics and memory, and on groups that have long been neglected by the scholarly canon and can now be examined from the perspectives of gender and postcolonial studies. Although personal documents possess an important value in Life Writing, the role of historiography in Life Writing is remarkably small. As a result, not only is the usefulness of these documents for historiography ignored, but there has been little to no investigation along these lines into

¹ Centre for Life-Writing Research, King's College London; Oxford Centre for Life-Writing (OCLW), Wolfson College, University of Oxford; Mainz Center for Life Writing, Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz; Centre for Life History & Life Writing Research, University of Sussex. A first collection intended for university education in Life Writing is Craig Howes and Miriam Fuchs ed., *Teaching life writing texts* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008). In Australia, the scholarly journal with the name *Life Writing* has been published since 2004.

biography, preeminently a genre much more deeply embedded in the scholarly debate on historiographic theory. The rise of Life Writing has yielded no independent, institutional-academic current of research on biography.

How is it, precisely, that biography, in an academic context, has been overtaken and pushed to the side by research carried out by Life Writing scholars? To find the sources of this development, two observations about the recent scholarly history of biography and Life Writing are pertinent. First, the various definitions of the terms Life Writing and biography in recent academic writing help to explain their shifts in meaning. In addition, as I will later discuss, the case of the scholarly journal *Biography*, based in the United States, shows that the domains of biography and Life Writing differ fundamentally, despite sharing common ground. As is now clear, research into biography is becoming detached from research into Life Writing because of a difference between the theoretical positions and practices of researchers whose approach is primarily theoretical and those whose approach is primarily historical. Those with a historical orientation attach great importance to critical responsibilities with respect to the historical truth that the works based on personal sources entail from a historiographic perspective; whereas Life Writing is directed above all to literary-theoretical research concerned with ethical questions associated with the construction of (personal and social) identity evident in personal sources. It is consequently not surprising that when attention is drawn to the possible socio-cultural significance of the information contained in these sources, these texts are often treated as vehicles of social emancipation.

Because the value and function of texts representing human lives are investigated in both biography and Life Writing, the research of both fields resembles each other. Nevertheless, a conspicuous difference remains, a distinction that especially concerns the status of the research material. In *Biography Studies*, biographies are examined, but from the standpoint of scholarly practices biographies are secondary sources, texts that have already processed more immediate primary sources. Biographers make use of the same source materials as Life Writing researchers (letters, diaries, memoirs, autobiographical texts), but they approach such evidence as ego-documents that are useful in historiography as one source among many; here, of course, the scholarly writer maintains his or her authority. In Life Writing research, the source is more often used as the determining starting point for research, without extensive historical contextualization and evaluation – essential matters to the approach of a biographer and a scholar of biographies. The Life Writing researcher addresses above all the ethical, literary-theoretical and socio-emancipatory analyses of Life Writing texts; whereas biographers and researchers into biography always seek information and insights that can be associated

with shared historical themes, and regard biography to be at its core a contribution to and consequence of an ongoing historiographic debate, directed toward the topical interpretation of the past.

The disconnect is all the more striking because the terms biography and 'Life Writing' have, once we turn to etymology, the same meaning and are even used synonymously. 'Biography', after all, is derived from a combination of the Greek words for 'life' (*bios*) and 'writing' (*graphein*). Both terms emerged in the seventeenth century.² At that time, there were no direct equivalents to 'Life Writing' in other languages, such as German and French. Via international lines of academic communication, the term recently gained entry into non-English language countries.

In the introduction to *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms* (2001), the volume's editor, British scholar Margaretta Jolly, warned the reader not to expect a definitive definition of Life Writing in this book.³ Such a definition, writes Jolly, would be undesirable and, moreover, impossible to establish. The sources studied cover a wide range of textual and non-textual forms: complementing long-established genres such as autobiography, biography, hagiography, memoirs, letters and diaries, in recent decades new forms of Life Writing have emerged, such as blogs and autobiographical comics. In addition, increased attention given to testimonies and travel reports demonstrate that the scope of Life Writing texts is open to even more inclusions.

In the first issue of the journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* (1978), the first part of a 'Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing' was published.⁴ 'Biography' is also used as a collective term for stories, testimonies or descriptions of lives, including autobiography, but this glossary indicates a transition from 'biography' as an umbrella term to 'Life Writing' as a generic term, including, among other forms, biography in its specific meaning of a history of an individual. The British biographer Hermione Lee accordingly defined Life Writing as what occurs 'when different ways of telling a life-story – memoir,

2 In the English-speaking world, the terms 'biography' and 'life-writing' emerged in the seventeenth century, when the words 'life' and 'writing' were first combined; see the Oxford English Dictionary, entry 'life-writing', its earliest recorded use dating to 1687. The word 'biography' also first appeared in Western European languages in the second half of the seventeenth century; see chapter 2 of this volume.

3 Margaretta Jolly, 'Editor's Note', in: Margaretta Jolly ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London [etc.]: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. ix–x.

4 Donald J. Winslow, 'Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing Part I', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 61–78. Part II appeared in *Biography* 1(1978)2, p. 61–85. Both parts were combined in: Donald J. Winslow, *Life-Writing: A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1980), with a Preface added.

autobiography, biography, diary, letters, autobiographical fiction – are being discussed together'.⁵ Other authors suggest that there is no convincing reason to consider Life Writing a broader concept than biography. According to Ian Donaldson, an Australian professor of English, the meaning of the concept Life Writing is, on the contrary, rather limited as compared to biography: 'through its stress on textuality – on the written word – life writing in fact diminishes the richer possibilities of the Greek compound'.⁶ The stress falls especially on the many forms that biography can take in addition to those that are written down, just as Nigel Hamilton, in his *Biography: A Brief History*, associates the history and significance of biography with a broad range of biographical expressions, from cave drawings to the printed book to the biopic and the blog.⁷

For those who understand biography primarily to be a text in which a life is interpreted, this broad interpretation of the term already goes too far. But it can go even further. On its website, the recently founded Oxford Centre for Life Writing (OCLW) states that 'Life Writing involves, and goes beyond, biography. It encompasses everything from the complete life to the day-in-the-life, from the fictional to the factual. It embraces the lives of objects and institutions as well as the lives of individuals, families and groups.'⁸ What is striking here is the position that life writing can also be 'fictional', and can even address itself to the inanimate (objects) and the abstract (institutions). In this way, the description casts aside the one element found in other definitions that have united the various forms of Life Writing: the notion they are representations of the life of a *specific person who had actually existed*, however much those representations might differ. 'Biography' is also increasingly used in connection with non-living things: a study of a city, a school or a river is called a 'biography', probably more than anything else in order to increase sales. There might be a parallel between biographies (of people) and such studies in terms of concepts or content.⁹ Yet it seems only reasonable to limit the subject matter of Life Writing and biography to the lives of human beings.

5 Hermione Lee, *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005), p. 100.

6 Ian Donaldson, 'Matters of Life and Death: The Return of Biography', in: *Australian Book Review* no. 286, November 2006, p. 23–29.

7 Nigel Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2007).

8 URL: <http://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/clusters/life-writing/about>, accessed May 10, 2012.

9 Donaldson, 'Matters of Life and Death', also mentions the genre of the 'object biography', which, however, expressly studies the relationship between the object, which is central, and the people who used it.

In 2005, Lee also made clear a specific meaning of Life Writing – as a genre that deliberately blurs the distinction between biography and autobiography.¹⁰ Taking over her definition, Max Saunders, a professor of English, analyzed how from 1870 on, fiction writers have increasingly incorporated Life Writing genres such as biography, autobiography, memoirs and diaries into their works. One of his main assertions is that the distinction among these Life Writing genres became vague during the twentieth century.¹¹ Certainly works have been published that combine biographical interpretations with autobiographical or fictional passages, but that does not mean that the value of biographical research *per se* has been resolved or eliminated as a concern. Passages that take up questions of biographical interpretation can readily be found in books such as Richard Holmes's *Footsteps* (1985) and Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), for example, even though they are intertwined with autobiographical travel writing in the former and fiction in the latter. These writers' interpretations of, among others, Robert Louis Stevenson, Gérard de Nerval and Gustave Flaubert can be placed next to the interpretations put forth in biographies of these figures.

The danger of failing to recognize the historiographic practices in Life Writing is nevertheless obvious. Life Writing can also be considered a variant of Creative Writing, well established as an academic phenomenon in Great Britain and the United States, though not as well known elsewhere. The stress falls clearly on the term's second word, 'writing', which can be studied and taught at universities as a creative endeavor: there was even a book published recently entitled *Life Writing*, which consisted largely of examples and writing exercises.¹² Although there are considerations of examples drawn from Life Writing texts, and biographers are interviewed so as to grant attention to the writing of biographies, the book's aim is above all to produce Life Writing, not to study it. It is as if the historian were being taught to produce a public archive rather than to explore the possible critical uses of existing archives and sources.

10 Lee, *Body Parts*, p. 100.

11 Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 4.

12 Sara Haslem and Derek Neale, *Life Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). Their definition of Life-Writing is: 'an umbrella term for biography and autobiography, which also covers popular sub-genres – like travel writing, for example' (p. 1). The authors of this book had previously written a textbook for Creative Writing: Sara Haslem and Derek Neale, *Writing Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) and had made contributions to Linda Anderson ed., *Creative Writing: a workbook with readings* (London: Routledge/Open University, 2006).

Historians are required to pretend that their personalities have been of little or no importance in the construction of their interpretations of the past. In Life Writing, there is a tradition that insists that the personality of the researcher will play an important role in shaping the text that emerges from research.¹³ A biography is, then, more properly assumed to be a personal quest of the biographer than to be academically rooted research.¹⁴ The rise of the term ‘auto/biography’, closely associated with the rise of Life Writing, illustrates this emphasis on the personal. It served not only to designate a field of research in which autobiography and biography were studied in close association with one another, but also to call attention to the biographer’s autobiographical expression: every biography, it is claimed, is in fact a concealed *autobiography*. This ‘observation’ is a non-issue for scholars of history and of society: an author cannot escape from the social and cultural fabric of his own life, and, moreover, this idea risks leading to the abandonment of the ambition to contribute to a shared field of discussion in which every author and researcher is involved. That the humanities is not a field of exact and therefore completely objective science is generally recognized. Neither is historiography an exact science, nor the writing of biographies; but at the same time historical scholarship is not without its responsibilities, and it cannot expand into a merely subjective carousel of stories, in which it makes no difference which story you choose, because every story represents some form of personal, autobiographical truth. Historical research recognizes as a fundamental requirement the ambition to achieve a correct and what could be called ‘intersubjective’ reconstruction of the historical past, based on consensus. It seems, in fact, that the term ‘auto/biography’ is being used less and less, which can be seen as yet another indication of the gulf that has come to exist between research on biography and research on autobiography and/or Life Writing.

Another problem of definition is that Life Writing has increasingly blurred the boundary between research and its source material. In this way, Life Writing encourages a reconciliation of the opposition that has existed between academic writing (theory) and personal forms of writing (practice; here Life Writing).¹⁵ As a consequence, the researcher himself now occupies a

13 For example Marlene Kadar ed., *Essays in Life Writing – From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); see chapter 14 of this volume.

14 Anna K. Kuhn, “The “Failure” of Biography and the Triumph of Women’s Writing: Bettina von Arnim’s *Die Gûnderode* and Christa Wolf’s *The Quest for Christa T.*”, in: Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom ed., *Revealing Lives. Autobiography, Biography, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 13.

15 Meg Jensen, ‘Introduction. Do You Speak Life Narrative?’, in: Meg Jensen and Jane Jordan ed., *Life Writing. The Spirit of the Age and the State of the Art* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), p. xxix.

foregrounded position in texts that are intended to be scholarly, allowing for the possibility that a scholarly article or book can itself be regarded as a form of Life Writing. The language of scholarship entails responsibilities not mandated by the idiom in which one writes about personal experiences. Can these two languages be united in a text in any way other than as juxtaposed modes in alternating passages? We come up against the problem that the ethos of historical research assumes, among other things, that the historian pursues the uncovering of a historical truth, however problematic that might be.

The literary scholars Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, in their Life Writing handbook *Reading Autobiography* first define 'life writing' as a general term for writing that takes a life, one's own or another's, as its subject. Such writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or explicitly self-referential and therefore autobiographical.¹⁶ One page later, they assert, however, that while Life Writing and biography are both 'modes of narrating a life, they are not interchangeable'.¹⁷ They argue that in biography 'scholars of other people's lives document and interpret those lives from a point of view external to the subject', whereas in Life Writing, subjects write, for the most part, about their own lives, taking at once externalized and internal points of view. In addition, they observe that most biographers incorporate multiple forms of evidence, whereas 'personal memories are the primary archival source' for 'life narrators'. Life narrators base their stories on individual 'memory', 'a subjective form of evidence [...] asserted on the subject's authority'.¹⁸ A biographer writes in the third person. A Life Writer writes in the first person. Smith and Watson conclude, then, that 'these kinds of life writing are fundamentally different'.¹⁹

It is legitimate to question whether biography ought still to be considered a variety of Life Writing. Narratives of mourning, illness, and addiction, as well as stories of disability and sexual orientation and of migration and exile – all are valued in Life Writing as being autobiographical expressions of identity. These narratives can also be researched effectively from a historical perspective. In *Reading Autobiography*, one finds a discussion, for example, of 'gastrography', the study of personalized recipe books valued for their transmission of evidence of personal subjectivity; a historian would investigate whether the diet and personal use of food could teach us something about the history of food, its cultural and collective meaning, its functioning and societal impact. In short, historians choose to examine the historical context of Life Writing

16 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, second ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 4.

17 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 5.

18 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 7.

19 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 6.

texts in order to be able to value and interpret personal sources in a historiographically based way. Life Writing researchers consider the ethical, social and political dimension of Life Writing texts, but in their treatment of these aspects, the language they use is a historical.

Biographers and historians carry out their work according to norms that require them to keep their own personalities out of the picture and present their research as new contributions to an ongoing, ever-expanding public field of knowledge and debate. Researchers in Life Writing are more attentive to the communication strategies that can be distinguished in autobiographical texts, alert to their use as elements in a process that conveys a 'subjective truth'; they themselves often adopt a personal, informal style.²⁰ Biographers and scholars of biography concern themselves with public readings of lives and their contexts, in which transparent interpretations of sources and consideration of their relevance to ongoing debates are essential. A biography can be considered to be an intermediary among the various public and scholarly debates that can be associated with a single life, in which there exists a dynamic relationship between social and historical debate and the agenda and methods of scholarly research.

Even if definitive definitions do not exist for either term, it is clear that the terms are drifting apart and especially that the term Life Writing is not sufficient to the understanding of biography. Life Writing is often and justifiably considered to be closely associated with the rise of feminist and postcolonial scholarship, in which groups from the past that had been neglected by academia (so-called subaltern cultures) were given a voice by means of sources that are personal and 'new', in the sense that they had been overlooked and had stood outside the traditional canon. These approaches have proven to be very valuable, but what seems all too often forgotten is that in historiography and biography, prior to and simultaneously with the emergence of these new academic approaches, more structural attention was devoted to these groups and individuals in combination with the new themes and issues raised by their role in the past. In this way, a past was revealed that was not directly associated with the established political culture, the administrative elite or what has long been called 'public affairs'. New approaches in the French *Annales* school addressed 'personal history', and microhistorians attempted to achieve new

20 An illustration is Marijke Huisman, Anneke Ribberink, Monica Soeting and Alfred Hornung ed., *Life Writing Matters in Europe* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012). Although differing in tone from Anglophone Life Writing publications because it is more historically rooted, this volume focuses on the autobiographical construction of identity rather than on biographical perspectives regarding the past.

insights about various aspects of the past by means of new and experimental approaches to sources.²¹ In addition, biographers had always taken personal sources into consideration in their research.

A serious problem that Life Writing poses for the historian is the great value attached to personal subjectivity, in which strategies of critical control, the sovereignty and independence of the researcher and the maintenance of the awareness of a shared and publicly debated past all disappear. Subjectivity takes on such momentous importance for Life Writing in part because its scholars devote so much attention to literary-theoretical analysis of the construction of an autobiographical identity and 'self' in Life Writing texts. That emphasis takes priority over source criticism as practiced by historians. This is what Nigel Hamilton writes in a footnote: 'Master programs in life writing are offered at numerous universities, though all too seldom within the framework of historical study of biography. Many teachers of life writing still admit, in fact, that they do not read or view biographies, nor are they interested in history or biography per se, beyond the narrow linguistic/literary study of self-representation as a branch of English-literature studies'.²²

In Life Writing research, the risk exists that various sorts of 'biographical texts' become used to address the issue of the graduated scale that separates biographies and 'biographical novels', and in that way to relativize the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. It is at the same time also true that Life Writing researchers have become aware, especially as a result of the discovery of autobiographical stories which are apparently largely or entirely invented, that this distinction is in fact worth holding on to.²³

It is in a way self-evident, but it is also striking that Life Writing researchers base the distinction between Life Writing texts and novels precisely on the fact that Life Writing texts refer to a reality outside the text, a 'historical world outside the narrative'.²⁴ However, autobiography researchers have concentrated especially on the 'rhetorical acts' in Life Writing texts, and have pushed the

21 Susanna Fellman and Marjatta Rahikainen ed., *Historical Knowledge. In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012); specifically on microhistory in this volume: Giovanni Levi, 'Microhistory and the Recovery of Complexity', p. 121–132.

22 Hamilton, *Biography: A Brief History*, p. 313.

23 In G. Thomas Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), the author discusses the historical record Life Writing has to deal with. In another essay he stated that 'the difference between fiction and nonfiction still matters in all kinds of ways': G. Thomas Couser, 'Genre Matters: Form, Force, and Filiation', in: *Life Writing* 2(2005)2, p. 139–156.

24 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 12.

historical aspect of these texts into the background. Smith and Watson point to the narrative aspect of historiography and to the absence of the historian as personality in the research that he or she presents.²⁵ That Life Writing texts can very effectively be used as sources for historical analyses and interpretations is accordingly taken to be an underestimation of the value of autobiographical texts.

Texts considered to be Life Writing are often interpreted as vehicles for emancipation: in diaries, personal notes, letters and self-written life stories, those who were not represented in the official ranks of academia, publishing and journalism could nevertheless articulate their version of history. The enrichment and re-evaluation of the past is in itself a good thing: the point is only that it is precisely the historiographic context of Life Writing texts that is excluded from consideration. In general, in Life Writing the sense of a shared debate about the past has been abandoned too much. Many personal effects and texts can, of course, be interesting sources for historical interpretations, as historians and biographers have shown time and again. It may be that the choice to contribute to a shared and to a certain extent selective view of history is therefore also ideologically charged, but from a scholarly perspective the participation in the search for a shared past produces greater returns. There is the crucial issue of common ground, with shared concepts and a shared disciplinary vocabulary. Because there is no substantive common denominator in Life Writing, the field becomes home for the most diverse subjects, with which historians can hardly identify. Historians, and with them biography scholars, seem to participate in different fields of scholarly activity than Life Writing researchers, and the groups seem to speak different languages.

One of the main causes for the eclipse of biography in Life Writing, then, is a general difference in background and practice by scholars in Life Writing and scholars in Biography Studies. In general, Life Writing scholars are grounded in feminist, poststructuralist, postcolonial, and narrative-studies methodologies. George Simson, who founded the scholarly journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* and established the institutional research on biography conducted at the University of Hawaii, wrote that the practitioners of Life Writing can be divided into 'common sense' and 'special sense' authors.²⁶ Simson does not make a general value judgment about these two categories of authors, but he touches on an important point: for the 'special sense' category

25 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 13–14.

26 George Simson, [Review of *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography*, by Michael Holroyd], in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 26(2003)1, p. 147–151.

of authors, theory is central, while for 'common sense' authors, reflection on the subject of investigation in more general terms is the key concern, perhaps because they are more focused on the outcomes of their research, and so theory is subsidiary to improving, for example, historical knowledge, rather than being an aim in itself.

The 'critical theory' that emerged in the 1970s in literature departments and beyond has indeed exerted a significant impact on the critical reflection about almost all Life Writing genres – except, notably, biography. This effect is currently reinforced in Life Writing through the dominance in the field of literature scholars who have been educated in a specific tradition, differing from the background of historians, for example. Simson, whose scholarship is rooted in philosophy, psychology, history and literature, noted in another publication some weaknesses in a journal that could be regarded as a typical Life Writing specimen: among them was its 'special priestly vocabulary'.²⁷ Strikingly, he also criticized its 'incomprehension of the idea of fact (not an issue in imaginative literature, but certainly one in biography)' and its 'solipsism'. Life Writing scholars sometimes still seem to struggle with these vulnerabilities.

Characteristic in this respect, too, are editorial remarks made in the first issue of the scholarly journal *Life Writing* in 2004, suggesting that it would soon be possible to distinguish a new field called 'metabiography', and perhaps to witness the establishment of a distinct scholarly discipline called 'Autobiography Studies'.²⁸ The journal's attention is in any case directed at 'publishing all forms of analytical and reflective writing that take "self" or "selves" as their focus. This includes philosophy, history, anthropology, literature, sociology, cultural studies, and any other intellectual enquiry that wishes to consider the role of narrative and the formulation of identity.' The watershed between biography and Life Writing becomes clear at this point: to be sure, a biography can address its subject's self-perception, but it should primarily focus on the reconstruction and interpretation of the social and historical significance of its subject's life, rather than analyzing, after the fashion of Life Writing, its subject's strategies of identity formulation.

27 Simson commented on the journal *a/b Auto/biography Studies*, 'mostly edited by members of the Life Writing Section of the MLA': George Simson, *Biography and the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i, 1976–1999* (N.p.: n.p., 2010), rev. ed. of George Simson, 'Biography and the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawaii, 1976–1999', in: *Biography and Source Studies* 5, ed. Frederick R. Karl (New York: AMS, 2000), p. 61–96.

28 Mary Besemeres and Maureen Perkins, 'Editorial', in: *Life Writing* 1(2004)1, p. vii–xii.

Life Writing has evolved into a discipline concerned with the themes of (collective) identity, self, memory, body, trauma and related topics, expressed via articles, monographs, conferences and courses of a wide and rather confusing variety. In a teaching handbook on Life Writing, originating from the biographical research school at Hawaii, the authors state that 'life writing is being taught at over forty postsecondary institutions'.²⁹ The volume indeed provides an impressive and innovative overview of current Life Writing scholarship. The roots of the current teaching of Life Writing are traced to English department courses on biography. But given that biographies are concerned with 'prominent people', biography has been rendered irrelevant. 'The venerable notions that history is the collected biographies of admirable or notorious individuals and that the way to understand shared social experience is by studying a "representative" prominent life are philosophically and historically problematic.'³⁰ Some texts in their handbook indeed suggest that 'the study of biography' could be 'a far more nuanced and wide-ranging activity'. But the notion that biographies and other Life Writing texts (e.g., ego-documents) can make useful contributions to historical understanding plays only a marginal role in the volume. Furthermore, the remarks on biography as a now problematic genre overlook scholarship on biography in which, indeed, the canonical, elitist and representative features of biography are being discussed. The suggestion is that Life Writing research has greatly updated and improved the critical analysis of biographical genres, as compared to the research of previous decades, especially what had been the norm around 1980. This may be so, but it seems that one genre has been cast aside: biography, in the sense of a book about the life of one person, written by another person who has investigated this life. At the same time, biography in public and academic publishing has continued to flourish as a widespread form of publication.

A telling illustration of the drifting apart of the fields of Biography and Life Writing can be found in the development of the American academic journal *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, founded in 1978. In a history of the journal written by its first editor-in-chief, the already mentioned George Simson (emeritus professor of English, director emeritus of the Center for Biographical Research at Hawaii, and editor-in-chief for sixteen years) shows that its scope was initially defined by the genre or method of biography: the study of an individual life by an external biographer.³¹ Yet its current contents reveals that *Biography* now reflects the hybrid and heterogeneous field of Life

29 Howes and Fuchs ed., *Teaching life writing texts*, p. 5.

30 Howes and Fuchs ed., *Teaching life writing texts*, p. 3.

31 Simson, *Biography and the Center for Biographical Research*, p. 4 and 10.

Writing scholarship, in which the genre of biography plays a minor role. Nevertheless, current Life Writing research paradoxically stems, at least partly, from efforts in the 1970s and 1980s to establish a useful theoretical research framework for biography. The journal *Biography* illustrates this development.

From the first issue, in 1978, the colophon of *Biography* has included the following lines: '*Biography* is a forum for all well-considered biographical scholarship. *Biography*'s aim is to stimulate the critical judgment of life-writing by presenting new information, sharper definitions, fresh interpretations, and well-argued evaluations.' Note the use of the term 'life-writing'. Clearly however, the current all-encompassing and scholarly meaning of 'Life Writing' had yet to develop. The introductory programmatic article 'Biography: A Manifesto', by the renowned biographer and influential critic of biography Leon Edel, suggested that biography would be the central theme of the journal.³² Edel's contribution fit the debates about literary biography that were particularly lively at that time. The essays in the first volumes of *Biography*, indeed, all dealt with biography. More specifically, in the first year of publication, articles about difficulties and themes in the biographical study of specific well-known individuals (Voltaire, Oliver Cromwell and James Thurber) alternated with theoretical and methodological articles on the genre of biography and with contributions that dealt with a single biography in depth. The journal's content in the first year is significant in this respect.³³ Also, in the following volumes, great pains were taken to arrive at an academic debating forum with biography as its central subject. Two authors who would later publish scholarly monographs on the poetics of biography were featured in the same issue of *Biography*.³⁴

32 Leon Edel, 'Biography: A Manifesto', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 1–3. Edel published a revised version of this manifesto in *Writing Lives: Principia Biographica* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), p. 13–17.

33 A. Owen Aldridge, 'Problems in Writing the Life of Voltaire: Plural Methods and Conflicting Evidence', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 5–22; Roger Howell Jr., 'Cromwell's Personality: The Problems and Promises of a Psychohistorical Approach', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 41–60; Frances Bigda-Peyton and Gary Alan Fine, 'The Hephaestus Complex: Power Themes in the Life of James Thurber', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)2, p. 37–61; Peter Nagourney, 'The Basic Assumptions of Literary Biography', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)2, p. 86–104; Jeanne W. Halpern, 'Biographical Images: Effects of Formal Features On the Way We See a Life', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)4, p. 1–14. Carl E. Rollyson Jr., 'Marilyn: Mailer's Novel Biography', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)4, p. 49–67.

34 William H. Epstein, 'Recognizing the Life-Text: Towards a Poetics of Biography', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 6(1983)4, p. 283–306; Ira Bruce Nadel, 'Biography

From the outset *Biography* aspired to publish and stimulate interdisciplinary research, as becomes clear in the account of Simson, the subtitle of the journal ('*An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*') and the paratexts of the publication. The interdisciplinary nature was implicitly reflected in the description of the Working Editorial Committee that was included in the colophon in the first twenty-two volumes. The colophon of the first issue included the names of representatives from the disciplines of history, social science and psychology, in addition to a researcher in charge of public figures. In the years to come, the number of named fields and their representatives would steadily increase. In 1982, the number of disciplines and themes mentioned had risen to ten. By 1994, twenty were listed, among them art, East Asia, economics, law, music and religion. This development reflects the consciousness that biography, while starting from assumptions belonging to history and the social sciences, can, due to its diversity, encompass and explore divergent subjects and fields of knowledge.

The advent in the 1990s of Life Writing as a specific school of research coincided with organizational and technical improvements in the journal and with personnel changes. *Biography* has had only four people who have served as editor-in-chief, two of them spanning together the whole period of its existence. Founding editor Simson remained in charge until the spring of 1994. He was succeeded by Craig Howes, who would later share this task with two other editors. The transition from the Simson era to the Howes era coincided, after some delay, with a thematic change.³⁵ Having been dominant for two decades, the study of biography faded into the background and Life Writing came to the foreground. The cause of this transition seems to be twofold. On the one hand, the journal responded to changes in the broad field of the study of texts related to lives, specifically the interest that 'groups of American, French, and British scholars' had begun to show in autobiography and memoir, 'without being much interested in biography in its usual sense at all'; the editors noted, however, that they did not intend 'to downplay or eliminate a focus on Biography the narrower, one person tells the life of another sense'.³⁶ Moreover,

and Four Master Tropes', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 6(1983)4, p. 307–315. The books are: William H. Epstein, *Recognizing Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987); Ira Bruce Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (London, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1984).

35 Howes explains that there was a three-year backlog of articles that had already been accepted for publication when he took over the editorship in 1994. Craig Howes, e-mail message to author, September 6, 2011.

36 Craig Howes, e-mail message to author, September 6, 2011.

one witnessed an increasing absence of historical scholars in this field.³⁷ One symptom of the shift away from biography is that the field increasingly came to be called 'Auto/biography' studies or 'Life Writing'. The abandonment of the term 'Biography' in order to define a wider research field, though this use of the term was rarely applied in academia, halted the slow but steady rise of the study of biography in the 1990s. In this regard *Biography* illustrates the transformation from research, which is oriented towards biography, to the emergence of Life Writing research, which ultimately eclipsed biography. On the other hand, the transition reflected the journal's own changes in its editorial agenda. In an ironic twist of fate, *Biography* no longer focused on biography.

The thematic transformation of *Biography* over the last three decades can be examined by scrutinizing articles and book reviews published in the journal throughout this period. Certain trends come to the fore. One development is that whereas the number of contributions on biography was high and remained stable over the journal's first fifteen years, this number declined in the late 1990s. By the second half of the 1990s the number of contributions on autobiography had managed to catch up with the number of contributions on biography. At the same time, however, contributions about autobiography were now outnumbered by essays on other types of Life Writing. These included articles that moved away from the traditional genres of biography and autobiography and adopted themes from Cultural Studies, in which historiographic methods and methods from literary history played a marginal role at best. From 1998 onward, articles and reviews alike were less clearly classifiable as focusing on biography, autobiography, or another specific Life Writing genre.³⁸ Probably the perception of 'biography' and 'autobiography' as old-fashioned and infected concepts among Life Writing-scholars, and the perceived ineffectiveness of these concepts when used in scholarly texts, were important reasons for the rise of definitions like auto/biography, Life Narrative and Life Writing.

Particularly interesting are the trends in book reviews, which generally offer an important indicator of the programmatic direction of a journal. In the first twenty years of *Biography*, book reviews concerned biographies and biography-related studies. The first volumes of *Biography* contained few reviews of autobiographies, autobiographical studies and 'other' books, books not directly related to biography and autobiography. From the 1990s onward,

37 Comment of Craig Howes at the 7th Biennial Conference of the International Auto/Biography Association, Brighton, United Kingdom, June 28–July 2, 2010.

38 E.g., Sandra J. Peacock, 'Biography and Autobiography in Eliza Butler's *Sheridan, A Ghost Story*', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 21(1998)4, p. 445–462.

however, reviews of 'other' books drastically increased. These books being reviewed dealt with oral history, gender, memoirs, Holocaust testimonials, disability/trauma, postcolonial Studies and the American Civil War. Nevertheless, a further analysis of the books reviewed showed a positive trend in the attention given to theoretical books on biography. This could be explained by an increase in the appearance of this type of publication, but nonetheless shows that *Biography*, under the influence of its prior scholarly history, was attempting to maintain the tradition of biography. But, taken as a whole, biography continues to play a subordinate role: in regular articles, the share of biography has declined substantially since 1997, when the journal deliberately changed direction. Of the total of 67 articles in the period 2006–2011, 20 articles dealt with biography (approximately 30 percent).³⁹

Regular reviews of biographies disappeared in the 1990s. Yet in the last two decades, reviews of biographies have not been totally absent from *Biography*. The section 'Reviewed Elsewhere', which has appeared from 1987 onward, contains references to and quotes from reviews in scientific journals and authoritative newspapers, searchable under the name of the biographical subject. The resulting bibliography of reviews is a potential goldmine for researchers on biography: it allows them to trace reviews of biographies with greater speed and efficiency, and also gives them the opportunity to analyze these reviews statistically. It makes up partly for the decrease in the number of regular reviews of biographies in *Biography*, but also seems more and more at odds with the rest of the journal's content.⁴⁰

39 This has to do, then, with articles that have a strong biographical component: the word biography or biographical appears in it several times, or the article is an instance of biographical research. In such cases, the interpretation was more often generous than strict. Articles by autobiographers or by memoir writers or diarists that contain biographical elements have not been assigned to the area of research on biography because they are, in the first place, concerned with an interpretation of the autobiographical texts and not with a biographical interpretation of the person who is the primary subject.

40 Another striking example of the reduced role of biography is provided by the topics and titles of the special issues of the journal, which appear once a year: 2000: Biopic; 2001: Autobiography and Changing Identities; 2002: Autobiography & Geography; 2003: Online Lives; 2004: Bodies of Evidence and the Intricate Machines of Untruth; 2005: Inhabiting Multiple Worlds: Auto/Biography in an (Anti-)Global Age; 2006: Keaton's Leap: Self-Projection and Autobiography in Film; 2007: Life Writing and Science Fiction; 2008 (1): Self-Regarding Art; 2008 (3): Something Other than Autobiography: Collaborative Life-Narratives in the Americas; 2009: Shifting Ground: Translating Lives and Life Writing in Hawaii; 2010: Autobiographical Discourse in the Theaters of Politics; 2011 (1): Life Writing as Intimate Publics; 2011 (3): Performing Queer Lives.

Scholars who engaged in biography kept (or returned to) writing monographs (drop by drop), contributing to edited volumes and publishing in disciplinary-bound periodicals as well as in popular media. The gap left by *Biography* was partially filled by the *Journal of Historical Biography*, founded in 2007.⁴¹ This periodical, however, appears to be exclusively oriented toward biography as a form of history – though biography is more than solely a branch of historiography. It is probably time for a new journal, one that would take up the responsibility for stimulating research on biography in an interdisciplinary mode. Suggested title: *Biography Studies*.

Are there perhaps other new terms that could improve and complement the understanding of the term 'biography', to accompany this much troubled word into a new age? The term 'Life Narrative', although it has a literary-studies connotation, seems better suited than 'Life Writing' to include biography, but this term has been associated with self-referential and autobiographical texts.⁴² 'Life History' also seems to be well suited to signify both the biographical and the historical dimensions, but the term has been assigned a specific meaning and usage in sociological and anthropological methodology.⁴³

The relationship between biography and history is complex, but in establishing biography more broadly as an object of academic research, historians could play a leading role. In historiography of the last decades of the twentieth century, the focus on non-official archives and personal sources has increased considerably and canonical history has been debunked. Microhistory and other schools of historical research investigating 'alternative' themes have emerged. Modern critical biography not only deals with the famous and has been accepted as a sound and valuable form of historiography. The aim is to improve our understanding of the past from a specific personal *agency* perspective.⁴⁴

41 The *Journal of Historical Biography* is published by the University College of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, BC, Canada. The contents of the journal are accessible only via the internet: accessed March 28, 2011, <http://www.ufv.ca/jhb/>.

42 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 4.

43 The Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research at the University of Sussex, however, in its programmatic statement, comes close to a biographical-historical approach: 'Life history and life writing research uses life story – whether in the form of oral history, personal narrative, autobiography or biography – as a primary source for the study of history and culture. Life stories capture the relation between the individual and society, the local and the national, the past and present and the public and private experience.' (<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/clhlwr/index>, accessed May 10, 2012).

44 Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig ed., *Biography between Structure and Agency. Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008).

Life Writing researchers assert, in the first instance, that biography belongs to the field of Life Writing research, by identifying biography as one of genres studied in Life Writing (which is, then, claimed to be a sufficiently ‘inclusive’ term), but in practice, biography, as a demonstrably historical genre, does not fit there. The expansion of Life Writing perhaps also raises questions about the functioning of the boundaries between hitherto distinct disciplines in the humanities. According to Jolly, a specialist in ‘Life History’, Life Writing is investigated in literary criticism, anthropology, sociology, psychology, history, theology, cultural studies, and even the biological sciences.⁴⁵ The question is whether Life Writing will be established as an autonomous scholarly field, perhaps exemplifying the interdisciplinary nature of current and future scholarly infrastructures. Recent developments in publications in *Biography* suggest that literary-studies approaches in Life Writing scholarship are starting to give way to social-science orientations (sociology, psychology, ethnography, and history of science). Maybe the next step will take us towards an increasing awareness of the historiographic value of Life Writing texts.

One can conclude, however, that over the past four decades Life Writing has become a research specialization in which approaches from the perspective of literary and cultural theory – with their focus on subjective identity politics, understood in literary terms, and the abandonment of canonical and ‘objective’ discourses – have gained a prominent position at the expense of historiographic and journalistic traditions in biographical Life Writing genres. Research on biography will have to be careful not to fall prey to Life Writing perspectives in interpreting biographies. Smith and Watson signal, in the last two decades, the rise of ‘new biography’, innovative forms of biographical writings in which authors make critical, autobiographical and fictional interventions.⁴⁶ The arrival of ‘new biography’ has already been – often – announced and has itself become a worthy subject of research.⁴⁷ Smith and Watson see in these texts, however, a harmonization of biography and Life Writing. ‘As much as we have argued for distinguishing life writing and biography, contemporary practices increasingly blend them into a hybrid, suggesting that life narrative indeed is a moving target and an ever-changing practice without absolute rules.’ That sounds sympathetic and pleasant, but the premises of the biographical and historical search for truth entail precisely that there is a crucial watershed separating biography from Life Writing.

45 Jolly, ‘Editor’s Note’, p. ix–x.

46 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 8–9.

47 Laura Marcus, ‘The Newness of the “New Biography”’, in: Peter France and William St. Clair ed., *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford/New York: The British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 193–218.

Coming to Terms

Life Writing – from Genre to Critical Practice

Marlene Kadar

There are at least three ways to view Life Writing, each of which includes an attempt to define or redefine what exactly Life Writing is. Let me go over the two that have been and still are used in the scholarship to date, and then let me tell you about the one ‘She’ made me do. This ‘she’ is a reading presence which reminds me that Life Writing is not a fixed term, and that it is in flux as it moves from considerations of genre to considerations of critical practice. ‘She’ also ensures that the text does not become fully the distant and mastered ‘object’ of my discourse.¹ After all, I am a particular kind of white reading woman in the ‘West’, interpreting the texts, or self-constructions, of others.² Issues of representation enter into the configuration of what does or may constitute Life Writing. What follows is a progressive three-part presentation and exploration of the term Life Writing alongside a suggestion that it may represent both genre and a critical practice. There is also the suggestion that changes in how we perceive Life Writing evolve as political and literary movements evolve.

Life Writing: The Original Genre

Life Writing may be viewed strictly as a limited and limiting genre, as it was in the eighteenth century. At that time it was equivalent to ‘biography’, and biography used to be considered more generally to *include* autobiography, and *perhaps* other kinds of autobiographical writing. First mention of the word ‘biography’ is recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as John Dryden, 1683; the root is the Greek *bios*, meaning ‘quick, vital’. The biographical, then, treats a subject that is vital to the subject, but the self of the author does not necessarily intrude into the subject. In this kind of Life Writing, it has often been

1 Marianna Torgovnick, ‘Experimental Critical Writing’, in: *Profession* 13(1990)1, p. 26; Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 19–21.

2 Ruth Behar, ‘Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman’, in: *Feminist Studies* 16(1990)2, p. 228.

considered preferable if the author remains 'objective'. An autobiography then, as M.H. Abrams's definition reveals, can be thought of in relation to biography: it is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself, with a certain degree of 'objectivity'.³

The term autobiography derives from the Greek *autos*, meaning 'of or by oneself, independently', and the first mention is recorded, again in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as Robert Southey in 1809. Autobiography is a genre that obeys the laws which have governed the writing of one's self. Although the author is not 'distant' or even 'objective', the text exhibits certain formal conventions, and adheres to certain protocols that are different from those of biography.

What is not always revealed in the scholarship about autobiographical writing, however, is that for a part of the eighteenth century, before the Greek and Latin rooted words 'biography' and 'autobiography' fell into current usage, the Anglo-Saxon rooted phrase 'Life-Writing' was popular. Life Writing has always been a more inclusive term, and as such may be considered to have certain critical advantages over 'biography' and 'autobiography'. Thus Life Writing, put simply is a less exclusive genre of personal kinds of writing that includes *both* biography and autobiography, but also the less 'objective', or more 'personal', genres such as letters and diaries. A particular branch of textual criticism has adopted this version of the term Life Writing – such as one might find in the journal *Biography* – and has also broadened it. A contemporary source for this use of the term may be found in Donald J. Winslow's *Life-Writing: A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms*, and amplified in Linda S. Coleman's dissertation 'Public Self, Private Self: Women's Life-Writing in England, 1570–1720'.⁴

In general, however, the usefulness of this version of Life Writing is limited, for the following reasons. First of all, it has a history of being androcentric, and may therefore (re)generate androcentric interpretive strategies, thus underlining the marginalization of what may be called gynocentric ones.⁵ Moreover, this version of Life Writing privileges objective truth and narrative regularity, leaving less room for non-linear narratives and fragments, and unpublished

3 M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed. (Fort Worth: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1988), p. 15.

4 Linda S. Coleman, 'Public Self, Private Self: Women's Life-Writing in England, 1570–1720', Ph.D. diss. (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1986).

5 Patrocino Schweickart, 'Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading', in: Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer ed., *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1989), p. 129.

documents. I will consider a second view of Life Writing as genre which, therefore, improves on these two limitations.

Life Writing: Still a Genre but...

The most broadened version of the term 'Life Writing' as a specific genre is the one often celebrated by feminist literary critics concerned with the proliferation, authorization, and recuperation of autobiographical writing, especially in recent decades. Here Life Writing is the subject of 'gynocritics', a literature that has been identified according to its subject matter – women's texts, personal narratives, Patrocínio Schweickart's 'female texts' – and the critic's job is focused on content. It is a kind of writing about the 'self' or the 'individual' that favours autobiography, but includes letters, diaries, journals, and (even) biography. This kind of Life Writing may be written by literary men and women, or it may be written by 'ordinary' men and women. When it is the latter, it is often referred to as 'nontraditional literature', and may include personal narratives, oral narratives and life testimonies, and anthropological life histories.⁶

Although this version of Life Writing takes into account women's writing and the suppression of women's writing, it is still potentially problematic because it tends to privilege an idea about what constitutes 'the personal', or the ('unary') 'subject', and it also may forget about the complex configuration of the reader.⁷ This kind of Life Writing is understood by new critics, for example, as primarily 'non-fictional', a term with which Quebec feminist fiction theory, deconstruction, and postmodernism have some difficulty. Nicole Brossard wrote: 'In reality, there is no fiction.'⁸ (As Cixous and Clement underline, as far as women are concerned, there is the added problem that there is too little fiction available in which 'her' reality is embedded by 'her'.)⁹ As Linda Hutcheon has said in her discussion of *Coming through Slaughter* – a book she calls 'a fictionalized biography of the real Buddy Bolden' – 'to write of anyone's history is to order, to give form to disparate facts; in short, to fictionalize'.¹⁰

6 Behar, 'Rage and Redemption', p. 223–228.

7 Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 103–181.

8 Nicole Brossard, *Lovers*, trans. Barbara Godard (Montreal: Guernica, 1986, original 1980), p. 15.

9 Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 96–97.

10 Linda Hutcheon, *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 82.

Apart from disputing an epistemology that separates fiction and non-fiction, the postmodern vision also enjoys contesting the boundaries between fiction and autobiography. Post-modernist critics, respectful of Jacques Derrida's inquiry into the utterance 'genres are not to be mixed', are uncomfortable with the inscribing of genre with laws and law-making, suspicious that this inscription will serve to censor the 'different', and valorize the 'same'.¹¹ Thus, 'she' made me explore this unfixed term, Life Writing, further, starting with the consequences of dualistic thinking: non-fiction (that is, autobiography) versus fiction; and literary non-fiction versus non-literary non-fiction. This latter dualism is usually framed this way: high culture versus low culture. In order to avoid jeopardizing the contesting of categories of culture that Life Writing enacts, we might prefer the terms high culture and non-high culture.

Personal Narrative and Non-high Culture

Both ordinary people (mainly men) and great people (mainly men) have written in the autobiographical voice 'in the past', a past that undeniably also includes women's 'natural', or 'ordinary', autobiographical voices. These voices are often represented in what Leonore Hoffman and Margo Culley have called 'women's personal narratives'.¹² Hoffman makes the point that women's personal narratives have been wrongly labelled 'nontraditional' literature, because they are only nontraditional 'in the sense of their exclusion from the literary canon'.¹³ We are unable to say exactly how long ago women's past reaches because, as Virginia Woolf wrote in 1929, 'all these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded', and consequently 'all the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie'.¹⁴ As Hoffman and Culley illustrate, what is recorded in 'lower culture' has had a difficult time competing with the higher, especially in the curriculum of literary studies. This is confirmed by Harriett Hawkins's serious but humorous study of 'high' art and popular modern genres, especially as she compares film heroes with 'deep' tragic heroes to show both the differences and the revealing similarities.¹⁵

When I think of non-high culture, I think also of, for example, archival materials by women or men who never became celebrities, or diaries and letters to

11 Jacques Derrida, 'La Loi du genre/The Law of Genre', in: *Glyph* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 202–231.

12 Leonore Hoffman and Margo Culley, *Women's Personal Narratives; Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy* (New York: MLA, 1985), p. 10–13.

13 Hoffman and Culley, *Women's Personal Narratives*, p. 1.

14 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977, original 1929), p. 85.

15 Harriett Hawkins, *Classics and Trash: Tradition, and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 3–37.

loved ones and friends, some notable examples of which have been uncovered in recent years. The seventeenth-century philosopher-nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, for example, recorded her own life in what has been called ‘an epistolary self-defense’ and an ‘intellectual autobiography’, titled the ‘Response to Sor Filotea’. The main segment of the letter – only brought to light late in this century – is autobiographical and contemplative; it includes a self-criticism, and is propelled by sophisticated ironies. Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau go so far as to say that Sor Juana, like many Hispanic nuns, used Catholicism ‘to structure a feminist ideology’, and used the opportunity to write to a colleague in order to voice her ideas.¹⁶ We will remember that even Virginia Woolf wrote *Three Guineas* in response to a ‘political’ letter requesting donations for an educational fund that overtly excluded women.

Sor Juana’s and Woolf’s letters are both examples of women’s Life Writing, and they are both concerned with the condition of women, and especially the condition of women in relation to (epistolary) writing and education.¹⁷ Their apparently non-fictional letters comprise Life Writing, and their expectation is that their reader will read the letters as such. Although epistolary literature is a legitimate and necessary function of – or even a step in our progressive consideration of – Life Writing, I prefer to include as well the fictional frame in which we might find an autobiographical voice. This is especially relevant in our consideration of experimental women’s writing, such as *Heroine* and other English-Canadian postmodern texts, or Elena Poniatowska’s epistolary novel *Dear Diego*.

Feminism and Postmodernism

Even though Life Writing claims to represent women, ‘feminist’ conclusions are not always the appropriate conclusions in our consideration of women’s Life Writing. As Gail Scott sees it, feminism is not prescriptive. Instead, it creates the conditions in which ‘she’ may be ‘herself-defined’.¹⁸

The difficulty with a strictly feminist (in both form and theme) view of Life Writing is that it may institutionalize a defensive posture for women, or for the unofficial writer of either gender. Though she is often female, ‘she’ may also be male (think of black slave narrators such as Frederick Douglass). That is, gender has determined genre in the past; in the future, we want to avoid any

16 Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau, *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works*, trans. Amanda Powell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), p. 341.

17 Elizabeth C. Goldsmith ed., *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), p. 46–59.

18 Gail Scott, *Spaces like Stairs* (Toronto: Women’s Press, 1989), p. 88–89.

further 'gendrification'. If, for example, we accept the stated antagonism between high and non-high culture, we are unable to read, compare, interpret, or know those who have been antagonized – or even those who have done the antagonizing – without having our vision of them coloured by the critical posture of having-been-antagonized. As Harriett Hawkins has illustrated in an indirect fashion, this often means we patronize when what we want to do is include. Moreover, we find here too that content is considered most significant in the assignment and evaluation of meaning; we want to avoid the unary feminist self-portrait. Not doing so may lead to unnecessary rivalries – rivalries not based on substantive difference, but rather on confused semi-political comparisons (that is, this text is more feminist than that). One might say here that May Sarton's *Tournai of a Solitude* (1973) is not as feminist as Audrey Lorde's *A Burst of Light* (1987) – for political reasons that may be legitimate, but that may compare authors' personal habits and origins more than the more mysterious habits and origins of texts, many of them extremely political in another metaphorical sense. The conversation between the reader and the critic must not stop at context, nor must it be reduced to text alone. Otherwise it can go nowhere else and thus risks becoming tautological.¹⁹ Once one critic decides this text is more feminist than the other, it is difficult for the other critic to say something other than 'it is not so'. At this point, it is difficult to *resist* continuing dualistic arguments that separate us out into the authorities (of 'gender coherence') and the not-authorities. As Judith Butler says: 'The fixity of gender identification, its presumed cultural invariance, its status as an interior and hidden cause may well serve the goals of the feminist project to establish a transhistorical commonality between us, but the "us" who gets joined through such a narration is a construction built upon the denial of a decidedly more complex cultural identity – or non-identity, as the case may be... It seems crucial to resist the myth of interior origins, understood either as naturalized or culturally fixed. Only then, gender coherence might be understood as the regulatory fiction it is – rather than the common point of our liberation.'²⁰

If gender coherence is a regulatory fiction, it will make itself known in what we have referred to as the habits and origins of texts. The habits and origins of texts have something to do with what the tradition calls 'style'. It is said that this 'style' is knowable because of what is read. But were we to progress in our

19 This impasse in feminist critical studies is referred to by Domna Stanton in 'Language and Revolution'. See also Paul Smith in *Discerning the Subject*, and Teresa de Lauretis in 'Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts'.

20 Judith Butler, 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse', in: Linda J. Nicholson ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 339.

discussion of Life Writing on its way from being only a genre to being also a critical practice, we can discern style also because of the nature of reading or the assumptions of readers.²¹ 'She', a kind of feminized reading consciousness, understands that style belongs, in the first instance, to the text; but 'she' also resists this knowledge. Style also belongs to the author and the reader, and finally to the interpretation and criticism that come out on the page. We have been taught that what comes out on the page is meant to be proof of our authority; it is meant to enter into the 'theatre' of debate and critique, the theatre of sorties and war.²² But in a magnanimous, progressive consideration of Life Writing, this page-proof is also not proof at all that the 'critic' has read the text the most, the best, the latest, the clearest, but has only read it in the best way 'she' knows how. 'She', it seems, must be self-consciously created as the reader goes along, and as she collects other readings, other theories, other orbits of a thing she might recognize as self-consciousness herself (or, 'herself-definition'). 'She' must be vulnerable; she must try not to be fully decided.²³ Postmodernism and deconstruction argue for this critical area somewhere in between a feminism with clarity and a feminism that suffers its own ignoble glitches and moves on.

At the same time, however, there is good reason for 'feminisms' to suspect postmodernism, even when they try to incorporate it. As Hutcheon writes: 'their political agendas would be endangered, or at least obscured by the double coding of that complicitous critique'.²⁴ Anthropologists Frances E. Mascia-Lees, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen go further in their condemnation of postmodernism. They are irritated by 'postmodern trends in epistemology and literary criticism' because they see these trends as unaware of their own politics.²⁵ My own sense is, however, that perhaps a politically conscious postmodernism is able to appreciate the canon, revise it where it sees fit, and forget it where it also sees fit. As Arun Mukherjee has illustrated, the canon cannot be used to fill up all the holes. It is, for example, in trying to

21 Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London/New York: New Accents, Methuen, 1983), p. 37.

22 Cixous and Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, p. 63–132.

23 Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 19; Barbara Johnson, 'Nothing Fails Like Success,' in: *SCE Reports #8* (Seattle: Society for Critical Exchange, 1980), p. 14–15.

24 Linda Hutcheon, 'Incredulity towards Metanarrative: Negotiating Postmodernism and Feminisms,' in: *Tessera* 5(1989)7, p. 41.

25 Frances E. Mascia-Lee, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerina Cohen, 'The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective,' in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 15(1989)1, p. 7–8.

determine why women's writing has been undervalued, simplistic to say only that it has been forgotten, ostensibly because the canon has been dominated by patriarchal modes of thinking and the values that valorize those modes.²⁶ The canon *has* been dominated by patriarchal modes of thinking, and this has affected all of us interminably. But it is the forgetting itself, that must be 'read' (and recorded) and again, not as if the 'feminine' were simply the antithesis of the 'masculine'.²⁷ Reading the 'forgetting' incorporates feminism into its decisions about the text, but it also uses deconstruction to understand the effects of the forgetting in the text and in the reader. This way, moreover, 'feminine' is not understood only as (heterogeneous) opposite, or, worse still, simply as victim – pointblank. Nor is it read only as white American feminist.

Life Writing: A Critical Practice

At the most extreme end of the spectrum, Life Writing is a way of looking at more or less autobiographical literature as long as we understand that 'autobiographical' is a loaded word, the 'real' accuracy of which cannot be proved and does not equate with either 'objective' or 'subjective' truth. Instead, it is best viewed as a continuum that spreads unevenly and in combined forms from the so-called least fictive narration to the most fictive. Even so, masks are either explicitly minimized or minimized implicitly through complex narratological 'levels' or strategies (as in metafiction). Under pressure from the reading presence I refer to as 'She', my own working definition of Life Writing is as follows: 'Life Writing comprises texts that are written by an author who does not continuously write about someone else, and who also does not pretend to be absent from the [black, brown, or white] text himself/herself. Life Writing is a way of seeing, to use John Berger's famous phrase; it anticipates the reader's determination on the text, the reader's colour, class, and gender, and pleasure in an imperfect and always evolving hermeneutic – classical, traditional, or postmodern.'

Reading a kind of metafictional Life Writing, one that overtly resists a proof-positive reading, leads us to ask questions about our critical practice, questions about 'standard academic style'.²⁸ However, having thought about both the conflicts in actually reading to the best of my (self)knowledge and the important considerations of a term developing from a genre to a critical practice, we

²⁶ Ruth Sherry, *Studying Women's Writing: An Introduction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988), p. 20–30.

²⁷ Giuseppina Moneta, 'La pensée comme écoute de la parole', in: Marisa Zavalloni, *L'émergence d'une culture au féminin* (Montreal: Les Éditions Saint-Martin, 1987), p. 106.

²⁸ Torgovnick, 'Experimental Critical Writing', p. 27.

are able to reconsider the possible functions of Life Writing now, functions that would allow us to include metafiction and, even, narrative poetry; that would enable us to include both 'high' and 'non-high' forms of writing; that would let us reread the canon while inserting the prejudices of women, and women's 'styles'; and that would concede to unfinished or imperfect styles, both those that have been designed into the text and those that have been designs or accidents of history. As Susan Winnett has cautioned: 'We have been taught to read in drag and must begin to question seriously the determinants that govern the mechanics of our narratives, the notion of history as a sense-making operation, and the enormous investment the patriarchy has in maintaining them.'²⁹ At the same time, we mustn't ignore the investment we have in overthrowing these determinants, and the influence which that desire to overthrow will have on our critical practice.

For now consider that this way of seeing literature is really a way of knowing that does not necessarily judge the text according to how 'realistic' the autobiographical truth may be, and therefore how good or bad the life disclosed. If anything, it acknowledges that the involved reader takes great pleasure in inventing a persona for himself or herself as he or she reads. In this sense a feminist model of Life Writing is necessary to correct former misreadings of women's writings. As Dr Johnson said, no man was better qualified to write his life than himself. The same holds true for women. The problem is that in the eighteenth century (and before) few women dared; few women were able; few women were qualified; few women had a life to write.³⁰ But to say this and then carry out the 'feminist' analysis that one would then expect seems too linear and rational to encompass the complexity of women's Life Writing, or the act of reading itself. Moreover, the feminist reader may want to fulfil a commitment as she (or he?) stands between conventional aesthetics and new critical practices. Finally, she stands between the influence of feminist practice – a position on gender inequality – and feminist revolution, a desire to celebrate what is already there in the name of women, *herself-defined*. Celebrating what

29 Susan Winnett, 'Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure', in: PMLA 105(1990)3, p. 516.

30 For an ironic look at the suppression of women's writing, Joanna Russ, 'Aesthetics' in *How to Suppress Women's Writing* in which she writes: 'the techniques for mystifying women's lives and belittling women's writing [...] work by suppressing context: writing is separated from experience, women writers are separated from their tradition and each other, public is separated from private, political from personal – all to enforce a supposed set of absolute standards [...] it calls into question the very idea of objectivity and absolute standards' (p. 118).

is already there while acknowledging inequities in the social contracts that have defined gendered relationships assumes the inherent quality of the words and the self who arranges them.³¹ That self defines a new text or life-in-the-text when she or he is not in a defensive position. The remaining problem then is: Does she or he have the strength to persist in light of the tremendous pressure to conform to what her colonizers have defined as intellectual excellence? As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has explained, in literary studies depersonalization and abstraction have often been associated with superior intellectual pursuits.³² As unfixed as the term Life Writing may be, it defies this equation and therefore does its part to resist and reverse the literary and political consequences we would have to expect were we to carry through with 'depersonalization' and unrelenting 'abstraction'.

Conclusion

Life Writing as a critical practice, then, encourages (a) the reader to develop and foster his/her own self-consciousness in order to (b) humanize and make less abstract (which is not to say less mysterious) the self-in-the-writing. Thus, there are many forms, or genres, in which a reader may glean this written self, but we usually think immediately of autobiography, letters, diaries, and anthropological life narratives, genres in which the conventional expectation is that the author does not want to pretend he/she is absent from the text. Add to these original Life-Writing genres the fictionalized equivalents, including self-reflexive metafiction, and Life Writing becomes both the 'original genre' and a critical comment on it, and therefore the self-in-the-writing. At its most radical, the critical practice of Life Writing enhances reading as a means of

³¹ For further reading: *Autobiographical Voices* by Françoise Lionnet; 'South Asian Poetry in Canada', in: *Towards an Aesthetic of Opposition* by Arun Mukherjee; 'Coming Unstrung' by Susan Winnett; 'Nothing Fails Like Success' by Barbara Johnson; 'Gender Trouble' by Judith Butler; and 'Women's Studies' in: *Reading Lacan* by Jane Gallop. For specific essays on feminism and autobiography, see Shari Benstock and Felicity Nussbaum ed., *The Private Self*; Domna C. Stanton ed., *The Autobiographical Subject: The Female Autograph*; Bella Brodski and Celeste Schenck ed., *Life/Lines*; and Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography*. See also Shirley Neuman 'Autobiography: From Different Poetics to a Poetics of Differences', in: Marlene Kadar ed., *Essays in Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*.

³² Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, 'To Write My Self: The Autobiographies of Afro-American Women', in: Shari Benstock ed., *Feminist Issues in Literature Scholarship* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 162–165.

emancipating an overdetermined 'subject', or various subject-locations. It is, to use Marianna Torgovnick's phrase, 'writerly writing', even if it is not what we understand as strictly autobiographical. In the end, Life Writing problematizes the notion of Literature. Without wanting to deny Literature, Life Writing allows us to see it, too, as only one possible category of special writing.

Appendices



Biography

Anonymous

In considering biography as an art distinct in a great measure from history, we naturally inquire, first, what are the aims of biography; and secondly, by [what] qualities they may be accomplished.

It is not an idle, flippant curiosity that excites in men a desire to learn the private as well as the public character and actions of their fellow-men. It is rather an universal sympathy, interesting all men, even the most callous and misanthropic, in whatever concerns their neighbours. Specially, does mankind experience this thirst after a knowledge of the private life of those favoured individuals to whose lot it has befallen to act a conspicuous part in the great drama of life. In accordance with that sympathy, the first aim of biography is to furnish an elaborate picture of the character of the men whose lives are under consideration. [...]

Biography professes to bring the reader into intimate personal association with each of its characters, to draw aside the veil that conceals from the world their domestic life, and to exhibit all their actions, great and small, without reservation, without exaggeration.

But while the biographer, by combining the details of public and private life, attempts a faithful delineation of individual character, he intends to afford the reader something more than a source of mere pleasure. Portraits of distinguished men are eloquent in their teachings to posterity. The historical painting set before us has not simply the merit of being a representation of an entire character; to the connoisseur, or even to the comparatively ignorant, the features speak volumes. The attentive observer cannot fail to discover that pride and meanness may be united; that baseness is often a companion of greatness; that the men whom the world most admires and applauds are sometimes most miserable, and often, least deserving of admiration and applause; that great men are after all human,—creatures with the same follies and crimes and sorrows that chequer the experiences of their less fortunate brethren. The most beneficial effect of all this is to diminish that blind admiration for men which is appropriately named hero-worship. No branch of letters is so well fitted as biography to teach the important lesson that the difference between the greatest and the humblest man is, at best, trifling. [...]

The two leading faculties of the mind – those to which all others are subservient – are reason and imagination. The office of reason in biography seems to consist chiefly in tracing to their sources individual actions, and in pursuing generalizations to discover the farthest limit of their influence. It is employed in elucidating facts and events; in connecting hitherto apparently isolated occurrences by the relation of cause and effect; and in deducing from all such data those maxims of wisdom and experience which it is the peculiar boast of all history to furnish. Whatever instruction is contained in brief and incidental remarks on political science, in the lives of statesmen; whatever maxims of war are given in the cursory treatment of military affairs, in the lives of warriors; whatever profound reflection and philosophic observation are embodied in biography at all, are due to the exercise of this faculty. Reason is further to discriminate between fact and fiction; to decide what credence is to be given to traditions, anecdotes, and other species of information poorly authenticated; to weigh opposing testimony and conflicting authorities on all contested questions; – to enable the biographer to select, from the mass of materials in his possession, such only as are true, and such as are adapted to his purpose. Many occurrences are regarded in one age as exerting a marked effect on the affairs of the world, which in a succeeding age are unnoticed and forgotten. Reasoning powers of unusual clearness and vigour are needed to prevent the biographer from overloading his pages with such useless facts, which, while they cause him to neglect others on which may have hinged the destiny of the individual, and through him, perhaps, the destiny of the state, weary the reader with their details and ultimately consign the book to oblivion.

But something more than reason is requisite to produce a good life of any man. Imagination, the great antagonist faculty to reason, is intimately concerned in every successful record of men's lives. A bare narration of the story of the gifted man, accompanied by such observations as the subject and incidents might naturally suggest to a philosophic mind, would, beyond a doubt, contain much valuable instruction; but how much more intensely interesting would such a narrative become in the hands of an imaginative artist? That aim of biography which is first of all others can be effected only by the aid of imagination. Happy delineation of character, individual and national; pictorial descriptions of men and scenery, of manners and customs, of events and their accessories, of battles, sieges, marches, of great assemblies, and of the calm delights of domestic life depend on the presence of imagination, watching over and impressing its character on the composition of the book. This faculty spreads a kind of enchantment over every thing it touches. Its office here is not to originate new and unheard of combinations, but to so combine existing and actual materials in proportions that have already

existed, that, while absolutely true, they shall possess all the novelty of original conceptions.

If the foregoing be true, it follows that biography should occupy an intermediate space between the broad and rugged, but productive field of reason, on the one hand, and the brilliant-hued and enchanting garden of imagination on the other. Neither faculty should be exclusively employed. The one or the other should predominate according to the character of the life to be unravelled. The Sistine Chapel, at Rome, was reared by an architect from solid materials; Michelangelo was employed to decorate the walls and ceiling with fresco paintings, which should shadow forth the gigantic character of his mind; the result of this combination of the labours of two distinct and widely dissimilar artists was a chapel, whose beauty the lapse of four centuries has not impaired, whose grandeur still strikes the visitor with admiration and awe. So in biography, reason should lay the foundation and rear upon it the superstructure; while the decorations, the frescoes, the paintings, and the other ornaments, external and internal, should be the work of imagination.

Where these two faculties are properly combined, biography is most perfect, and is, to a healthy mind, the most delightful reading in the whole range of literature. Nor is this difficult to explain. One peculiar advantage which, independent of all others, biography possesses, and which will always render the dullest specimens of it more or less interesting, is its Reality. We know that the man, whose life we are reading, is not the creation of a novelist's brain; that the incidents affecting us variously are real incidents; that the actions and achievements, the successes and failures, the sufferings and misfortunes, the weaknesses, frailty, and humanity, or the pride, meanness and cruelty, which are recorded of the hero, have been actual existences and actual experiences – in a word, that the book is not a hypothetical view of human nature, elaborated in all its characters and incidents to establish the theory of some fiction-writing philosopher, but the authenticated life of a man who really existed and suffered and sinned and died, at some period, on this great world. The writer of fiction is successful in proportion as he reproduces nature, either when describing natural scenery and occurrences, or more especially when delineating human character, in doing both of which, he depends mainly on imagination. Now with the same powers of imagination, a genuine biography may be made as intensely interesting and far more instructive than the most powerful modern novel. It is all a mistake to imagine that fiction is, in and of itself, more entertaining than fact. There never could be a more absurd notion. The charm that chains the reader of fiction spell-bound to the brilliant page is wholly produced by art. The same art, employed in connecting and embellishing the actual experiences of an eventful life, will produce a similar

charm, differing from the other, only by being more healthful, and being stripped of all meretricious and dangerous qualities.

The biographer should be as truly an artist as the sculptor, the painter, or the novelist, for his works are just as susceptible of criticism according to rules of art as are the works of the others. His art consists in the judicious selection and arrangement of materials, in the disposition of the light and shade, of the foreground and background. A little reflection will show that half a dozen different narratives of the same life may be constructed, each of which shall contain facts and facts only, while none of them shall furnish either a true account of the man's life or a true picture of his character. In the hands of Mr. J. Parton, that compound of Brownslow-billingsgate and Theodore Parker-raving commonly yclept Horace Greeley, becomes a great man, a Christian, a philanthropist; in the same hands John C. Calhoun would probably become another Aaron Burr, ambitious to subvert the government of his country. This arises from the fact, that as all, or even the greater part, of the occurrences of a life could not be recorded in any reasonable limits, the biographer necessarily confines himself to such as are, in his opinion, most worthy of mention. The art of the biographer should enable him to make a selection of materials which, in artistic combination, shall produce an effect most nearly similar to what the whole mass of incidents would produce, if it were possible for them to be minutely represented. It is principally the want of this art of selection that floods the world with specimens of worthless biography.

Fidelity and impartiality are qualities so imperatively demanded, that without them, or an appearance of them, a biography, faultless in other respects, would be condemned and ostracized. The very nature of the undertaking to write lives of other men supposes the possession of these qualities. Otherwise, there would be no reliability in anything recorded, we would receive the author's statements and remarks with suspicion, if not with positive unbelief, and this whole art would degenerate into ordinary fiction. [...]

When cultivated powers of reasoning, a brilliant pictorial imagination, an artistic skill in the selection and disposition of incidents, and scrupulous fidelity and impartiality are united in one person, that fortunate individual is fitted to excel in the noble art of biography. A mind like this is rarely, if ever, found, but we may be sure that a biographical production of it would prove a treasure, the value of which few other books equal, and none surpass. [...]

Sex in Biography

Ernest Boyd

Describing the spate of so-called ‘modern’ biographies, ‘novelized’ lives, and so forth, one might say: ‘The trick of biography seems to have fallen on prosperous times in Europe and America. A most scholarly and subtle branch of writing has been relegated to the sex circulationists of letters; we do not reflect that it is perhaps as easy to write a flashy biography as a cheap novel. Those octavo volumes with which it is our custom to vulgarize the dead – who does not know them, with their half-digested paucity of material, their “smart” style, their tone of tedious superiority, their lamentable lack of taste, of real knowledge, of honest purpose? They are as familiar as the case histories of the psycho-analysts, and wear the same air of spurious, psychological profundity.’ In other words, the overemphasis of the sex element in contemporary biography doubtless explains in large part the current vogue of that branch of writing. [...]

It is also a significant fact, for it raises the general question of the importance of sex in biography. Is it possible that we now exaggerate its importance? One may welcome the freedom of modern biography from hagiography while questioning its overemphasis upon sexual psychology. When Frank Harris was trying to make of his life of Bernard Shaw a volume comparable to his own ineffable and insufferable *My Life and Loves*, his victim escaped him by confronting him squarely with unromantic facts, thereby confuting prurient conjecture. ‘First, O Biographer,’ he writes, ‘get it clear in your mind that you can learn nothing about your sitter (or Biographee) from a mere record of his gallantries. You have no such record in the case of Shakespeare, and a pretty full one for a few years in the case of Pepys; but you know much more about Shakespeare than about Pepys. The explanation is that the relation between the parties in gallantries is not a personal relation. It can be irresistibly desired and rapturously executed between persons who could not endure one another for a day in any other relation.’ And he adds: ‘I found sex hopeless as a basis for permanent relations. [...] In permanence and seriousness my consummated love-affairs count for nothing beside the ones that were either unconsummated or ended by discarding that relation.’

Here we have the unusual spectacle of the subject of a biography definitely answering the question I have raised. Mr. Shaw is clearly of opinion that the

part of sex in biography – not merely in his biography – is negligible. He even declares: ‘If I were to tell you every such adventure that I have enjoyed, you would be none the wiser as to my personal, nor even as to my sexual, history’. From which it would seem to follow that even the sexual history of a biographer’s subject is not to be explained merely by reference to the latter’s sexual experiences. In other words, an intelligent view of biography may so far diverge from the current preoccupation with sex as to eliminate it altogether, as something wholly irrelevant.

Obviously the relevance of sex in biography must be largely determined by the character and temperament of what Mr. Shaw calls the ‘biographee’, rather than by the more or less morbid prepossessions of the biographer. If Mr. Shaw, for example, had been the kind of man whom Frank Harris so fatuously alleged himself to be in *My Life and Loves*, what purpose would be served by recording the facts? By his own admission such facts would be irrelevant, since ‘gallantry is not a personal relation’ and ‘sex is hopeless as a basis for permanent relations’. Presumably it is precisely the permanent elements in the life of a human being which are of vital importance to the biographer. Consequently, the latter has to decide whether or not the sexual life of his subject is essential to an understanding of his career. Can that be decided arbitrarily, on the theory popularized by the Freudians, that we are such stuff as sexual psychoneuroses are made on, our little life is rounded with a complex? [...]

Thus we return to the question of the place of sex in biography. Where sex is an essential factor the first thing to be decided is whether the case is pathological or not. If pathological, the biographer becomes the scientist, as defined by Mr. Nicolson and M. Maurois, and biography as a work of art, as a means of expression, ceases to concern us. Where sex is not pathological, its importance is slight almost to the point of non-existence. The happiest sex life is one that has no history, and biography is neither more nor less concerned with sex than with digestion. Carlyle’s indigestion, Gibbon’s hydrocele, Napoleon’s cancer, the erysipelas of Frederick the Great, add not one cubit to our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of these men. Many obscure persons have suffered similarly and many people of like stature have been free of such suffering. The tedious novels of George Sand are not a whit more interesting because of her encounters with Jules Sandeau, Musset, Pagello, Chopin, and the rest of that ‘necropolis’, as an unkind lover called the ‘cemetery’ of her heart. Nor is the tedium of George Eliot’s novels relieved by the thought of her exemplary life with George Henry Lewes, and her courageous unconventionality has not prevented us from preferring the works of the Brontë sisters and of Jane Austen, whose lives seemed models of decorum. [...]

Sex in biography, as in life itself, is simultaneously essential and unimportant, save when nothing else of importance is afoot. The autobiographies of Mill, Newman, Gibbon, Herbert Spencer, Renan, dealing with the world of the mind and of ideas, are worth all the memoirs of all the Casanovas, great and small, real and imaginary, whose usually trivial exploits and conquests make one wish that more people had Mr. Shaw's keen realization of the fundamental valuelessness of such experiences as a commentary on life.

The Personal in the Political Biography

Hans Renders

A terminological misconception has been active for a long time: the ‘literary biography’ is not so much a life history with literary qualities as the biography of a literary figure. And therefore, similarly, the phrase ‘political biography’ is generally intended to designate the biography of a politician. The inappropriateness of this parallel usage is easily explicable: a literary biography, the biography of a writer in which hardly any attention is devoted to the subject’s oeuvre is common, while a biography of a politician without extensive attention for his political ideas would be utterly absurd. That this is so has to do with the wide range of meaning of the word ‘politics’, but also with the status of the writer in our society. He or she is a star, loved and admired, while the politician is in the best case a hard-working, reliable servant. Much from the private life of a politician has political significance and political consequences, attributed to it by others, while the life of a writer is only relevant to the literature if he writes about it himself. The image of a politician is seen as a blueprint for his ideas. The hairstyle of a Dutch prime minister was adapted, one could say, to make his ideas and opinions seem to fit the time better. The life of a writer receives, in the media today, considerable attention, but no one would write about the sexual aberrations of a poet if he had not made them a theme of his poetry.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson wrote on 2 February 1935 his so-called ‘Instructions concernant ma biographie’, urgent advice to his biographer Gilbert Maire who would publish a biography in that same year.¹ Bergson begins by saying that it would be unnecessary to involve his family in his biography, or even to mention them. ‘Just say that I was born in Paris, rue Lamartine.’² Maire respected the ‘Instructions’ almost to the letter. If you read the subtitle of his biography, you already know enough: *Mon maître*.

Now, Maire would have been an obedient biographer without the instructions, but what was so interesting about Bergson’s letter was that he understood

¹ Gilbert Maire, *Bergson, mon maître* (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1935). Bergson’s ‘Instructions’ were written in February; Maire’s book was printed on 30 September of that same year.

² Philippe Soulez and Frédéric Worms, *Bergson* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), p. 288.

better than his biographer that a biography is not so much the story of a life but the story of a legacy. The legacy is an entity that begins to live with the death of the person whose biography is being written. He has to do with faded and forgotten personal papers – like school notebooks, letters, declarations, notebooks and daily minders – and the dream of every biographer: diaries. But also: the letters and diaries of others in which he appears and which, sooner or later, digitally or not, are associated with him.

Nevertheless, the politician can more effectively influence his biography posthumously with his legacy than by any other means. The deceased perishes while his legacy grows. His colleagues, his friends, his family, the institutions where he worked all pass away, and they all leave a trace behind. The legacy constantly expands, and the commentary on it even more so. The collection of letters by Joop den Uyl, the late prime minister of the Netherlands, housed in the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam will grow considerably during the next twenty years, as his old friends and colleagues pass away.

According to the French historian François Dosse, who published a book about political biography in 2005, political biography's right to exist depends on a visible shift of attention from an individual to an ideological context. The biographer is required to provide a narrative of the transformation of the private individual into a public figure.³ That may be true, but a biography serves in the first place to come to grips with the genesis of his hero's legacy. Who established the archive of the politician? Who has maintained it and possibly sifted through the material and transferred what remained of it to a public institution? Was the politician involved in the process? Did he preserve letters of rejection, from those he loved or wanted to work for? No one wants to be the accountant of his own disappointments, but to destroy the traces of such things is dangerous. Even non-public individuals can be recovered in hundreds and even thousands of records. Think about municipalities, taxes, doctors, supermarkets, sport clubs and internet-providers, and, equally sensitive to privacy, the library. That is not even considering the records of friends. Might it not be the case that politicians have written autobiographies in recent years because they know that in their legacy, at least in that part over which they have no control, an image might rise which they wish to correct? It is especially politicians who create that impression.

Almost every working day, a biography appears in the Netherlands, those originally written in Dutch and those translated from another language taken together. This fact notwithstanding, one hears continuously the complaint

3 François Dosse, *Le pari Biographique. Écrire une vie* (Paris: Éditions la Découverte, 2005), p. 346–354.

that things are so much better in England, that so many more biographies appear. This calls for a critical look. The genre is so popular, in both England and the Netherlands, that more and more books called biographies enter the market that don't deserve the name. In England and the United States, whole bookcases are packed with biographies, but closer inspection reveals titles along the lines of *Recipes Chosen by Britney Spears* or *Exercise Yourself to be Healthy and Slender like Barbara Streisand* placed without hesitation in the biography section, just like publications with subtitles 'biography of a village', 'biography of a river' and 'biography of a building'. In the Dutch book trade, similarly, a book dedicated to the memory of a popular singer is immediately labeled a biography, but it is equally true that of the 250 to 300 biographies published each year, a substantial portion are written by academics or at least satisfy the standards and expectations of academics. We only need to mention the biographies of the Dutch ex-prime ministers Jo Cals, Hendrik Colijn and Willem Drees or of the American president Bill Clinton to realize that the claim that historians have rediscovered the biography is justified. Political history has been enriched thanks to these and other biographies of politicians.

The biographer has to make clear that a person's private background has influenced his public achievements. If he fails to do that, he might as well not have written the biography. This position can easily be defended with a couple of examples.

Social politics in the Netherlands has long oscillated between two extremes: the solidarity which citizens feel for their socio-economically weaker compatriots and the fear which those same citizens feel for communism. The champions of the middle-way have been, from the beginning, the social liberals. The journalist and politician Hendrik Goeman Borgesius was one of their most important representatives. His biographer allows Goeman Borgesius's personality to disappear as the book progresses.⁴ He becomes a phantom behind his political ideas, and the biographer appears to be interested only in the distinction between his ideas and those which the socialists, Catholics, Protestants and ex-liberals advanced. That is a useful exercise, but deadly for a biography. The same is true for the biography of the Dutch politician and jurist Jan Donner written by Job de Ruiter (former Minister of Justice).⁵ The biographer says that Donner was a distinctive personality but his book is much more a summation of Donner's genuinely distinctive professional life – a link between his role as diligent father and husband and his career in political circles is never made.

4 Bert Wartena, *H. Goeman Borgesius (1847–1917). Vader van de verzorgingsstaat. Een halve eeuw liberale en sociale politiek in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2003).

5 Job de Ruiter, *Jan Donner, jurist. Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Boom, 2003).

The Personal is Political

In a variation on the adage that a novel is a made up biography, the former socialist politician Lambert Giebels described a biography as a novel with annotations. That sounds romantic, but it is well established that in a biography there has to be some intrigue, 'the hidden wound', Gustave Flaubert would say. Historians like to talk about their views, some of them about their social views, but that is still something different from exposing the hidden wound of the protagonist. The intrigue in the biography of the statesman Louis Beel (KVP: Catholic People's Party), for example, is, according to his biographer, Lambert Giebels, his escape from an unhappy marriage.⁶

Interpretations like this are not without their risks. The British politician James Keir Hardie was criticized by his backbenchers for fighting harder for feminism than for socialism. His biographer Kenneth O. Morgan wrote that Hardie had a secret relationship with the suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst. Does this explain the criticism or did Hardie genuinely believe that feminism was more important than socialism?⁷

Sometimes the personal perspective on a large theme reveals more than placing it in a grand context. The personal as the motor of the political is something that we encounter, among other places, in the many biographies of Dutch people who collaborated with the Nazis during the World War II. The human interest in collaborationist countrymen has enhanced our understanding of the political culture in the Netherlands during the inter-war years. Thanks to a few biographies we have been able, as it were, to distinguish several typologies of politicians from the period. By means of the biography of the national-socialist poet, journalist and publisher George Kettmann by Willem Huberts, we know how the 'early birds' of fascism and national-socialism in the Netherlands developed on the strength of what the historian A.A. de Jonge has called 'the small political crisis': the citizens' great dissatisfaction, their distrust of the way the government was functioning.⁸ The crisis unfolded at the same time as the intellectuals were growing concerned about

6 Lambert Giebels, *Beel, van vazal tot onderkoning: biografie 1902–1977* (The Hague: SDU, 1995).

7 Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Writing Political Biography', in: Eric Homberger and John Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography* (Basingstoke [etc.]: Macmillan, 1988), p. 33–48.

8 W.S. Huberts, *Schrijver tussen daad en gedachte. Leven en werk van George Kettmann Jr. (1898–1970), met een bibliografie* ('s-Gravenhage: Stichting Bibliographia Neerlandica, 1987); A.A. de Jonge, *Crisis en critiek der democratie. Anti-democratische stromingen en de daarin levende denkbeelden over de staat in Nederland tussen de wereldoorlogen* (Utrecht: HES Uitgevers, 1982, original 1968).

the dangers of national-socialism and communism.⁹ Kettmann addressed himself to the small man who experienced the small crisis, converted to totalitarian thinking as early as 1931 and made a career for himself as journalist, writer and publisher. In all of these capacities, he felt an obligation to produce a commentary on what we have subsequently come to call the great political crisis. As a publisher he was responsible for the publication of, among other works, *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler, who, as head of government, was friendly with Holland. The national-socialist Kettmann cannot be accused of opportunism because in 1931, as a direct result of his public position, few of his colleagues in the world of journalism, literature and publishing were willing to support him. The same can be said of Anton Mussert, the leader of the Dutch National-Socialist Movement (NSB). It becomes clear in Jan Meyers's biography *Mussert, een politiek leven* that hardly anyone else was so convinced that he could and felt that he had to save the Netherlands as the hydraulic-engineer Anton Mussert. In 1931 he established the National-Socialist Movement and thanks to Meyers's biography we explain his political choices to a large extent on the basis of his private background.¹⁰ His delusion that he had to play the part of a second Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (Dutch statesman who in 1609 agreed a truce with the Spanish oppressors of the Netherlands), as the biographer clearly demonstrates, was already distinctly present when he was a child, a student and an engineer. The *Spitzbürger* Mussert spoke about big ideas, but he was driven by indignation about the way political institutions were functioning.

In 2005, the biography was published of the Flemish nationalist August Borms, a collaborator during both World War I and II, although the collaboration deserved to be weighed differently in the two cases.¹¹ In the Netherlands Borms is known especially because the writer Willem Elsschot once wrote a poem about him, after his execution in 1946. In Flanders, he is still famous and infamous as a symbol of extreme Flemish radicalism. His biographer, Christine van Everbroeck, has unraveled the Borms mystery and, with that having been done, little of it remains. Thanks to this biography, we know that while the Borms-cult may have grown to mythic proportions, the political influence that has been attributed to him was in fact not all that great. Flemish radicals and other sympathizers made a mascot of him to harass the opposition; his supporters knew

9 Koen Vossen, *Vrij vissen in het Vondelpark. Kleine politieke partijen in Nederland 1918–1940* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2003), p. 163–197.

10 Jan Meyers, *Mussert, een politiek leven* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1984).

11 Christine van Everbroeck, *August Borms. Zijn leven, zijn oorlogen, zijn dood. De biografie* (Amsterdam/Antwerp: Meulenhoff/Manteau, 2005).

that Borms saw himself too much as a messiah who preferred to live and work inside prison rather than outside. Deep down, he was never in fact driven by any desire to play a serious political role. The biographer's sober analysis of the facts removes the polish from the myth. Precisely by devoting so much attention to the way Borms was raised, to the conditions in which he lived and to his narcissistic tendencies, his biography gives us a deeper insight into his almost fairy-tale like political views. The biographies of politicians in which much attention is given to the personal are generally also those which provide the deepest insights concerning their politics. But that is a conclusion which is open to debate.

I would like to take Dosse's position – the biographer is required to provide a narrative of the transformation of the private individual into a public figure – and turn it around: the biographer is required to provide the politician with a personal narrative, so that we can better understand the incubation of his political ideas.

The Biographical Method

Hans Renders

An amusing anthology can be compiled of statements that make clear that biography is perceived as an objectionable genre. ‘Biography is the form by which little people take revenge on big people.’¹ The arguments in support of this thesis mostly come down to the same: a biographer is not able to achieve anything noteworthy himself and therefore parasitizes on people who are gifted. ‘Every great man has his disciples and it is always Judas who writes the biography’, so says the often cited adage of Oscar Wilde. Biographers take advantage of others people’s distress. That is also said about accident injury lawyers, but oddly enough never about doctors, firemen or café proprietors. In the academic field there is an additional argument to exclude biographers from universities: supposedly, they do not work from the framework of a method or theory. What is the reason an historian who is writing a book about the slavetrade in the nineteenth century or about the Holocaust in the twentieth century is never asked the question a biographer usually gets asked first: which theory are you working with? For such questioners theory is a guarantee for scholarship, while for historians a scholarly attitude, regarding sources or the formulation of questions, is more important for groundbreaking results. Also, the call for a method suggests that writing a biography is a gap-filling exercise that can be brought to a proper ending when previously described steps are taken.

Biographers themselves are jointly responsible for this misunderstanding. In prefaces of biographies or in interviews biographers give after completing their work, it is often read that before writing the biography they first consulted ‘the theory’. It goes without saying that a theoretical and methodical understanding when exercising a profession is commendable, even necessary. But these remarks about ‘consulting theory’ show the naive notion that all literature about biographies is easily united into a practical guide on how to write a biography.

¹ This quote of writer/biographer Edmund White is used in all sorts of variants by people biographed, critics and others, see: Carl Rollyson, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism. Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), p. 6.

That notion is understandable, because the term ‘theory’ is often confused with the opposite, ‘instruction manual’. It goes without saying that the theory of the biography, one that a biographer can have at hand and that lets him write the ideal biography, is an utopia. In 1946 already, the Dutch historian Jan Romein wrote in a reflecting book about the biography, that the ideal methodology does not exist – ‘and therefore it is an ideal’.² There will be few to dispute his words, but still this thesis provides an interesting insight: the terms theory and framing of a theory too often support great ambitions. ‘It is sometimes asked what the method of biography is, but that is an completely misplaced question. Biography *has* no method, but *is* a method.’³ And that is the way it is.

The biographical method offers us the possibility to ask specific research questions and come to different results that way. The umbrella question of every biographer is: does our knowledge of the personal life of a certain individual add anything to the understanding of his public achievements?⁴ The years of of one’s youth for instance are frequently a period of incubation for views developed later in life. Thinking about biographical research into politicians, that basic question can be specified. If we consider politics as a means to structure society through rules and laws, the biography offers an option to study in depth the breeding ground of those politicians. Thanks to the biography of a politician we gain a different insight into the origin of political ideas that we trace in party manifesto’s and other ‘institutionalized’ sources. In recent publications of political scientists it is more and more remarked that an analysis of the relation between policy and political culture, between policy and society and between policy and rule is lacking for the greater part. We could add the lack of insight into the interaction between the personal life and political culture. Sometimes a biography can provide clarity about a question that concerns countless more people than the person biographed. This conception can be easily illustrated with some topical examples.

Every couple of years the discussion flares up about how to interpret the industrial persecution of the Jews: as a preconceived plan or as a consequence of the Nazi regime that, as the war went along, was put into practice under the strictest secrecy. There is a lot of evidence supporting both views. Numerous studies are being written on this topic, the one more convincing than the other, although they claim the complete opposite.

2 Jan Romein, *De biografie. Een inleiding* (Amsterdam: Ploegsma, 1946), p. 138.

3 Klaas van Berkel, *E.J. Dijksterhuis. Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1996), p. 9.

4 Except for when it is about biographies like ‘the wife of’ or ‘the child of’, like in Carol Loeb Shloss, *Lucia Joyce: To dance in the wake* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003), in which James Joyce is being explained by means of his daughter.

In the impressive (but not biographical) study *Backing Hitler. Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* of the historian Robert Gellately, the thesis is chosen that the persecution of the Jews took place according to a previously staged plan.⁵ Moreover, Gellately claims there was nothing secretive about the staging by showing that the pre-war political culture in Germany not only provided fertile soil for the persecution of the Jews, but also that showing antisemitism as openly as possible by the people in power (Kristallnacht) and by the media (praising reports on the first concentration camps) were part of that culture.

The American biographer Richard Breitman focuses in his biography of SS-leader Heinrich Himmler on the systematicness of the Holocaust and whether or not it was executed openly as the main issue of his research, covered under the question: does our knowledge of the personal life of a certain individual contribute to the understanding of his public achievements?⁶ By providing us with insight into the personal backgrounds of Himmler, the man that especially in Poland played a decisive part in the preparation of the construction of concentration camps, Gellately's claim is put into perspective. According to Breitman there was no such thing as a German pre-war political culture that stimulated antisemitism. Rather, the systematic persecution of the Jews is to be explained by party political machinations that tested one or the other high ranking Nazi's loyalty towards his superiors. Himmler had the character trait to tell even his political friends only things of the utmost necessity and every time a subordinate was placed for a *fait accompli* (for instance an unexpected assignment to execute sizeable groups of Jews) it was in Himmler's nature to think about the next experiment to test the loyalty of this assistant. According to Breitman, Auschwitz, Treblinka and all the other camps were gradually developed and in regards to the massmurders everyone kept the strictest secrecy. The most compelling reason to switch from mass executions to gassing was – so says Breitman – the fact that Himmler badly endured witnessing the executions and was convinced that the German soldiers that were held responsible for those would mentally crumble. At the same time Breitman makes it plausible that the plans for the gas chambers were prepared under the strictest secrecy to get personal *credits* from Hitler, because Himmler was sensitive to compliments. There is much more to be said about this matter, but of importance here is the observation that the biographical method leads to

5 Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler. Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

6 Richard Breitman, *Heinrich Himmler. The architect of genocide: Himmler and the final solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

different and no less compelling interpretations as opposed to the non-biographical study of Gellately.

With assistance of the biographical method a different or new light can be shed on certain issues. Remaining with World War II: in the meanwhile we know how thin the separation was between good and evil and even between suffering and weariness during the occupation. 'Do not send me so much food,' forced labourer and in successive years poet Jan Hanlo wrote in 1943 from the barracks of the Siemens factories to his mother.⁷ Where others suffered, for Hanlo forced labour was not a big deal, partially because as a Dutchman he was held in high regards in the Germanic racial doctrine of the Nazi's, but also because he spoke German like his guards. The brothers Alfred and Ernst Kossmann (Alfred became the wellknown writer and Ernst the famous historian) had the time of their lives for the same reason while working on a railroad in Germany.⁸ Thanks to this (auto-)biographical information our knowledge is expanded of what forced labour in Germany was about during the occupation. The biographer of the Dutch regional novelist Antoon Coolen has shown that his protagonist, who indeed heroically refused to become a member of the National Socialist Kulturkammer, still wanted to become a mayor in wartime.⁹ Those are only a couple of examples that provide us with better insight in the political culture, thanks to biographical research.

In 2004 the Biography Institute was founded at the University of Groningen. The goal is not merely to accomplish beautiful biographies, research into the effects of biographical studies is as much part of the objectives. 'In the end, a person can historically be treated in much the same way as a naval battle or a food riot.'¹⁰ And like other forms of historiography can be studied on form and effect, that is also possible with regard to biographies. The researchers of the Biography Institute write biographies and/or scrutinize biographical research of others and from other times. For instance, research has been carried out into the 'biographical sketches and portraits' that were released between 1870 and 1895 under the title *Mannen van beteekenis in onze dagen* [Men of Significance in our days]. This biographical series in twenty-five parts edited by H. Tiedeman

7 Hans Renders, *Zo meen ik dat ook jij bent. Biografie van Jan Hanlo* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1998), p. 157–191.

8 E.H. Kossmann, *Familiearchief. Notities over voorouders, tijdgenoten en mijzelf* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1998).

9 Cees Slegers, *Antoon Coolen 1897–1961. Biografie van een schrijver* (Tilburg: Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact Tilburg, 2001), p. 399–424.

10 Hans Renders, 'Ondernemen als leven. Biografen maken de balans voor Gunning, Verolme en Beyen', in: *De Academische Boekengids* (2006)56, p. 11–13.

and others, was published by publishing company Kruseman in Haarlem amongst others. Examined is to what extent selected politicians were part of the series, of which nationality they were and which character traits were treated as relevant to focus on at the end of the nineteenth century, so as to contribute to the historiography of politics and political culture.

In a biography everything is connected to each other. The biography therefore is in essence multidisciplinary. G.J. van Heuven Goedhart was the chief editor of respectively the Dutch newspapers *De Telegraaf*, the *Utrechtsch Nieuwsblad* and *Het Parool*, but he was also minister in the Dutch government in exile during World War II and much later the first High Commissioner for the refugees of the United Nations. This connection between activities especially surfaces through biographical research and results in different research data as opposed to traditional press- and party histories. The biography of Van Heuven Goedhart is one of the projects that has been carried out under the auspices of the Biography Institute.¹¹ Biographies have become an integral part of historical research. The biographer is no avenger looking for revenge, no 'Judas', he is simply an historian.

¹¹ For premises and *work in progress* check the website of the Biography Institute: www.rug.nl/biografieinstituut.

Why Genealogy and Biography are Not Kin

Hans Renders

It is often assumed that the biographer is intensely involved in genealogical research. That is a misconception. Genealogy is for the biographer a supportive field of research. Biography is a genre, whether scientific or not, in which information about someone's personal life is exploited to render that person's public life more intelligible. This observation entails the conclusion that factual information concerning an individual, his family tree, his family history and that of his ancestors – also known as genealogy – provides at best illustrative material for the story constructed by the biographer. Naturally he achieves this construction after the study of source material. Genealogy, by contrast, is distinguished by the fact that it has as an ultimate goal the gathering together of biographica. Those working in other fields make use of that knowledge; potentially in a great variety of ways. Genealogy, for example, can support prosopographical research. It can supply the basic evidence required to answer questions concerning the social rise and fall of certain families, or the seeming inheritability of poverty in some social environments, or of professions like diplomacy or law, which are associated with family histories, and the like. And in recent years, family history has gained in prominence worldwide. Genealogy is finally illustrative of certain aspects of national and international history, but we will rarely be able to read in family-tree research how representative the illustration is for the larger story.

The importance of genealogy has somewhat diminished in the modern state of affairs. If no other material is available, genealogy offers a way forward. And considering the way public life is organized, it is reasonable to assume that more documentation will be found in registries of births and landownership than in the archives of publishers, horse-lovers or universities. Broadly put, private archives enjoy a shorter life-span than governmental ones. The invisible hand of public institutional sources forms the basis of genealogical research, in some cases almost as an extension of public administration.

The increased popularity of family histories notwithstanding, the position can also be defended that in the modern age the family as an interpretative foundation for the life history of an individual has become steadily less significant. Social clubs and athletic clubs, colleagues, digital communities, such as the Apple Family, Citroen owners, alpinists or amateur investors are probably

more important for many people than their blood relatives. The great exception is of course the family member who wants to put his own family on display. 'The royal and municipal archives are like places where the elderly *hang out!*'¹

If one considers the book by the Dutch historian A.Th. van Deursen concerning the North Holland village of Graft, then one can see how important genealogy can be. With information drawn from municipal and county registers and the archives of churches, he describes the social changes which took place in the seventeenth century.² Not with the intention of producing a family history, but to reveal the character of a community. That could no longer be done, at least not as effectively, because contacts with the bank, the favorite television channel and the hundreds of other 'circles' to which people belong cannot be traced in the municipal archive. One might better study the financial records of families which can be found in banks. But such information does not often appear in family-tree research.

Genealogists seek verifiable family history and want to have nothing to do with 'subjective' (auto)biographical 'story-telling'.³ In biography, the story and its construction are important; in genealogy they are not. Genealogy is exclusively and solely determined by sources; biography relies on sources but is determined by theoretical issues. And by the narrative perspective that the biographer selects. That can be the authorial narrator, the voice which tells the story and simultaneously knows how this life will come to an end, but many biographers choose the perspective of the eye-witness, a family member or another contemporary. The genealogist chooses the archive as the basis for his narrative, just as the autobiographer chooses himself as the measure of things. That is why genealogy never ages, and biography does. Family-tree research locates and gathers together as many facts as possible about a family; biographical research attempts, on the basis of a research question, to assemble information in order to construct a narrative which offers an interpretation. That may seem at first sight to be an insignificant difference, but it is not.

A biographer has to think more deeply about the form his book will take. He can trace the circles around his hero as widely as he thinks necessary, the

1 Eugène Coppes, 'Van familiegeschiedenis naar allemans verleden. Ervaringen van een familiehistoricus', in: Paul Klep, Carla Hoetink & Thijs Emons ed., *Persoonlijk Verleden. Over geschiedenis, individu en identiteit* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2005), p. 31–42.

2 A. Th. van Deursen, *Een dorp in de polder: Graft in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1994), German trans.: *Graft: ein Dorf im 17. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1997).

3 Julia Watson, 'Genealogy', in: Margaretta Jolly ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London [etc.]: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2011), p. 361.

place of work, his neighborhood, his country of residency, the political situation in his region, depending on the period about which he is writing. That means that he has to consider in advance what questions he wants to have answered. If no sources exist for a period in a person's life, the biographer will not remain silent about that period. That is certainly true if it can reasonably be assumed that the period about which the sources are silent has in fact been an extremely important one in a life. Take, for example, the life of the Dutch writer Jaap Meijer. Little documentation exists concerning the time that he spent in the 'Durchgangslager' (or 'transit camp') Westerbork and his subsequent removal to the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen. But everyone will agree that this period is of the greatest significance for the life of the Jewish writer. The biographer Evelien Gans gave form to this period in Meijer's life by depending heavily on the memories of Abel Herzberg and Louis Tas, fellow victims who were in the same camps at the same time. Biographical research is in the first instance driven by questions. That is necessarily so, because otherwise it would be boundless. 'Source driven' means in this case that the story is, with the aid of sources, falsifiable. Genealogical research can establish that someone has for generations been part of a bourgeois environment, or of the nobility.

A person's social origins are important for a biographer, but the family tree of his ancestors is another issue. If we want to write the biography of an entrepreneur, it is important to know whether the subject comes from a working class environment, or the nobility and what his siblings did. That information can be useful in explaining the later success of the entrepreneur. But in order to make clear what a working class environment is, it is not always necessary to go back to the Industrial Revolution and if we do go back, we must do so selectively, in support of the question at hand. This leads us to another important distinction: biography is synthesizing and interpretative, while genealogy creates inventories and is descriptive.

For the family-tree researcher, sources and documents are the oxygen of his work. That would seem to be logical, but in the eyes of many an autobiographer this is not the case. For diarists and Life Writers, subjective experience is more important than family. Genealogy is responsible for the 'official' past, the autobiographer for the past as it felt. The biographer is not distracted by such notions. He is even responsible for interpreting the subjective, entirely in order to test whether certain sources fit in his story.

Broadly speaking, during the Enlightenment the importance of the individual and his potential was defined. From that time, genealogy has become less important. The world is no longer exclusively determined by social class and someone's future is no longer contained in someone's origins and family tree.

That insight (which is still growing), the individual's changing context and above all the increasing value which we associate with individualism have to some extent dispatched genealogy to the shadows. This has certainly been the case since biographers came to the realization that biographies do not have to be written exclusively about a society's elite, such as aristocrats and successful entrepreneurs. Those produced so many hagiographic studies for which the description of the context was so obvious that it did not need to be the subject of research. Biographies which select more marginal figures as objects of study will necessarily have to devote attention to the situation of such a person. A beggar is an outcast from the perspective of the culture of biographies of successful people, but from the perspective of urban culture, such a person can represent a whole environment.

Genealogy recognizes two more or less theoretical themes: generation research and degeneration research. Numerous family biographies (the family of Anne Frank, the Wittgenstein family) teach us something about the way material objects and values are passed from one generation to another and many family histories address the social rise or fall of certain families, by generation. This is to exclude, obviously, degeneration in family research of the sort that the Nazi's loved. That came down to the efforts of the special department of the NSDAP to determine how racially pure someone was. Even the Dutch National Socialist Meinoud Rost van Tonningen had his family tree traced in Berlin because there were rumors that there was Indonesian or even Jewish blood in his veins.

In fact generation research often has basically to do with the question whether an individual is 'typical' or 'exemplary'.⁴ In other words, does a certain person confirm his family history or is he actually an exception? According to this line of thought, we almost automatically find ourselves in the domain of social history, the broadest definition of which is: 'History which concentrates on the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the lives and the customs, inclinations and institutions of a population group.' All of the questions which social history poses are relevant to family-tree research. The only difference is one of scale. Research into the aristocracy is in fact social history; research on one aristocratic family is social history. Research on a professional group is social history. And again and again, we want to know what the common denominator of these people was. Family-tree research is more encyclopedic than social history, perhaps also more objective. It is after all the documents

4 Stefan Willer, 'Biographie – Genealogie – Generation', in: Christian Klein ed., *Handbuch Biographie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2009), p 87–94.

which are speaking and not an interpreting biographer. As the philosopher Epictetus knew as long ago as the first century of the Common Era: we're not talking about things but about our opinions of things.⁵ This is clear: biography is to genealogy as the 'sum' is to the 'parts'. 'It is obvious that History is not the accumulation of facts, but the relation of them,' as Lytton Strachey wrote in his *Eminent Victorians*.

Family-tree research is oriented toward individuals, though the findings are relevant to families, but in fact it never produces direct personal information. That is to say: no personal information which says something specific about the effects of motives and the emotions on the individual's negotiation of public affairs. It does say much indirectly. Birth and death certificates suggest to us something about the emotions experienced by a family, albeit those emotions which we always associate with birth and death. 'The life of a citizen must be enclosed', said Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand.⁶ By the wall of private life. But family-tree researchers know that little remains private. Bankruptcy, convictions and tax returns reveal much about someone's private life, but are always easy to find in public archives. Genealogy is a science of illustration, illustrations from a larger story. If we find the sentence of someone who has been found guilty of a violent assault, the biographer will seek to answer other questions about the life of his subject to see if he is dealing with a violent person. That can be important in determining, for example, if there is a discrepancy between someone's private and public life. The only question is: what is a personal life if it can so easily be recovered in public archives? And are we really interested in the personal lives of individuals from long ago? Or are we making use of that information in order to gain something for ourselves, even if only a more self-conscious identity?

5 Cited by H.W. von der Dunk in: 'Persoonlijke herinnering en geschiedschrijving', in: Klep, Hoetink & Emons ed., *Persoonlijk Verleden*, p. 77–93.

6 Cited in Nicole Castan, 'Publiek en particulier', in: Roger Chartier ed., *Geschiedenis van het persoonlijk leven. Van de renaissance tot de Verlichting* (Amsterdam: Agon, 1989), first published in 1986, p. 353–389. Also in: Georges Duby, 'Woord vooraf bij de Geschiedenis van het persoonlijk leven', in: Paul Veyne ed., *Geschiedenis van het persoonlijk leven. Van het Romeinse Rijk tot het jaar duizend* (Amsterdam: Agon, 1987, original 1985), p. 6–7.

A Nobel Prize for Biography

Nigel Hamilton

Biography is one of man's oldest endeavors. Ever since classical times biographers have sought to record with honesty the real lives of their fellow humans, separating truth from myth. For biography has a different purpose than myth or fiction, whose primary aim is provide an escape from our real lives, bewitching us into suspending our disbelief.

Biography's purpose, by contrast, is to discover for us, and for those who follow us, as much as possible of the unvarnished, unromanticized, uncompromising truth about real lives.

As in the field of fiction, there are those biographies that are written without substance, written to excite attention rather than to deepen our understanding of life through the close examination of a chosen human life. But for the most part biographers work slowly and devotedly at their task, seldom taking less than three or four years to complete it – sometimes even 37 years-and-counting, as for example Robert Caro, preparing to publish, in the United States, the fourth volume of his epic biography of President Lyndon B. Johnson. It is in almost every respect a labor of love, honesty and compassion. Something biographers have been doing since Xenophon, Plutarch and Suetonius.

Telling the real truth about people has never been easy. 'Reputation, reputation, reputation! Oh, I have lost the immortal part of myself!' cries Cassio in *Othello* – and it is the fear about reputation that has led to countless reverses for biographers. Suetonius, author of *The Twelve Caesars*, was exiled from his beloved Rome. In his famous *Historie of the World*, Sir Walter Raleigh warned other writers 'whosever shall follow truth to near the heels, it may happily strike out his teeth' – yet failed to take his own advice, and was executed in part for his impudence towards princes.

The biographer, then, takes on a bold and rigorous challenge every time he or she attempts to record and interpret a real life – not only the challenge of research, but facing the reception of the work. The family of the third U.S. President, Thomas Jefferson, for centuries resisted with fury and disdain the notion that Jefferson had seduced his young slave, Sally Hemings, and had sired some seven children by her. Only recently, in 1998, was a DNA study able to expose the bigotry of denial that had underscored Southern racism, in the United States, for so long. Still today, biographers struggle against defamation

and libel suits, are denied access to archives, refused copyright permission, in attempts by vested interests to thwart them. Were we to open the archives of publishers and authors, we would find them littered with the scars of battles fought – and often lost – in the struggle to tell the truth.

And yet, century after century, decade after decade, year after year, biographers have continued with this truth-telling task – working in the belief that *to tell the truth about one individual is, symbolically, to tell the truth about a whole society*.

That pursuit, that challenge, seems to me to be one of the noblest challenges we have inherited from the Greeks and Romans two thousand years ago: one that goes to the very heart of modern democratic society. Just as we check the time by looking at our watches, so we can measure the health, the freedom, the justice and spirit of a society by looking at how biography is practiced in a country – and received.

For good or ill, we live in an age of individualism – one in which every individual is encouraged to believe that he or she counts, and has a life worth living. Biography, as the patient record of the individual, is today more appreciated, and is more important to the health of our society, than ever before. ‘I esteem biography’, said the father of modern biography, Dr. Samuel Johnson, ‘as giving us what comes near to ourselves, what we can put to use.’ The kind of biography Dr. Johnson practiced and preached two hundred and fifty years ago is sweeping the globe, as individuals choose to tell the truth about the lives of their rulers, for example, past and present.

It has been my privilege to attend the award of the biennial Erik Hazelhoff Roelfzema Prize for Biography here in Holland this year – and to see with my own eyes how biography thrives in this land: in its output and its readers; in bookstores and in university studies; in journals and in public discourse. As former President of Biographers International Organization (BIO), it has also been my privilege, moreover, to watch the pursuit of biography spreading to more and more countries. It is time, I earnestly believe, to reward that patient, global endeavor, not with money, but by a recognition of how important biography has become in our society – in fact, how bereft our society would be without it. My proposal is therefore this: that we found a Nobel Prize for Biography, open to biographers across the world.

In funding the original Nobel Prizes, Alfred Nobel wished to reward those who confer the ‘greatest benefit to mankind’. Biography has been conferring that benefit for two millennia. What better way to honor and inspire the seeking of the truth about real individuals across the continents than to create such a Nobel award for Biography? In an age of such great human potential, but also of such great danger from reckless individuals, what better way to show that truth *matters* – here, abroad, and across the globe?

Bibliography

- Aaron, Daniel, ed., *Studies in Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).
- Aboites, Luis, *La revolución mexicana en Espita, 1910–1940: Microhistoria de la formación del Estado de la revolución* (Tlalpan: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 1982).
- Abrams, M.H., *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed. (Fort Worth: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1988).
- Ackroyd, Peter, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990).
- Ackroyd, Peter, *Blake* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995).
- Ackroyd, Peter, *T.S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984).
- Ackroyd, Peter, *Chatterton* (New York: Grove Press, 1987).
- Adorno, Theodor, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 1974, original 1951).
- Adorno, Theodor W., *Il gergo dell'autenticità [Jargon der Eigentlichkeit: Zur deutschen Ideologie]* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1989).
- Aldridge, A. Owen, 'Problems in Writing the Life of Voltaire: Plural Methods and Conflicting Evidence', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 5–22.
- Allen, Grant, 'Nation Making', in: *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1878 (in: *Popular Science Monthly Supplement*, 1878, p. 121–126).
- Allen, Grant, 'The Genesis of Genius', in: *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1881, XLVI, p. 371–381.
- Allen, Richard, and Malcolm Turvey ed., *Wittgenstein, Theory, and the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- Amigoni, David, 'Distinctively queer little morsels: Imagining distinction, groups, and difference in the *DNB* and the *ODNB*', in: *Journal of Victorian Culture* 10(2005)2, p. 279–288.
- Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso Editions, 1983).
- Anderson, Linda, ed., *Creative Writing: a workbook with readings* (London: Routledge/Open University, 2006).
- Ankersmit, F.R., 'Historiography and Postmodernism', in: *History and Theory* 28(1989)2, p. 137–153.
- Appleby, Joyce, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994).
- Arenal, Electa, and Stacey Schlau, *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works*, trans. Amanda Powell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989).

- Arendt, Hannah, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1961).
- Arendt, Hannah, and Karl Jaspers, *Briefwechsel 1926–69* (München: Piper, 1985), Engl. trans. *Correspondence 1926–1969* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonovich Publishers, 1992).
- Ariès, Philippe, and Michel Winock, *Un Historien du dimanche* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).
- Ascher, Carol, Louise De Salvo, and Sara Ruddick ed., *Between Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
- Assouline, Pierre, *Lutetia. Roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).
- Atkinson, Juliette, *Victorian Biography Reconsidered. A Study of Nineteenth-Century 'Hidden' Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Atkinson, Rick, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007).
- Ayer, A.J., 'One's Knowledge of Other Minds', in: D.F. Gustafson ed., *Essays in Philosophical Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1967).
- Backus, Joseph M., 'Interview: George R. Stewart on Names of His Characters', in: *Names* 9(1961), p. 53–57.
- Baggerman, Arianne, and Rudolf Dekker, *Child of the Enlightenment: Revolutionary Europe Reflected in a Boyhood Diary*, trans. Dianne Webb (Boston: Brill, 2009).
- Banta, Martha, *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen and Ford* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- Banti, Alberto M., 'Storie e microstorie: L'histoire sociale contemporaine en Italie [1972–1989]', trans. Susanna Magri, in: *Genèses: sciences sociales et histoire* 3(1991)3, p. 134–147.
- Barbey d'Aureville, *Les Ridicules du temps* (Paris: Éd. Rouveyre et G. Blond, 1883, 7th reprint Paris, Phénix Éditions, 2003).
- Barceló, Elia, *Bal Masqué* (Amsterdam: Q, 2007, original Madrid, Disfraces Terribles, 2004).
- Baron, Samuel H., and Carl Pletsch ed., *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self-Awareness* (Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1985).
- Barthes, Roland, 'The Death of the Author', in: *Aspen* (1967)5–6 ('La mort de l'auteur', in: *Mantéia* (1968)5, p. 12–17).
- Bateson, Gregory, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Chandler Publishing Company, 1972).
- Battaglia, Salvatore, ed., *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1961–1978).
- Becker, Howard S., *Sociological Work. Method and Substance* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1970).
- Beeler, Madison S., 'George R. Stewart, Toponymist', in: *Names* 24(1976), p. 77–85.
- Behar, Ruth, 'Rage and Redemption: Reading the Life Story of a Mexican Marketing Woman', in: *Feminist Studies* 16(1990)2, p. 223–258.

- Bender, Thomas, 'Strategies of Narrative Synthesis in American History', in: *American Historical Review* 107(2002)1, p. 129–153.
- Benesch, Otto, *Der Maler Albrecht Altdorfer* (Vienna: Scholl, 1939).
- Benstock, Shari, 'Authorizing the Autobiographical', in: Shari Benstock ed., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
- Béraud, Henri, *Ce que j'ai vu à Moscou* (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1925).
- Béraud, Henri, *Ce que j'ai vu à Berlin* (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1926).
- Béraud, Henri, *Le Flâneur salarié* (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1927).
- Béraud, Henri, *Ce que j'ai vu à Rome* (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1929).
- Berghahn, Volker R., and Simone Lässig, ed., *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York and London: Berghahn Books, 2008).
- Berkel, Klaas van, *E.J. Dijksterhuis. Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1996).
- Berkhofer, Robert, Jr., *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).
- Berlin, Isaiah, 'The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History', in: Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly ed., *Russian Thinkers* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 22–81.
- Berr, Henri, 'La méthode statistique et la question des grands hommes', *Nouvelle Revue* 1 and 15 June 1890.
- Bertaux, Daniel, 'From the Life-History Approach to the Transformation of Sociological Practice', in: Daniel Bertaux ed., *Biography and Society. The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1981).
- Besemeres, Mary, and Maureen Perkins, 'Editorial', in: *Life Writing* 1(2004)1, p. vii–xii.
- Bigda-Peyton, Frances, and Gary Alan Fine, 'The Hephaestus Complex: Power Themes in the Life of James Thurber', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)2, p. 37–61.
- Blanning, T.C.W., and David Cannadine, ed., *History and Biography. Essays in Honour of Derek Beales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- Bloch, Marc, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954, original *Apologie pour l'histoire*, 1949).
- Blom, Hans, 'Balans', in: J.C.H. Blom and J. Talsma ed., *De Verzuiling Voorbij. Godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000), p. 201–236.
- Blumer, Herbert, *An Appraisal of Thomas and Znaniecki's 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America'* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1939).
- Bonin, Hubert, 'La biographie peut-elle jouer un rôle en histoire économique contemporaine?', in: François-Olivier Touati and Michel Trebitsch ed., *Problèmes & méthodes de la biographie* (Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, [1985]), p. 167–190.

- Bonnet, Jean-Claude, 'Le fantasme de l'écrivain', in: *Poétique* 16(1985)63, p. 259–278.
- Borges, Jorge Luis, *El hacedor* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1960). Engl. trans. 'On Rigor in Science', in: Jorge Luis Borges, *Dreamtigers* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).
- Boucharenc, Myriam, *L'Écrivain-reporter au coeur des années trente* (Villeneuve d'Ascq Cédex: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004).
- Bourdeau, Louis, *L'histoire et les historiens. Essai critique sur l'histoire considérée comme science positive* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1888).
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (Genève-Paris: Librairie Droz, 1972).
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 'L'illusion biographique', in: *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 11(1986)62/63, p. 69–72.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Choses dites* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1987).
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *La noblesse d'État. Grandes écoles et esprit de corps* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1989).
- Boureau, Alain, *Histoires d'un historien. Kantorowicz* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).
- Boyd, Ernest, 'Sex in Biography', in: James L. Clifford ed., *Biography as an Art. Selected Criticism 1560–1960* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 141–143.
- Boyer, Paul, *Chez Tolstoï: Entretiens à Iasnaïa Poliana* (Paris: Institut d'Études Slaves, 1950).
- Boyer, Paul, and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Solem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).
- Bradbury, Malcolm, 'The Telling Life: Some Thoughts on Literary Biography', in: Eric Homberger and John Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography*, (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 131–140.
- Braudel, Fernand, 'Histoire et sociologie', in: Georges Gurvitch ed., *Traité de sociologie*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1958–1960), Vol. 1.
- Braudel, Fernand, *Écrits sur l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969).
- Braudel, Fernand, *Le Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949); trans. Siân Reynolds, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).
- Braudel, Fernand, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- Breitman, Richard, *Heinrich Himmler. The architect of genocide: Himmler and the final solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991).
- Brett, Judith, *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1992).
- Brodski, Bella, and Celeste Schenck ed., *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).
- Brossard, Nicole, *La lettre aérienne* (Montreal: Remue-ménage, 1985).
- Brossard, Nicole, *Lovhers*, trans. Barbara Godard (Montreal: Guernica, 1986, original 1980).

- Brown, Richard D., *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1600–1865* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).
- Brown, Richard D., *Knowledge is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700–1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- Brown, Richard D., *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650–1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).
- Brown, Wendy, 'Feminist Hesitations, Postmodern Exposures', in: *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 3(1991)1, p. 63–83.
- Brown, Wendy, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).
- Buckle, Henry Thomas, *History of Civilization in England* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1858).
- Buijnsters, P.J., *Levens van beruchte Personen. Over de criminele biografie in Nederland gedurende de 18^e eeuw* (Utrecht: H&S Publishers, 1980).
- Burke, Peter, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1991).
- Burke, Peter, 'Overture: The New History, Its Past and Its Future', in: Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1991), p. 1–23.
- Burke, Peter, *What is Cultural History?* (London: Polity Press, 2004).
- Butler, Judith, 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse', in: Linda J. Nicholson ed., *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 324–340.
- Byatt, A.S., *The Biographer's Tale* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000).
- Caine, Barbara, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- Caldwell, John, *George R. Stewart* (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1981).
- Calvino, Italo, *Il sistema periodico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975).
- Calvino, Italo, *Segni, cifre e lettere e altrisaggi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981).
- Calvino, Italo, 'Piccola guida alla *Piccola cosmogonia*', in: Raymond Queneau, *Piccola cosmogonia portatile*, trans. Sergio Solmi (Turin: Einaudi, 1982), p. 162.
- Calvino, Italo, *Il barone rampante* (Milan: Garzanti, 1985).
- Calvino, Italo, 'Ricordo di una battaglia', in: Italo Calvino, *La strada di San Giovanni* (Milan: Mondadori, 1990).
- Calvino, Italo, *I libri degli altri: Lettere, 1947–1981*, Giovanni Tesio ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1991).
- Cases, Cesare, *Opere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987–1990), Vol. I.
- Castan, Nicole, 'Publiek en particulier', in: Roger Chartier ed., *Geschiedenis van het persoonlijk leven. Van de renaissance tot de Verlichting* (Amsterdam: Agon, 1989, original 1986).
- Certeau, Michel de, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

- Cerutti, Simona, *La Ville et les métiers: Naissance d'un langage corporatif* (Turin, 17^e–18^e siècles) (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 1990).
- Cesari, Severino, *Colloquio con Giulio Einaudi* (Rome: Theoria, 1991).
- Charachidze, Georges, *La Mémoire indo-européenne du Caucase* (Paris: Hachette, 1987).
- Chartier, Roger, 'Intellectual History or Sociocultural History? The French Trajectories', in: Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan ed., *Modern European Intellectual History. Reappraisals & New Perspectives* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 13–46.
- Chartier, Roger, *La rappresentazione del sociale. Saggi di storia culturale* (Turin, Bollati Boringhieri, 1989).
- Chartier, Roger, *On the Edge of the Cliff. History, Language, and Practices* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
- Châtelet, François, *La naissance de l'histoire* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1962).
- Chaunu, Pierre, 'Un Nouveau Champ pour l'histoire sérielle: Le Quantitatif au troisième niveau', in: *Méthodologie de l'histoire et des sciences humaines*, Vol. 2 of *Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel* (Toulouse: Privat, 1973), p. 105–125.
- Chaunu, Pierre, 'Le Fils de la morte', in: Pierre Nora, *Essais d'ego-histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).
- Chiaromonte, Nicola, *Credere o non credere* (Milan: Il Mulino, 1971).
- Chorus, A., *Het beeld van de mens in de oude biografie en hagiografie* (The Hague: Leopold, 1962).
- Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- Clark, Axel, 'Academics lose themselves in foul verbal swamps', in: *Sydney Morning Herald* 7 November 1981.
- Clifford, James L., ed., *Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism 1560–1960* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962).
- Clifford, James L., *From Puzzles to Portraits* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970).
- Cobb, Richard, *A Sense of Place* (London: Duckworth, 1975).
- Cobb, Richard, *Raymond Queneau* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).
- Codell, Julie F., 'Biographical Dictionaries', in: Margaretta Jolly, *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London [etc.]: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. 107–108.
- Cohn, Dorrit, 'Fictional versus Historical Lives: Borderlines and Borderline Cases', in: *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 19(1989)1, p. 3–24.
- Cole, John Y., ed., *Biography and Books* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1986).
- Coleman, Linda S., *Public Self, Private Self: Women's Life-Writing in England, 1570–1720* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, 1986).

- Coppes, Eugène, 'Van familiegeschiedenis naar allemans verleden. Ervaringen van een familiehistoricus', in: Paul Klep, Carla Hoetink & Thijs Emons ed., *Persoonlijk Verleden. Over geschiedenis, individu en identiteit* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2005).
- Cornell, Saul, 'Reflections on "The Late Remarkable Revolution in Government": Aedanus Burke and Samuel Bryan's Unpublished History of the Ratification of the Federal Constitution', in: *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 112(1988)1, p. 103–130.
- Corbin, Alain, *Le monde retrouvé de Louis-François Pinagot, sur les traces d'inconnu, 1798–1876* (Paris: Flammarion, 1998).
- Corino, Karl, *Musil: eine Biographie* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2003).
- Couser, G. Thomas, 'Genre Matters: Form, Force, and Filiation', in: *Life Writing* 2(2005)2, p. 139–156.
- Couser, G. Thomas, *Memoir: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Crapanzano, Vincent, *Tuhami. Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- Crick, Bernard, *George Orwell: A Life* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980, reprinted Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).
- Croce, Benedetto, *History: Its Theory and Practice*, trans. Douglas Ainslie (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960, original 1915).
- Darnton, Robert, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
- Davies, Alan, *Essays in Political Sociology* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1972).
- Davies, Godfrey, 'Biography and History', in: *Modern Language Quarterly* 1(1940)1, p. 79–94.
- Debenedetti, Giacomo, *Il personaggio uomo* (Milan: Editore Garzanti, 1970).
- Del Col, A., *Domenico Scandella Known as Menocchio. His Trials Before the Inquisition (1583–1599)*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996).
- Derrida, Jacques, 'La Loi du genre/The Law of Genre', in: Jacques Derrida, *Glyph* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 176–232.
- Deursen, A. Th. van, *Een dorp in de polder: Graft in de zeventiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1994). German trans.: *Graft: ein Dorf im 17. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1997).
- Di Bella, Maria Pia, Michel Bée, Raffaella Comaschi, Lucette Valensi, and Michelle Perrot, 'Fait divers, fait d'histoire', in: *Annales ESC* 38(1983)4, p. 821–919 (introduction by Marc Ferro).
- Dikovich, Albert, 'Dem "ursprünglichen Entwurf" auf der Spur. Die biographischen Hermeneutik Jean-Paul Sartres', in: Bernhard Fetz and Wilhelm Hemecker ed., *Theorie der Biographie. Grundlagentexte und Kommentar* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), p. 247–256.

- Dilthey, Wilhelm, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bernard Groethuysen ed. (Stuttgart/Göttingen: Teubner/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1927, original 1910) Vol. VII., Engl. trans. in: Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings*, H.P. Rickman ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
- Donaldson, Ian, 'Matters of Life and Death: The Return of Biography', in: *Australian Book Review* no. 286, November 2006, p. 23–29.
- Dosse, François, *Le pari Biographique. Écrire une vie* (Parijs: Éditions la Découverte, 2005).
- Dowling, William C., 'Boswell and the Problem of Biography', in: Daniel Aaron ed., *Studies in Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
- Droysen, Johann Gustav, *Texte zur Geschichtstheorie. Mit ungedruckten Materialien zur 'Historik'*, G. Birtsch and J. Rüsen ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972).
- Droysen, Johann Gustav, *Historik. Die Vorlesungen von 1857*, P. Leyh ed. (Stuttgart and Bad Canstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977).
- Duby, Georges, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines, 27 juillet 1214* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985, original 1973).
- Duby, Georges, 'Woord vooraf bij de Geschiedenis van het persoonlijk leven', in: Paul Veyne ed., *Geschiedenis van het persoonlijk leven. Van het Romeinse Rijk tot het jaar duizend* (Amsterdam: Agon, 1987, original 1985), p. 6–7.
- Dugain, Marc, *La Malédiction d'Edgar* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2005).
- Durkheim, Émile, *Le rôle des grands hommes dans l'histoire* (1883), in: *Textes. 1. Éléments d'une théorie sociale* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1975).
- Durkheim, Émile, *Les règles de la méthode scientifique* (Paris: Puf, 1963, original 1895).
- Edel, Leon, *Literary Biography* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957, second edition 1959).
- Edel, Leon, 'The Biographer and Psychoanalysis', in: *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 42(1961)4/5, p. 458–466.
- Edel, Leon, 'Biography: A Manifesto', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 1–3.
- Edel, Leon, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions* (New York: Avon, 1980).
- Edel, Leon, 'Biography and the Science of Man', in: A.M. Friedson ed., *New Directions in Biography* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981), p. 1–11.
- Edel, Leon, *Writing Lives: Principia Biographia* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984).
- Edinger, Lewis J., 'Political Science and Political Biography', in: *The Journal of Politics* 26(1964)2, p. 423–439 and 648–676.
- [Editorial], 'Histoire et sciences sociales: Un tournant critique?', in: *Annales ESC* 43(1988)6, p. 291–293.
- [Editorial], 'Tentons l'expérience', in: *Annales ESC* 44(1989)6, p. 1317–1323.

- Eley, Geoff, 'Labor History, Social History, *Alltagsgeschichte*: Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday – A New Direction for German Social History?', in: *Journal of Modern History* 61(1989)2, p. 297–343.
- Elias, Norbert, *What is Sociology?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978, original 1970).
- Ellis, Joseph J., *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).
- Ellis, Joseph P., 'Playing the Role of a Lifetime', in: *Guardian Weekly* 14–20 October 1999.
- Ellmann, Richard, *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973).
- Enschédé, J.W., *A.C. Kruseman*, Vol. 2 1863–1894 (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen & Zoon, 1902).
- Enzensberger, Hans Magnus, 'Letteratura come storiografia', in: *Il Menabò* 7(1966)9, p. 7–22.
- Epstein, William H., 'Recognizing the Life-Text: Towards a Poetics of Biography', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 6(1983)4, p. 283–306.
- Epstein, William H., *Recognizing Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987).
- Everbroeck, Christine van, *August Borms. Zijn leven, zijn oorlogen, zijn dood. De biografie* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: Meulenhoff/Manteau, 2005).
- Farrell, Nicholas, *Mussolini: A New Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2003).
- Fellini, Federico, *Comments on Film* (Fresno, Calif.: California State University, 1988, original 1983).
- Fellman, Susanna, and Marjatta Rahikainen ed., *Historical Knowledge. In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).
- Ferro, Marc, 'La biographie, cette handicapée de l'histoire', in: *Le Magazine littéraire*, avril 1989.
- Fest, Joachim, *Ich nicht: Erinnerungen an eine Kindheit und Jugend* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 2006).
- Fetz, Bernhard, and Hannes Schweiger, ed., *Die Biographie. Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).
- Fetz, Bernhard, and Wilhelm Hemecker, ed., *Theorie der Biographie. Grundlagentexte und Kommentar* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011).
- Field, Andrew, *Nabokov: His Life in Part* (New York: Viking Press, 1977).
- Fiske, John, 'Sociology and hero-worship', in: *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1881, p. 81.
- Foa, Vittorio, *La Gerusalemme rimandata: Domande di oggi agli Inglesi del primo Novecento* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1985).
- Forster, Margaret, 'Woman to Woman', in: Teresa Iles ed., *All Sides of the Subject: Women and Biography* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), p. 126–133.

- Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1978).
- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth, 'To Write My Self: The Autobiographies of Afro-American Women', in: Shari Benstock ed., *Feminist Issues in Literature Scholarship* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 161–180.
- France, Anatole, *La Vie littéraire* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1888).
- France, Peter, and William St. Clair, ed., *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford/New York: The British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Friedson, Anthony M., [review Leon Edel, *Literary Biography*], in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 83–86.
- Frugoni, Arsenio, *Arnaldo da Brescia nelle fonti del secolo XII* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989, original 1954).
- Furet, François, and Jacques Le Goff, 'Histoire et ethnologie', in: *Méthodologie de l'histoire et des sciences humaines*, Vol. 2 of *Mélanges en l'honneur de Fernand Braudel* (Toulouse: Privat, 1973), p. 227–243.
- Furet, François, 'Pour une définition des classes inférieures à l'époque moderne', in: *Annales ESC* 18(1963)3, p. 459–474.
- Furetière, Antoine, and Etienne Souciet, *Dictionnaire universel François et latin*, eight volumes (Paris: La Compagnie des Libraires Associés, 1704–1771).
- Gallop, Jane, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
- Garin, Eugenio, 'Serra e Croce', in: A. Brasini ed., *Scritti in onore di Renato Serra: Per il cinquantenario della morte* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1974).
- Garraty, John, *The Nature of Biography* (London: Knopf, 1957).
- Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
- Gellately, Robert, *Backing Hitler. Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Gentry, Curt, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).
- Giebels, Lambert, *Beel, van vazal tot onderkoning: biografie 1902–1977* (Den Haag: SDU, 1995).
- Ginzburg, Carlo, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, original 1966).
- Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Spie: Radici di un paradigma indiziario', in: Aldo Gargani ed., *Crisi della ragione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979), p. 57–106.
- Ginzburg, Carlo, and Carlo Poni, 'Il nome e il come. Mercato storiografico e scambio diseguale', in: *Quaderni storici* 14(1979)40, p. 181–190. Engl. trans. in Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero ed., *Microhistory & the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
- Ginzburg, Carlo, 'L'Autre moyen age de Jacques Le Goff', [review of *Pour un autre moyen age*, by Jacques Le Goff], in: *Critique* 36(1980)395, p. 345–354.

- Ginzburg, Carlo, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, original 1976).
- Ginzburg, Carlo, *Spurensicherungen: Über verborgene Geschichte, Kunst und soziales Gedächtnis*, trans. Karl Friedrich Hauber (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1983).
- Ginzburg, Carlo, *Indagini su Piero: Il Battesimo, il ciclo di Arezzo, la Flagellazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper, *The Enigma of Piero della Francesca: The Baptism, the Arezzo Cycle, the Flagellation* (London: Verso, 1985).
- Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', in Carlo Ginzburg, *Myths, Emblems, Clues* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p. 96–125.
- Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Morelli, Freud, and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method', in: Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok ed., *Dupin, Holmes, Peirce: The Sign of Three* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 81–118.
- Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Proofs and Possibilities: In the Margins of Natalie Zemon Davis' *The Return of Martin Guerre*', trans. Anthony Guleratne, in: *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 37(1988), p. 114–127.
- Ginzburg, Carlo, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 96–125.
- Ginzburg, Carlo, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon, 1991, original 1989).
- Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Veranschaulichung und Zitat: Die Wahrheit der Geschichte', in: Fernand Braudel et. al., *Der Historiker als Menschenfresser: Über den Beruf des Geschichtsschreibers* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1990), p. 85–102.
- Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Just One Witness,' in: Saul Friedlander ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 82–96.
- Ginzburg, Carlo, *The Enigma of Piero: Piero della Francesca*, trans. Martin Ryle and Kate Soper (London: Verso, 2002, original 1981).
- Ginzburg, Carlo, 'Spuren einer Paradigmengabelung: Machiavelli, Galilei und die Zensur der Gegenreformation', in: Sybille Krämer, Werner Kogge and Gernot Grube ed., *Spur: Spurenlesen als Orientierungstechnik und Wissenskunst* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2007), p. 257–280.
- Gittings, Robert, *The Nature of Biography* (London: Heinemann, 1978).
- Goldhagen, Daniel, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).
- Golding, William, *The Paper Man* (San Diego, Calif., Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1984).
- Goldsmith, Elizabeth C., ed., *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989).
- González y González, Luis, *Pueblo en vilo: Microhistoria de San José de Gracia* (Guanajuato, Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1968).

- González y González, Luis, *Invitación a la microhistoria* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1973).
- González y González, Luis, *Les Barrières de la solitude: Histoire universelle de San José de Gratia, village mexicain*, trans. Anny Meyer (Paris: Plon, 1977).
- González y González, Luis, 'De la múltiple utilización de la historia,' in: Carlos Pereyra ed., *Historia para que?* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1990, original 1980).
- González y González, Luis, *Nueva invitación a la microhistoria* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982).
- Gothein, Eberhard, *Die Aufgaben der Kulturgeschichte* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1889).
- Gould, Warwick, and Thomas Staley ed., *Writing the Lives of Writers* (London and New York: Macmillan and St Martin's Press, 1998).
- Gray, Marion W., 'Microhistory as Universal History,' in: *Central European History* 34(2001)3, p. 419–431.
- Greer, Germaine, *Shakespeare's Wife* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).
- Grendi, Edoardo, 'Micro-analisi e storia sociale,' in: *Quaderni storici* 12(1977)35, p. 506–520.
- Grendi, Edoardo, 'Lo storico e la didattica incosciente (replica a una discussione),' in: *Quaderni storici* 16(1981)46, p. 338–346.
- Greven, Philip, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).
- Gross, Robert A., *The Minuteman and their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976).
- Guenée, Bernard, *Entre l'Église et l'État. Quatre vies de prélats français à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).
- Hähner, Olaf, *Historische Biographik. Die Entwicklung einer geschichtswissenschaftlichen Darstellungsform von der Antike bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999).
- Halpern, Jeanne W., 'Biographical Images: Effects of Formal Features On the Way We See a Life,' in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)4, p. 1–14.
- Hamilton, Nigel, *Biography: A Brief History* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2007).
- Hamilton, Nigel, *How To Do Biography: A Primer* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2008).
- Harrison, Brian, 'A Slice of Their Lives: Editing the DNB, 1882–1999,' *English Historical Review* 119(2004)484, p. 1179–1201.
- Hartsock, John C., *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).
- Haslem, Sara, and Derek Neale, *Writing Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).
- Haslem, Sara, and Derek Neale, *Life Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

- Hawkins, Harriett, *Classics and Trash: Tradition, and Taboos in High Literature and Popular Modern Genres* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).
- Hawthorne, Julian, 'Journalism the Destroyer of Literature', in: *The Critic* 48(1906) february, p. 166–177.
- Hay, Denis, *Annalists and Historians. Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Methuen & Co., 1977).
- Hayles, Nancy Katherine, ed., *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1991).
- Hayward, John, *The first part of the life and reign of King Henrie III* (London: E. Alde and T. Judson, 1599).
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G., *Writing a Woman's Life* (London: Women's Press, 1989).
- Hemecker, Wilhelm, ed., *Die Biographie. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009).
- Higham, John, 'The Limits of Relativism: Restatement and Remembrance', in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56(1995)4, p. 669–674.
- Hilbert, Richard A., 'Ethnomethodology and the micromacro order', in: *American Sociological Review* 55(1990)6, p. 794–808.
- Hinz, Evelyn J., ed., *DATA and ACTA: Aspects of Life Writing* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, Mosaic 1987).
- Hoberman, Ruth, 'Biography: General Survey', in: Margaretta Jolly ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London [etc.]: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. 109–112.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, *Primitive Rebels. Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1965, original *Social Bandits and Primitive Rebels*, 1959).
- Hobsbawm, Eric, 'From Social History to the History of Society', in: *Daedalus* 100(1971)1, p. 20–45.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).
- Hoffman, Leonore, and Margo Culley, *Women's Personal Narratives; Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy* (New York: MLA, 1985).
- Hoggart, Richard, *The Uses of Literacy: Changing Patterns in English Mass Culture* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1961).
- Holmes, Richard, *Footsteps: Adventures of a Romantic Biographer* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985).
- Holmes, Richard, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989).
- Holmes, Richard, *Dr Johnson and Mr Savage* (London: Flamingo, 1994).
- Holroyd, Michael, 'Changing Fashions in Biography', in: *The Guardian* 7 November 2009.
- Holt, Thaddeus, *The Deceivers: Allied Military Deception in the Second World War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004).

- Homberger, Eric, and John Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1988).
- Houghton, Walter E., *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830–1870* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957).
- Howell, Roger, Jr., 'Cromwell's Personality: The Problems and Promises of a Psychohistorical Approach', *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 41–60.
- Howes, Craig, and Miriam Fuchs ed., *Teaching life writing texts* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2008).
- Huber, Joan, 'Macro-Micro Links in Gender Stratification', in: Joan Huber ed., *Macro-Micro Linkages in Sociology* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1991).
- Huberts, W.S., *Schrijver tussen daad en gedachte. Leven en werk van George Ketmann Jr. (1898–1970), met een bibliografie* ('s-Gravenhage: Stichting Bibliographia Neerlandica, 1987).
- Hughes, Kathryn, 'The death of life writing', in: *The Guardian* 28 June 2008.
- Huisman, Marijke, Anneke Ribberink, Monica Soeting and Alfred Hornung ed., *Life Writing Matters in Europe* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012).
- Huizinga, Johan, *Cultuurhistorische verkenningen* (Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1929).
- Humboldt, Wilhelm von, *Betrachtungen über die Weltgeschichte*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Behr's Verlag, 1904, original 1814), Vol. 3.
- Humboldt, Wilhelm von, *Betrachtungen über die bewegenden Ursachen in der Weltgeschichte*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* (1904, original 1818).
- Humboldt, Wilhelm von, *Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtsschreibers*, in: *Gesammelte Schriften* (1904, original 1821).
- Hutcheon, Linda, *The Canadian Postmodern* (Oxford: Toronto 1988).
- Hutcheon, Linda, 'Incredulity towards Metanarrative: Negotiating Postmodernism and Feminisms', in: *Tessera* 5(1989)7, p. 39–44.
- Isaacson, Walter, *Einstein. His Life and Universe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).
- James, William, 'Great men and their Environment', *Atlantic Monthly*, 1880.
- James, William, 'The Importance of Individuals', *Open Court*, 1890, republished in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York and London: Longmans, 1897).
- Jay, Martin, 'The Extraterritorial Life of Siegfried Kracauer', in: *Salmagundi* 10/11(1975/1976)31/32, p. 49–106.
- Jay, Martin, 'Adorno and Kracauer: Notes on a Troubled Friendship', in: *Salmagundi* 13(1978)40, p. 42–66.
- Jay, Martin, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

- Jefferson, Ann, *Biography and the Question of Literature in France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Jensen, Meg, 'Introduction. Do You Speak Life Narrative?', in: Meg Jensen and Jane Jordan ed., *Life Writing. The Spirit of the Age and the State of the Art* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).
- Johnson, Barbara, 'Nothing Fails Like Success', in: *SCE Reports #8* (Seattle: Society for Critical Exchange, 1980), p. 7–16.
- Johnson, E.W., and Tom Wolfe ed., *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
- Johnson, Samuel, *Life of Savage*, Clarence Tracy ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971, original 1744).
- Jolly, Margaretta, ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London [etc.]: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001).
- Jolly, Margaretta, 'Editor's Note', in: Margaretta Jolly ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London [etc.]: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. ix–x.
- Jonas, Hans, *Philosophical Essays. From Ancient Creed to Technological Man* (Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 1974).
- Jonge, A.A. de, *Crisis en critiek der democratie. Anti-democratische stromingen en de daarin levende denkbeelden over de staat in Nederland tussen de wereldoorlogen* (Utrecht: HES Uitgevers, 1982, original 1968).
- Kadar, Marlene, ed., *Essays in Life Writing – From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, original 1989).
- Kant, Immanuel, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, in: *Kants Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1902, original 1784). Engl. trans., 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', in: *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- Kantorowicz, Ernst, *The Fundamental Issue: Documents and Marginal Notes on the University of California Loyalty Oath* (San Francisco: Parker Print. Co., 1950).
- Keener, John F., *Biography and the Postmodern Historical Novel* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).
- Kelley, Donald R., *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship. Language, Law and History in the French Renaissance* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970).
- Kendall, Paul Murray, 'Biographical Literature', in: *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago [etc.]: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1984).
- Kenyon, Cecelia M., 'Men of Little Faith: The Antifederalists on the Nature of Representative Government', in: *William and Mary Quarterly* 12(1955)1, p. 3–43.
- Kersten, Dennis, *Travels with fiction in the field of biography. Writing the lives of three nineteenth-century authors* ([Nijmegen]: [n.p., 2011]).

- Klein, Christian, ed., *Grundlagen der Biographik. Theorie und Praxis biographischen Schreibens* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002).
- Klein, Christian, ed., *Handbuch Biographie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2009).
- Klinken, Gerry van, 'Nationale helden in Indonesië', in: Rosemarijn Hoefte, Peter Meel and Hans Renders ed., *Tropenlevens. De (post)koloniale biografie* (Amsterdam and Leiden: Boom/KITLV Uitgeverij, 2008), p. 216–235.
- Kocka, Jürgen, 'Ideological repression and methodological Innovation: Historiography and the Social Sciences in the 1930s and 1940s', in: *History and Memory* 2(1990)1, p. 130–138.
- Konvitz, Josef, 'Biography: The Missing Form in French Historical Studies', in: *European Studies Review* 6(1976)1, p. 9–20.
- Koselleck, Reinhart, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979).
- Kossmann, E.H., *Familiearchief. Notities over voorouders, tijdgenoten en mijzelf* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1998).
- Kossmann, Ernst, and Henk Wesseling, *Briefwisseling 1976–2003* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2009–2010).
- Kramer, Janet, *Europeans* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988).
- Kristeller, Paul Oskar, Introduction, in: Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- Kuhn, Anna K., 'The "Failure" of Biography and the Triumph of Women's Writing: Bettina von Arnim's *Die Gûnderode* and Christa Wolf's *The Quest for Christa T.*', in: Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom ed., *Revealing Lives. Autobiography, Biography, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
- Kupperman, Karen Ordahl, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).
- Kurkov, Andrej, *Smert' postoronnego* (Kiev: Al'terpress, 1996); Engl. trans. Andrey Kurkov, *Death and the penguin* (London: Harvill Press, 1996).
- LaCapra, D., 'Sartre and the question of biography', in: D. LaCapra, *Rethinking intellectual history* (Ithaca [etc.]: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 184–233.
- Lamprecht, Karl, 'Was ist Kulturgeschichte? Beitrag zu einer historischen Empirik', in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (1896–97)1, p. 75–150.
- Landgrebe, Ludwig, *Phänomenologie und Geschichte* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968).
- Langlois, Charles-Victor, and Michel Jean Charles, *Introduction to Historical Research* (New York: H. Holt, 1932, original 1898).
- Lässig, Simone, 'Introduction: Biography in Modern History – Modern Historiography in Biography', in: Berghahn and Lässig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York and London: Berghahn Books, 2008).

- Lauretis, Teresa de, 'Feminist Studies/Critical Studies: Issues, Terms, and Contexts', in: Teresa de Lauretis, *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies, Theories of Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1986), p. 1–19.
- Lauster, Martina, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century. European Journalism and its Physiologies, 1830–1850* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).
- Le Goff, Jacques, 'Les Mentalités: Une Histoire ambiguë', in: Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora ed., *Faire de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974) Vol. 3, p. 76–94.
- Le Goff, Jacques, Roger Chartier, and Jacques Revel ed., *La Nouvelle Histoire* (Paris: Retz, 1978).
- Le Goff, Jacques, 'L'Appétit de l'histoire', in: Pierre Nora ed., *Essais d'ego-histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).
- Le Goff, Jacques, 'The Whys and Ways of Writing a Biography: The Case of Saint Louis', in: *Exemplaria* 1(1989)1, p. 207–225.
- Le Goff, Jacques, 'Comment écrire une biographie historique aujourd'hui?', *Le Débat* (mars-avril 1989)54, p. 48–53.
- Le Goff, Jacques, *Saint-Louis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).
- Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel, 'L'Historien et l'ordinateur' (original 1968), in: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Territoire de l'historien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), trans. Ben Reynolds and Siân Reynolds, 'The Historian and the Computer', in: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
- Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel, *Montaillou: the Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: G. Braziller, 1978).
- Lee, Hermione, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996).
- Lee, Hermione, *Body Parts: Essays on Life-Writing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005).
- Lee, Hermione, *Biography. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- Lee, Sidney, 'The Dictionary of National Biography: A Statistical Account', in: *Dictionary of National Biography*, (63 Vols., 1885–1900), LXIII, p. LXIV.
- Lee, Sidney, *Principles of Biography*, The Leslie Stephen Lecture, Delivered at Senate House, Cambridge, 13 May 1911 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911).
- Leijonhufvud, Alex, *On Keynesian Economics and the Economics of Keynes. A Study in Monetary Theory* (London and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- Lepetit, Bernard, *De l'échelle en histoire*, in: Jacques Revel ed., *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1996).
- Lepore, Jill, 'Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography', in: *The Journal of American History* 88(2001)1, p. 129–144.
- Levenson, J.C., ed., *The Letters of Henry Adams* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982–1988), Vol. 4.
- Levi, Giovanni, *L'eredità immateriale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1985). Engl. trans. *Inheriting Power: the Story of an Exorcist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

- Levi, Giovanni, 'I pericoli del geertzismo', in: *Quaderni storici* 20(1985)58, p. 269–277.
- Levi, Giovanni, *Inheriting Power: The Story of an Exorcist*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
- Levi, Giovanni, 'Les usages de la biographie', in: *Annales ESC* 44(1989)6, p. 1325–1336; Engl. trans. chapter 5 of this volume.
- Levi, Giovanni, 'On Microhistory', in: Peter Burke ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 97–119.
- Levi, Giovanni, 'Documento Amsterdam', unpublished discussion paper for specialized theme Biography and Microhistory at the 21st International Congress of Historical Sciences 2009.
- Levi, Giovanni, 'Microhistory and the Recovery of Complexity', in: Susanna Fellman and Marjatta Rahikainen ed., *Historical Knowledge. In Quest of Theory, Method and Evidence* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), p. 121–132.
- Levi, Primo, *L'altrui mestiere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), p. 150–154 (trans. Raymond Rosenthal, under the title *Other People's Trades* (New York: Summit Books, 1989)).
- Levi, Primo, *The Periodic Table*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Schocken Books, 1984, original 1975).
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 'Histoire et ethnologie', in: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Plon, 1958, original 1949, p. 3–33).
- Lewis, Oscar, *The children of Sanchez: autobiography of a Mexican family* (New York: Random House, 1961).
- Lijphart, Arend, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968).
- Lionnet, Françoise, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1989).
- Lively, Penelope, *According to Mark* (London: Heinemann, 1984).
- Lockridge, Kenneth, *A New England Town, the First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636–1736* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970).
- Loeb Shloss, Carol, *Lucia Joyce: To dance in the wake* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003).
- Londres, Albert, *La Chine en folie* (Paris: A. Michel, 1925).
- Loriga, Sabina, 'Écriture biographique et écriture de l'histoire aux XIXe et XXe siècles', in: *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* 22(2010)45, p. 47–71. Engl. trans. chapter 6 of this volume.
- Löwith, Karl, *Meaning in History. The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949).
- Lüdtke, Alf, ed., *Alltagsgeschichte: Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1989).
- Maass, Léonie, *Het Journal Littéraire de la Haye (1713–1723). De uitwendige geschiedenis van een geleerdentijdschrift* ([Nijmegen]: [s.n.], 2001).

- Macintyre, Ben, *Operation Mincemeat. How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010).
- Madelénat, Daniel, *La biographie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984).
- Maechler, Stefan, *The Wilkomirski Affair: A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York: Schocken Books, 2001).
- Magnússon, Sigurdur Gylfi, “‘The Singularization of History’: Social History and Microhistory within the Postmodern State of Knowledge”, in: *Journal of Social History* 36(2003)3, p. 701–735.
- Magnússon, Sigurdur Gylfi, István M. Sziujártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).
- Maire, Gilbert, *Bergson, mon maître* (Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset, 1935).
- Malamud, Bernard, *Dubin’s Lives* (New York : Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979).
- Malcolm, Janet, *The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes* (London: Picador, 1994).
- Manso, Peter, *Mailer: His Live and Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).
- Marcus, Laura, “‘Enough About You, Let’s Talk About Me’: Recent Autobiographical Writing”, in: *New Formations* 1(1987)1, p. 77–94.
- Marcus, Laura, “The Newness of the “New Biography””, in: Peter France and William St. Clair ed., *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography* (Oxford/New York: The British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 193–218.
- Marshall, Alfred, *Principles of Economics* (London: Macmillan, 1891, 2nd edition, original 1890).
- Martin, Marc, ‘Le Voyage du grand reporter, de la fin du XIXème siècle aux années trente’, in: *Le Temps des Médias* 4(2007)8, p. 99–103.
- Mascia-Lee, Frances E., Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerina Cohen, ‘The Post-modernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective’, in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 15(1989)1, p. 7–33.
- Matthews, Brian, *Louisa* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1987).
- Maurois, André, *Aspects de la biographie* (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1928).
- Mauss, Marcel, ‘Une catégorie de l’esprit humain: la notion de personne, celle de “moi”’, in: Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 8th ed., 1983, original 1938).
- McKillop, Ian, ‘Vignettes: Leavis, Biography and the Body’, in: Gould and Staley ed., *Writing the Lives of Writers*, p. 293–301.
- Meinecke, Friedrich, *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1965, original 1936).
- Merzario, Raul, *Il paese stretto: Strategie matrimoniali nella diocesi di Como secoli XVI–XVIII* (Turin: Einaudi, 1981).
- Meyers, Jan, *Mussert, een politiek leven* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1984).
- Meyers, Jeffrey, ed., *The Craft of Literary Biography* (New York: Schocken, 1985).

- Modjeska, Drusilla, *Poppy* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1990).
- Modjeska, Drusilla, *Stravinsky's Lunch* (Sydney: Picador, 1999).
- Momigliano, Arnaldo, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).
- Momigliano, Arnaldo, *Lo sviluppo della biografia greca* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974).
- Momigliano, Arnaldo, *Fondamenti della storia antica* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984).
- Moneta, Giuseppina, 'La pensée comme écoute de la parole', in: Marisa Zavalloni ed., *L'émergence d'une culture au féminin* (Montreal: Les Éditions Saint-Martin, 1987), p. 101–106.
- Monk, Ray, 'Life without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding', in: *Poetics Today* 28(2007)3, p. 528–570.
- Montaldi, Danilo, *Autobiografie alla leggera* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961).
- Montaldi, Danilo, *Militanti politici di base* (Turin: Einaudi, 1971).
- Moretti, Franco, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 2005).
- Morgan, Kenneth O., 'Writing Political Biography', in: Eric Homberger en John Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography* (Basingstoke [etc.]: Macmillan, 1988), p. 33–48.
- Morris, Edmund, *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1999).
- Mouzelis, Nicos, *Sociological Theory: What Went Wrong? Diagnosis and Remedies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
- Mouzelis, Nicos, *Modern and Postmodern Social Theorizing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- Muir, Edward, and Guido Ruggiero ed., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).
- Mukherjee, Arun, *Towards an Aesthetic of Opposition* (Stratford, Ont.: Williams-Wallace, 1988).
- Nabokov, Vladimir, *Nikolai Gogol* (Norfolk, Conn.: New Direction Books, 1944).
- Nadel, Ira Bruce, 'Biography and Four Master Tropes', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 6(1983)4, p. 307–315.
- Nadel, Ira Bruce, *Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form* (London, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1984).
- Nagourney, Peter, 'The Basic Assumptions of Literary Biography', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)2, p. 86–104.
- Namier, L.B., *Skyscrapers and Other Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1931, original 1928).
- Nicholl, Charles, *The Lodger: Shakespeare on Silver Street* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).
- Nicolson, Harold, *The Development of English Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1968).

- Noguez, Dominique, *Lénine Dada* (Paris: Laffont, 1989).
- Novarr, David, *The Lines of Life: Theories of Biography, 1880–1970* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1986).
- Nussbaum, Felicity A., *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology In Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).
- Owen, David, *Sickness and in Power: Illness in heads of government during the last 100 Years* (London: Methuen, 2008).
- Painter, Nell Irvin, 'Writing Biographies of Women', in: *Journal of Women's History* 9(1997)2, p. 154–163.
- Parke, Catherine N., *Biography: Writing Lives* (New York: Twayne, 1996).
- Passeron, Jean-Claude, 'Biographies, flux, itinéraires, trajectoires', in: *Revue française de sociologie* 31(1990)1, p. 3–22.
- Paulin, Roger, 'Adding Stones to the Edifice: Patterns of German Biography', in: Peter France and William St Clair ed, *Mapping Lives. The Uses of Biography* (Oxford/New York: The British Academy/Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 103–114.
- Pawel, Ernst, *The Nightmare of Reason: A Life of Franz Kafka*, (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1984).
- Peacock, Sandra J., 'Biography and Autobiography in Eliza Butler's *Sheridan, A Ghost Story*', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 21(1998)4, p. 445–462.
- Peltonen, Matti, 'Carlo Ginzburg and the New Microhistory', in: *Suomen Antropologi* 20(1995)1, p. 2–11.
- Peltonen, Matti, 'Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research', in: *History and Theory* 40(2001)3, p. 347–359.
- Peltonen, Matti, 'On the methodological roots of microhistory' [translated title from original in Russian], in: *History Journal* 2(2011)2, p. 5–10.
- Penn, Nigel, *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth-Century Cape Characters* (Cape Town: David Philip/Verloren, 1999).
- Plas, Michel van der, *Daarom, mijnheer, noem ik mij katholiek. Biografie van Anton van Duinkerken* (Amsterdam/Tielt: Anthos/Lannoo, 2000).
- Plechanov, Gheorghi V., *Über die Rolle der Persönlichkeit in der Geschichte* (Berlin: Verlag Neuer Weg, 1945, original 1898). Engl. trans. *The Role of the Individual in History* (New York: International Publishers, 1940).
- Plutarch, L. Mestrius, *Greek Lives* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- Pomper, Philip, 'Historians and Individual Agency', in: *History and Theory* 35(1996)3, p. 281–308.
- Poniatowska, Elena, *Dear Diego*, trans. Katherine Silver (New York: Pantheon, 1986, original 1978).
- Powell, Sumner Chilton, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1963).

- Presser, J., 'Memoires als geschiedbron', in: *Winkler Prins Encyclopedie* viii (Elsevier: Amsterdam 1958). Reprint: M.C. Brands and M.E.H.N. Mout ed., *Uit het werk van dr. J. Presser* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Genneep, 1969), p. 277–282.
- Pressler, Mirjam, *'Grüße und Küsse an alle': die Geschichte der Familie von Anne Frank* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2009).
- Queneau, Raymond, *Une Histoire modèle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966, original 1942).
- Queneau, Raymond, 'L'histoire dans le roman', in: *Front national* 4-8-1945.
- Queneau, Raymond, *Exercices de style* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).
- Queneau, Raymond, *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965, original 1950).
- Queneau, Raymond, *Les Fleurs bleues* (Paris: Gallimard, [1965]).
- Queneau, Raymond, *Piccola cosmogonia portatile*, trans. Sergio Solmi (Turin: Einaudi, 1982).
- Quételet, Adolphe, *Sur l'homme et le développement de ses facultés ou Essai de physique sociale* (Paris: Bachelier, 1835).
- Rabinow, Paul, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977).
- Raggio, Osvaldo, *Faide e parentele: Lo stato genovese visto dalla Fontanabuona* (Turin: Einaudi, 1990).
- Ragin, Charles C., and Howard S Becker ed., *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- Ramelb, Carol, ed., *Biography East and West. Selected Conference Papers* (Honolulu: College of Languages, Linguistics and Literature, University of Hawaii, 1989).
- Ramella, Franco, *Terra e telai: Sistemi di parentela e manifattura nel Biellese dell'Ottocento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984).
- Rancière, Jacques, *Les mots de l'histoire. Essai de poétique du savoir* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992).
- Rapaport, Herman, 'The New Personalism', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 21(1988)1, p. 36–49.
- Rearick, Charles, *Enlightenment Beyond: Historians and Folklore in Nineteenth-Century France* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1974).
- Redondi, Pietro, *Galileo eretico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), trans. Raymond Rosenthal, under the title *Galileo Heretic* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).
- Renders, Hans, *Zo meen ik dat ook jij bent. Biografie van Jan Hanlo* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1998).
- Renders, Hans, [review John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism. The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst (Mass) 2000], in: [e-zine] *List for Discussion of History and Mass Communication*: JHistory@H-Net.MSU.EDU, 4-11-2002.
- Renders, Hans, and Paul Arnoldussen, 'Toen kwam Colijn binnen. Kaart Abessinië!', in: Hans Renders and Paul Arnoldussen, *Jong in de jaren dertig. Interviews* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2003; original 1999), p. 144–145.

- Renders, Hans, *Wie weet slaag ik in de dood. Biografie van Jan Campert* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2004).
- Renders, Hans, 'Ondernemen als leven. Biografen maken de balans voor Gunning, Verolme en Beyen', in: *De Academische Boekengids* (2006)56 p. 11–13.
- Renders, Hans, 'De biografische methode', in: Gerrit Voerman and Dirk Jan Wolffram ed., *Kossmann Instituut. Benaderingen van de geschiedenis van politiek* (Groningen: Kossmann Instituut, 2006), p. 39–42.
- Renders, Hans, 'Het zelfbewustzijn van de biograaf. Waarom de biografie geen roman is' [The Self-Awareness of Biographers. Why a Biography is Not the Same as a Novel], in: *Zacht Lawijd, cultuur-historisch tijdschrift* 6(2007)2, p. 67–81.
- Renders, Hans, 'Oude levens, nieuwe kwesties. De biografie in Limburg', in: Rob Bindels and Ben van Melick ed., *Oude levens, nieuwe kwesties. Dag van de biografie* (Maastricht: Huis voor de Kunsten Limburg, 2007), p. 14–27.
- Renders Hans, 'Privé in de politieke biografie', in: Hans Renders & Gerrit Voerman, *Privé in de politiek biografie*, Series Biographical Studies (Amsterdam: Boom, 2007), p. 7–13.
- Renders, Hans, 'Actualiteit van biografica', in: *Nieuw Letterkundig Magazijn* 25(2007)1/2, p. 16–23.
- Renders, Hans, 'Mannen van Beteekenis: Ontstaan en groei van de biografie in de 19de eeuw', in: *Geschiedenis Magazine* 42(2007)4, p. 28–32.
- Renders, Hans, *De zeven hoofdzonden van de biografie. Over biografen, historici en journalisten* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008).
- Renders, Hans, 'Did Pearl Harbor Change Everything?: The Deadly Sins of Biographers', in: *Journal of Historical Biography* 1(2008)3, p. 98–123.
- Renders, Hans, 'De biograaf tussen context en actualiteit', in: Wouter Beekers ed., *Christelijk-sociaal in de jaren zestig* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2010), p. 9–16.
- Renders, Hans, and Binne de Haan, 'The limits of representativeness. Biography, life writing and microhistory', in: *Storia della Storiografia* 29(2011)59–60, p. 32–42.
- Revel, Jacques, 'L'Histoire au ras du sol', in: Giovanni Levi, *Le Pouvoir au village: Histoire d'un exorciste dans le Piémont du septième siècle*, trans. Monique Aymard (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. i–xxxiii.
- Revel, Jacques, 'Micro-analyse et reconstitution du social', in: *Ministère de la recherche et de la technologie: Colloque 'anthropologie contemporaine et anthropologie historique'* (1992)2, p. 24–37.
- Revel, Jacques, 'Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social', in: Jacques Revel & Lynn Hunt ed., *Histories. French Constructions of the Past* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 493–502.
- Revel, Jacques, ed., *Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris: Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1996).

- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York: New Accents, Methuen, 1983).
- Roberts, Andrew, *The Storm of War. A New History of the Second World War* (London and New York: Allen Lane, 2009).
- Roberts, Brian, *Micro Social Theory* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave, 2006).
- Robson, Kathryn, *Writing wounds: the inscription of trauma in post-1968 French women's life-writers* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2004).
- Roche, Daniel, ed., *Journal de ma vie. Jacques-Louis Ménétra, compagnon vitrier au 18e siècle* (Paris: Montalba, 1982).
- Rollyson, Carl E., Jr., 'Marilyn: Mailer's Novel Biography', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)4, p. 49–67.
- Rollyson, Carl, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism? Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005).
- Rollyson, Carl, *Biography: An Annotated Bibliography* (Chicago: iUniverse 2007; original 1992).
- Romano, Ruggiero, 'Un Modèle pour l'histoire', in: Andrée Bergens ed., *Raymond Queneau* (Paris: L'Herne, 1975).
- Romein, Jan, *De biografie. Een inleiding* (Amsterdam: Ploegsma, 1946).
- Rose, Jacqueline, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984).
- Roth, Philip, *Exit Ghost* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007).
- Ruiter, Job de, *Jan Donner, jurist. Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2003).
- Runyan, William McKinley, *Life Histories and Psychobiography: Explorations in Theory and Method* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
- Russ, Joanna, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).
- Sabeau, David, *Property, Production and Family in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
- Sabeau, David, *Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Salwak, Dale, ed., *The Literary Biography: Problems and Solutions* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996).
- Sanders, Mathijs, *Het spiegelend venster: katholieken in de Nederlandse literatuur, 1870–1940* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2002).
- Saunders, Max, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Schlanger, Judith, *Les métaphores de l'organisme* (Paris: Vrin, 1971).
- Schnicke, Falko, '1. Begriffsgeschichte: Biographie und verwandte Termini', in: Christian Klein ed., *Handbuch Biographie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2009), p. 1–6.

- Schweickart, Patrocino, 'Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading', in: Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer ed., *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1989), p. 118–141.
- Schweiger, Hannes, and Deborah Holmes, 'Nationale Grenzen und ihre biographischen Überschreitungen', in: Bernhard Fetz and Hannes Schweiger, ed., *Die Biographie. Zur Grundlegung ihrer Theorie* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), p. 385–418.
- Schweiger, Hannes, 'Die Macht der Archive. Zu Michel Foucault: "Das Leben der infamen Menschen"', in: Bernhard Fetz and Wilhelm Hemecker ed., *Theorie der Biographie. Grundlagentexte und Kommentar* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), p. 277–284.
- Schweiger, Hannes, 'Das Leben als U-Bahnfahrt. Zu Pierre Bourdieu: "Die Biographische Illusion"', in: Bernhard Fetz and Wilhelm Hemecker ed., *Theorie der Biographie. Grundlagentexte und Kommentar* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), p. 311–316.
- Scott, Gail, *Spaces like Stairs* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1989).
- Sennett, Richard, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).
- Serra, Renato, 'Partenza di un gruppo di soldati per la Libia', in: Mario Isnenghi ed., *Scritti letterari, morali e politici* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 278–288.
- Serra, Renato, letter to Croce, 11 November 1912, in: *Epistolario di Renato Serra*, p. 459.
- Shelston, Alan, *Biography* (London: Methuen, 1977).
- Sherry, Ruth, *Studying Women's Writing: An Introduction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988).
- Shklovskii, Viktor, *Materiali e leggi di trasformazione stilistica: Saggio su 'Guerra e pace'*, trans. Monica Guerrini (Parma: Pratiche, 1978).
- Shreve, Porter, *The obituary writer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
- Simson, George, *Biography and the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i, 1976–1999* (N.p.: n.p., 2010), rev. ed. of George Simson, 'Biography and the Center for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i, 1976–1999', in: *Biography and Source Studies* 5, ed. Frederick R. Karl (New York: AMS, 2000), p. 61–96.
- Simson, George, [Review of *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography*, by Michael Holroyd], in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 26(2003)1, p. 147–151.
- Simiand, François, 'Méthode historique et science sociale', in: *Revue de synthèse historique* 6(1903)16, p. 1–22 and 6(1903)17, p. 129–157.
- Skidelsky, Robert, 'Only Connect: Biography and Truth', in: Eric Homberger and John Charmley ed., *The Troubled Face of Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1988).
- Slegers, Cees, *Antoon Coolen 1897–1961. Biografie van een schrijver* (Tilburg: Stichting Zuidelijk Historisch Contact Tilburg, 2001).

- Smith, Paul, *Discerning the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
- Smith, Sidonie, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography; Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).
- Smith, Sidonie, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
- Smyth, Denis, *Deathly Deception: The Real Story of Operation Mincemeat* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- Sokoloff, Boris, *Napoleon: A Doctor's Biography* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1937).
- Solow, Robert, *Monopolistic Competition and Macroeconomic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Soulez, Philippe, and Frédéric Worms, *Bergson* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).
- Southgate, Beverly, *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow [etc.]: Longman, 2009).
- Stanley, Liz, 'Process in Feminist Biography and Feminist Epistemology', in: Teresa Iles ed., *All Sides of the Subject: Women and Biography* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), p. 109–125.
- Stanley, Liz, 'The Knowing Because Experiencing Subject: Narratives, Lives and Autobiography', in: *Women's Studies International Forum* 16(1993)3, p. 205–215.
- Stannard, Martin, 'The Necrophiliac Art?', in: Dale Salwak ed., *The Literary Biography: Problems and Solutions* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 32–40.
- Stanton, Domna, 'Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-Connection', in: Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine ed., *The Future of Difference* (New Brunswick, NJ: Barnard College Women's Center, 1980).
- Stanton, Domna, ed., *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- Steedman, Carolyn, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860–1931* (London: Virago, 1990).
- Steedman, Carolyn, *Past Tenses: Essays on Writing, Autobiography and History* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1992).
- Stewart, George R., *Names on the Land* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967, original 1945).
- Stewart, George R., *Man: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1946).
- Stewart, George R., 'The Regional Approach to Literature', in: *College English* 9(1948)7, p. 370–375.
- Stewart, George R., *The Year of the Oath: The Fight for Academic Freedom at the University of California* (Berkeley: Da Capo Press, 1971, original 1950).
- Stewart, George R., *Pickett's Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Attack at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959).
- Stewart, George R., *Not So Rich as You Think* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

- Stewart, George R., *American Place-Names* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).
- Stoianovich, Traian, *French Historical Method: The 'Annales' Paradigm* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976).
- Stone, Lawrence, 'The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History', in: *Past and Present* [28](1979)85, p. 3–24.
- Strachey, Lytton, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918, reprinted Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
- Strachey, Lytton, *Elizabeth and Essex; a tragic history* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948, original 1928).
- Strachey, Lytton, *Portraits in Miniature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1933).
- Suny, Ronald G., 'Back and Beyond: Reversing the Cultural Turn?', in: *American Historical Review* 107(2002)5, p. 1476–1499.
- Taylor, Alan, *American Colonies* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 2001).
- Thérenty, Marie-Ève, *La Littérature au quotidien. Poétiques journalistiques au XIX siècles* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007).
- Thomas, William I., and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (Chicago: The University Chicago Press, 1918–1920).
- Thompson, E.P., *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Allen Lane, 1975).
- Thompson, E.P., *Persons & Politics: Historical Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1994).
- Tiedeman, H., ed., *Mannen van Beteekenis* (Haarlem: Kruseman, 1870).
- Torgovnick, Marianna, 'Experimental Critical Writing', in: *Profession* 13(1990)1, p. 25–27.
- Torres, Felix, 'Du champ des *Annales* à la biographie: réflexions sur le retour d'un genre', in: François-Olivier Touati and Michel Trebitsch ed., *Problèmes & méthodes de la biographie* (Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, [1985]), p. 141–148.
- Touati, François-Olivier, and Michel Trebitsch ed., *Problèmes & méthodes de la biographie* (Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, [1985]).
- Venturi, Franco, *Jeunesse de Diderot (de 1713 à 1753)* (Paris: Albert Skira, 1939).
- Verne, Jules, *Le Tour du monde en quatre-vingt jours* (Paris: Hachette, 1925, original 1872).
- Vossen, Koen, *Vrij vissen in het Vondelpark. Kleine politieke partijen in Nederland 1918–1940* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2003).
- Vovelle, Michel, 'Du quantitatif à l'étude de cas: Théodore Desorgues', in: François-Olivier Touati and Michel Trebitsch ed., *Problèmes et méthodes de la biographie* (Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, [1985]), p. 191–198.
- Vovelle, Michel, 'Histoire sérielle ou "case studies": Vrai ou faux dilemme en histoire des mentalités', in: *Histoire sociale, sensibilités collectives, et mentalités: Mélanges Robert Mandrou* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985), p. 39–49.

- Walter, James, ed., *Reading Life Histories* (Nathan: Griffith University/Institute for Modern Biography, 1981).
- Wartena, Bert, *H. Goeman Borgesius (1847–1917). Vader van de verzorgingsstaat. Een halve eeuw liberale en sociale politiek in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2003).
- Watson, Julia, 'Genealogy', in: Margaretta Jolly ed., *Encyclopedia of life writing: autobiographical and biographical forms* (London [etc.]: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), p. 361.
- Weinberg, Steve, *Telling the Untold Story. How Investigative Reporters Are Changing the Craft of Biography* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1992).
- Wellek, René, and Austin Warren, *Theory of literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948).
- Werkman, Hans, *De wereld van Willem de Mérode*, (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2011; original 1983).
- Whittemore, Reed, *Pure Lives: The Early Biographers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).
- Wilkomirski, Benjamin, *Fragments. Memories of a Wartime Childhood* (New York: Schocken Books, 1996).
- Winchester, Simon, *The meaning of everything. The story of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- Winnett, Susan, 'Coming Unstrung: Women, Men, Narrative, and Principles of Pleasure', in: *PMLA* 105(1990)3, p. 505–518.
- Winslow, Donald J., 'Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing Part I', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)1, p. 61–78.
- Winslow, Donald J., 'Glossary of Terms in Life-Writing Part II', in: *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 1(1978)2, p. 61–85.
- Winslow, Donald J., *LifeWriting. A Glossary of Terms in Biography, Autobiography and Related Forms* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1980, second edition 1995).
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 3rd printing, 1967, original 1953).
- Wood, Gordon S., 'Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution', in: Richard Beeman [et al.] ed., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).
- Wood, Gordon S., *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).
- Wood, Gordon S., 'A Century of Writing Early American History: Then and Now Compared; Or How Henry Adams Got It Wrong', in: *American Historical Review* 100(1995)3, p. 678–696.
- Woolf, Virginia, *Orlando; a biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933, original 1928).
- Woolf, Virginia, *Flush* (London: Harmondsworth [etc.], 1977, original 1933).
- Woolf, Virginia, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Grafton, 1977, original 1929).

- Woolf, Virginia, *Three Guineas* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977, original 1938).
- Zagorin, Perez, 'Historiography and Postmodernism: Reconsiderations', in: *History and Theory* 29(1990)3, p. 263–274.
- Zambelli, Paola, 'From Menocchio to Piero della Francesca: the Work of Carlo Ginzburg', in: *The Historical Journal* 28(1985)4, p. 983–999.
- Zemon Davis, Natalie, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France; eight essays*, (Stanford Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1975).
- Zemon Davis, Natalie, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).
- Zemon Davis, Natalie, 'AHR Forum: The Return of Martin Guerre. On the Lame', in: *American Historical Review* 93(1988)3, p. 572–603.

Index

- Aaron, Daniel 48, 65
Abel, Olivier xviii
Aboites, Luis 141
Abrams, M.H. 196
Ackroyd, Peter 56
Adams, Henry 119–120, 125
Addison, Joseph 36–37
Adorno, Theodor 113, 158
Ainslie, Douglas 159
Albertingk Thijm, J.A. 98
Aldridge, A. Owen 189
Alexander (the Great) xv, 76, 155
Allen, Grant 82
Allen, Richard 3–4
Altdorfer, Albrecht xv, 155–156
Ambrosini, Luigi 159
Amigoni, David 99
Anderson, Benedict 20
Anderson, Linda 181
Anderson, Perry 139
Ankersmit, Frank 161–163
Anscombe, G.E.M. 4
Appleby, Joyce 120–121, 125
Arenal, Electa 199
Arendt, Hannah 75–76
Ariès, Philippe 149–150
Armstrong, Lance 131
Arnin, Bettina von 182
Arnoldussen, Paul 138
Ascher, Carol 51
Assouline, Pierre 32
Atkinson, Juliette 116
Atkinson, Rick 131
Attila (the Hun) 77
Austen, Jane 214
Ayer, A.J. 44
Aymard, Monique 149
- Bach, Johann Sebastian 92
Backus, Joseph M. 140
Baggerman, Arianne 174
Bailyn, Bernard 119
Bakhtin, Mikhail 119
Ballerino Cohen, Colleen 201
Balsem, N.C. 101
- Balzac, Honoré de 27, 91
Banta, Martha 54
Banti, Alberto M. 163
Barbey d'Aurevilly, Jules 27, 40, 96–97
Barceló, Elia 30
Barnes, Julian 181
Baron, Samuel H. 48
Barrie, James 137
Barthes, Roland 14, 49
Bateson, Gregory 89
Battaglia, Salvatore 143
Baudelaire, Charles 28
Beales, Derek 85
Becker, Howard S. 87, 118
Beckett, Samuel 70
Bede (Saint or Venerable) 78
Bée, Michel 142
Beekers, Wouter 131
Beel, Louis 219
Beeler, Madison S. 140
Beeman, Richard 121
Behar, Ruth 195, 197
Bender, Thomas 123
Benedetti, Vincent 95
Benesch, Otto 155
Benstock, Shari 204
Béraud, Henri 32–33
Bergens, Andrée 143
Berger, John 202
Berghahn, Volker R. 115, 193
Bergson, Henri 216
Berkel, Klaas van 223
Berkhofer Jr., Robert 119–120
Berlin, Isaiah 76–77, 154, 162
Berr, Henri 83
Bertaux, Daniel 88
Besemeres, Mary 187
Beyen, J.W. 225
Bigda-Peyton, Frances 189
Bindels, Rob 136
Birtsch, G. 82
Bismarck, Otto von 28, 85, 94–95
Blake, William 56
Blanning, T.C.W. 17, 85
Bloch, Marc 86, 111–112, 148, 157

- Blom, Hans 135
 Blumer, Herbert 87
 Boas, Franz 141
 Boccioni, Umberto xv, 165–166
 Bodei, R. 158
 Bonin, Hubert 88
 Bonnet, Jean-Claude 64
 Borges, Jorge Luis 91
 Borms, August 220–221
 Boswell, James 13, 22, 26, 57, 65
 Boucharenc, Myriam 33
 Bourdeau, Louis 82
 Bourdieu, Pierre 22, 61, 63, 67, 72, 74, 89
 Boureau, Alain 90
 Boyd, Ernest xiii, 213–214
 Boyer, Paul 126, 154
 Bradbury, Malcolm 50
 Brady, Matthew 56, 97
 Brands, M.C. 18
 Brasini, A. 160
 Braudel, Fernand 86, 141–142, 146–149, 164
 Bray, Barbara 111, 148
 Brecht, Bertolt 89
 Breitman, Richard 224
 Brett, Judith 54
 Brink, Jan ten 97
 Brodski, Bella 204
 Brönte (sisters) 214
 Brossard, Nicole 197
 Brown, Irene Q. 119
 Brown, Richard D. xii, xvi, 4, 119–128
 Brown, Wendy 53
 Bruegel, Pieter 155
 Bryan, Samuel 122
 Buckle, Henry Thomas 82
 Buijnsters, P.J. 37, 94
 Burckhardt, Jakob 81
 Burke, Aedanus 122
 Burke, Peter 107, 113, 138, 146, 149, 163, 165
 Burr, Aaron 212
 Bush, George W. xvii, 1
 Bush, George H.W. 1
 Bush, Jeb 1
 Bushman, Richard L. 119
 Butler, Eliza 191
 Butler, Judith 200, 204
 Byatt, A.S. 30
 Caesar 77, 86
 Caine, Barbara 3, 116
 Caldwell, John 140
 Calhoun, John C. 212
 Cals, Jo 218
 Calvino, Italo 143–145, 161–162
 Campert, Jan xviii
 Cannadine, David 17, 85
 Capote, Truman 16
 Carena, Carlo 144
 Carlyle, Thomas 214
 Caro, Robert 232
 Carroll, Lewis (pseudonym of Charles Dodgson) 137
 Carvalho, Otelo Saraiva de 40
 Casanova, Giacomo 215
 Cases, Cesare 144
 Castan, Nicole 231
 Cato (the Elder) 36
 Cendrars, Blaise 32
 Certeau, Michel de 111
 Cerutti, Simona 139, 164
 Cesari, Severino 144
 Charachidze, Georges 142
 Chaunu, Pierre 147–148, 150
 Charles I (King) 78
 Charles XII (King) 78
 Charmley, John 17, 48–50, 219
 Chartier, Roger 73–74, 112, 124, 149, 152, 231
 Châtelet, François 75
 Chatterton, Thomas 56
 Chiaromonte, Nicola 155
 Chopin, Frédéric 214
 Chorus, A. 12
 Churchill, Winston 21, 132
 Cixous, Hélène 50, 197, 201
 Clark, Axel 50
 Clement, Catherine 197, 201
 Cleopatra (VII) 21, 140
 Clifford, James L. 19, 48
 Clinton, Bill xvii, 218
 Cobb, Richard 145–146, 153
 Cochrane, Lydia G. 146
 Codell, Julie F. 96, 99
 Cohn, Dorrit 16, 31
 Cole, John Y. 48
 Coleman, Linda S. 196
 Coleridge, Herbert 99

- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 55
 Colette, Sidonie-Gabrielle 32
 Colijn, Hendrik 138, 218
 Columbus, Christopher 86
 Comaschi, Raffaella 142
 Conan Doyle, Arthur 105, 118
 Conrad, Joseph 48, 158
 Coolen, Anton 225
 Coppes, Eugène 228
 Corbin, Alain 88
 Corino, Karl 38
 Cornell, Saul 122
 Costigliola, Frank 119
 Couser, G. Thomas 173, 185
 Crapanzano, Vincent 71
 Crick, Bernard 53–55
 Cromwell, Oliver 77, 189
 Croce, Benedetto 159–160
 Cruz, Juana I. de la 199
 Culley, Margo 198
 Cullwick, Hannah 52
- Damascius (Philosopher) 12
 Darius III of Persia xv, 155
 Darnton, Robert 112
 Darwin, Charles 83
 David, Jacques-Louis 78
 Davies, Alan 48
 Davies, Godfrey 89
 Davis, Natalie Zemon 68, 88, 111–113,
 115, 126, 160, 162
 Davis, Robert Con 196
 Davison, Emily Wilding 52
 Debenedetti, Giacomo 70
 De Chirico, Giorgio 76
 De Robertis, Giuseppe 159
 De Salvo, Louise 51
 Defoe, Daniel 32
 Dekker, Rudolf 174
 Del Col, A. 154
 Derrida, Jacques 119, 198
 Desorgues, Théodore 67, 69
 Deursen, A.Th. van 228
 Di Bella, Maria Pia 142
 Dickens, Charles 56
 Diderot, Denis 63–65, 69
 Dietrich, Marlene 106
 Dijksterhuis, E.J. 223
- Dikovich, Albert 22
 Dilthey, Wilhelm 6, 22, 75, 91–93
 Dodgson, Charles, *see* Carroll, Lewis
 Donaldson, Ian 180
 Donner, Jan 218
 Dosse, François 217, 221
 Dössekker, Bruno *see* Wilkomirski,
 Benjamin
 Douglass, Frederick 199
 Dowling, William C. 65
 Drees, Willem 218
 Droysen, Johann Gustav 81–82
 Dryden, John 12, 34, 195
 Duby, Georges 126, 149, 155,
 162, 231
 Dugain, Marc 31–32
 Duinkerken, Anton van (pseudonym of
 W.J.M.A. Asselbergs) 135
 Dunk, H.W. von der 231
 Duris (of Samos, historian) 77
 Durkheim, Émile 49, 83
- Eaton, Kate xi
 Eck, Otto van 174
 Eco, Umberto 105
 Edel, Leon 22, 35, 44–45, 47, 49, 53,
 57, 189
 Edinger, Lewis J. 48
 Einaudi, Giulio 139, 144
 Einstein, Albert 41, 172
 Eisenhower, Dwight D. 5
 Eley, Geoff 150
 Elias, Norbert 110
 Eliot, George (pseudonym of Mary Ann
 Evans) 48, 214
 Eliot, T.S. 48, 56
 Ellis, Joseph J. 121
 Ellis, Joseph P. 57
 Ellmann, Richard 48
 Elsschot, Willem (pseudonym of A.J.
 de Ridder) 220
 Emons, Thijs 228, 231
 Enschedé, J.W. 100–101
 Enzensberger, Hans Magnus 76
 Epictetus (Philosopher) 231
 Epstein, William H. 11, 189–190
 Erll, Astrid 20
 Everbroeck, Christine van 220

- Farrell, Nicholas 39
 Febvre, Lucien 86, 148
 Fellini, Federico 155
 Fellman, Susanna 185
 Ferro, Marc 85
 Fest, Joachim 138
 Fetz, Bernhard 19–20
 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb 79–80
 Field, Andrew 56
 Fine, Gary Alan 189
 Firth, Charles 89
 Fiske, John 82–83
 Flaubert, Gustave 22, 181, 219
 Fleming, Ian 130
 Foa, Vittorio 164
 Fogu, Claudio 155
 Forster, Margaret 52, 54
 Foucault, Michel 22, 50, 112, 119
 Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth 204
 France, Anatole 27
 France, Peter xi, 20, 22, 194
 Frank, Anne 174, 230
 Fraser-Smith, Charles 130
 Frederick (the Great) 214
 Freud, Sigmund 43, 45, 50, 105, 118
 Fridenson, Patrick 139
 Friedlander, Saul 159, 163
 Friedson, Anthony M. 19, 45, 49
 Frugoni, Arsenio 160–161
 Fuchs, Miriam 177, 188
 Fuller, Thomas 34
 Furet, François 86, 147–148, 150–153
 Furetière, Antoine 94

 Galilei, Galileo 106, 116, 163
 Gallop, Jane 195, 201, 204
 Gans, Evelien 229
 Gargani, Aldo 105
 Garin, Eugenio 160
 Garraty, John 78
 Gaulle, Charles de 40
 Geertz, Clifford 113–114, 119
 Gellately, Robert 224–225
 Gentry, Curt 31
 Géricault, Théodore 78
 Gibbon, E. 214–215
 Gide, André 48
 Giebels, Lambert 219

 Gilbert, Margaret 119
 Ginzburg, Carlo xii, xvi, 4–5, 70, 89,
 105–108, 110, 112–113, 115–118, 125–126,
 138–166, 173
 Gittings, Robert 48
 Godard, Barbara 197
 Goeman Borgesius, Hendrik 218
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 21
 Gogol, Nikolai 30
 Goldhagen, Daniel 138
 Golding, William 56
 Goldsmith, Elizabeth C. 199
 Goldstein, L.J. 162
 González y González, Luis 141–143,
 146, 164
 Gorgias (Philosopher) 77
 Gothein, Eberhard 84–85
 Gould, Warwick 53, 58
 Gray, Marion W. 126
 Greeley, Horace 212
 Greenblatt, Stephen 39
 Greer, Germaine 38–39
 Grendi, Edoardo 90, 107, 132, 145–146,
 164–165
 Greven, Philip 126
 Griaule, Marcel 147
 Grilli, Alfredo 159
 Groag Bell, Susan 182
 Groethuysen, Bernard 75
 Gross, Robert A. 119, 126
 Grube, Gernot 106
 Guenée, Bernard 88
 Guerre, Martin 68, 115, 126, 160
 Guerrini, Monica 159
 Guneratne, Anthony 160
 Gunning, J.H. 225
 Gurvitch, Georges 141–142
 Gustafson, D.F. 44
 Gutenberg, Johannes 9

 Haan, Binne de xi–xii, xvi, 1–8, 11–23,
 129, 177–194
 Habermas, Jürgen 119, 158
 Hachette, J.G. 100
 Hähner, Olaf 22
 Haimon, Paul (pseudonym of
 L.C.W. Laugs) 136
 Halpern, Jeanne W. 189

- Halttunen, Karen 119
 Hamilton, Nigel viii–x, xiii, xvi–xvii,
 20, 26, 28–29, 36, 98, 180, 185, 232–233
 Hamp, Pierre 32
 Hanlo, Jan xviii, 225
 Hardie, James Keir 219
 Hardy, Henry 77, 154
 Harris, Frank 213–214
 Harrison, Brian 99
 Hartsock, John C. 3, 16
 Haslem, Sara 181
 Hathaway, Ann 38–39
 Hauber, Karl Friedrich 155
 Hawkins, Harriett 198, 200
 Hawthorne, Julian 8
 Hay, Denis 78
 Hayles, N. Katherine 124
 Hayward, John 78
 Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 79, 145
 Heilbrun, Carolyn 51–52
 Hemecker, Wilhelm 19
 Hemings, Sally 232
 Hemingway, Ernest 131, 170
 Henrie III (King) 78
 Herder, Johann Gottfried 92
 Herodotus (Historian) 146
 Herzberg, Abel 229
 Hesse, Hermann 1
 Heuven Goedhart, G.J. van 226
 Higham, John 124
 Hilbert, Richard A. 109
 Himmler, Heinrich 224
 Hintze, Otto 85
 Hitler, Adolf 39, 76–77, 129, 131, 138, 157,
 172, 220, 224
 Hoberman, Ruth 12
 Hobsbawm, Eric 45, 51, 110–111
 Hoefte, Rosemarijn 20
 Hoetink, Carla 228, 231
 Hoffman, Leonore 198
 Hoggart, Richard 87
 Holmes, Deborah 20
 Holmes, Richard 55–57, 181
 Holroyd, Michael 2, 171–172, 186
 Holt, Thaddeus 131
 Homberger, Eric 17, 48–50, 219
 Hoover, J. Edgar 31, 41
 Hornung, Alfred 184
 Houghton, Walter E. 174
 Howe, Daniel Walker 119
 Howell, Roger 189
 Howes, Craig 177, 188, 190–191
 Huber, Joan 109
 Huberts, Willem 219
 Hughes, Kathryn 116
 Hugo, Victor 27, 97
 Huisman, Marijke 184
 Huizinga, Johan 30
 Humboldt, Wilhelm von 80–81, 93
 Hume, David 78
 Hunt, Lynn 113, 120–121
 Huret, Jules 40–41
 Hutcheon, Linda 197, 201
 Iles, Teresa 52
 Isaacson, Walter 41
 Isnenghi, Mario 159, 161
 Jacob, Margaret 120–121
 Jacoby, Hans 137–138
 James, Henry 35
 James, William 83
 Jameson, John Franklin 120
 Jarry, Alfred 31
 Jaspers, Karl 76
 Jay, Martin 157–158, 164
 Jedin, Hubert 157
 Jefferson, Ann 30, 37, 97–98
 Jefferson, Thomas 121, 232
 Jensen, Meg 182
 Johnson, Barbara 201, 204
 Johnson, E.W. 16
 Johnson, Lyndon B. 232
 Johnson, Samuel 13, 15, 22, 26, 56–57,
 65, 203, 233
 Jolly, Margaretta 12, 18, 96, 179, 194, 228
 Jonas, Hans 75
 Jonge, A.A. de 219
 Jordan, Jane 182
 Joyce, James 41, 48, 66, 223
 Joyce, Lucia 223
 Kadar, Marlene xii, xvii, 3, 182, 195–205
 Kafka, Franz 32
 Kant, Immanuel 79–80, 158
 Kantorowicz, Ernst 90, 139–140
 Kaplan, Steven L. 112, 152
 Karl, Frederick R. 20

- Keaton, Buster 192
 Keener, John F. 16
 Kelley, Donald R. 78
 Kelly, Aileen 77, 154
 Kendall, Paul Murray 13
 Kennedy, John F. xvii
 Kennedy, Jacqueline 22
 Kenyon, Cecelia M. 121
 Kersten, Dennis 16
 Kessel, Joseph 32
 Kettmann, George 219–220
 Keynes, John Maynard 108
 Klein, Christian 12, 19–20, 230
 Klep, Paul 228, 231
 Klinken, Gerry van 20
 Kocka, Jürgen 84
 Kogge, Werner 106
 Kojève, Alexandre 145
 Konvitz, Josef 85
 Koselleck, Reinhart 75, 155
 Kossmann, Alfred 225
 Kossmann, Ernst 170, 225
 Kracauer, Siegfried 156–158, 162, 164
 Kramer, Janet 40–41
 Krämer, Sybille 106
 Kristeller, Paul Oskar 156–157
 Kruseman, A.C. 94, 99–101
 Kuhn, Anna K. 182
 Kuhn, Thomas S. 105
 Kupperman, Karen Ordahl 124
 Kurkov, Andrej 30
- Lacan, Jacques 50, 201, 204
 LaCapra, D. 22, 112, 152
 Lady Di (Diana Spencer) 22
 Lamartine, Alphonse de 27
 Lamprecht, Karl 83–84
 Landgrebe, Ludwig 79
 Langlois, Charles-Victor 111
 Lässig, Simone 115–116, 193
 Lauretis, Teresa de 200
 Lauster, Martina 34
 Lawson, Louisa 56
 Le Goff, Jacques 35, 86, 88, 147–149,
 151, 153
 Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel 6, 86, 111–112,
 114, 126, 148, 162
 Lee, Hermione 20, 58, 179–181
 Lee, Sidney xv, 24–25, 99
- Leijonhufvud, Axel 108
 Lenin, Vladimir 31
 Lepetit, Bernard 90
 Lepore, Jill 7, 115
 Lermolieff, Ivan *see* Morelli, Giovanni
 Leuilliot, Paul 141
 Levenson, J.C. 120
 Levi, Giovanni xi, xvii, 4–5, 61–74, 89–91,
 106–107, 110, 112, 115, 133, 138–139, 144–146,
 149, 162, 164–165, 185
 Levi, Primo 143
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude 141–142, 144, 147, 151
 Lewes, George Henry 214
 Lewis, Oscar 87
 Ley, P. 82
 Lijphart, Arend 134–135
 Lionnet, Françoise 204
 Lively, Penelope 56
 Lockridge, Kenneth 126
 Loeb Shloss, Carol 223
 Londres, Albert 32
 Lorde, Audrey 200
 Loriga, Sabina xi, xvii, 4, 75–93
 Losev, A. 141
 Louis IX of France (Saint Louis) 86
 Louis XIV (King) 78
 Löwith, Karl 79
 Lüdtke, Alf 150
 Lukács, Georg 158
- Maass, Léonie 97
 Mac Orlan, Pierre 32
 Machiavelli, Niccolò 106
 Macintyre, Ben 129, 131, 133
 Madelénat, Daniel 12
 Maechler, Stefan 175
 Magnússon, Sigurdur Gylfi xiv, 6, 132
 Magri, Susanna 163
 Mailer, Marilyn 189
 Mailer, Norman 16
 Maire, Gilbert 216
 Malamud, Bernard 31, 56
 Malcolm, Janet 49
 Mandrou, Robert 152
 Manso, Peter 51
 Marcenaro, Pietro 164
 Marcus, Laura 52, 194
 Marshall, Alfred 108
 Martin, Marc 33

- Martin, William (= Glyndwr Michael) 130
- Marx, Karl 41, 79
- Mascia-Lees, Frances E. 201
- Matthews, Brian 56–57
- Matthews, Sarah 142
- Maurois, André xv, 45–46, 214
- Maurras, Charles 149
- Mauss, Marcel 63
- McK. Runyan, W. 48
- McKillop, Ian 58
- McMillan, Margaret 53
- Meel, Peter 20
- Meijer, Jaap 229
- Meinecke, Friedrich 78
- Melick, Ben van 136
- Ménétra, Jacques-Louis 68
- Menocchio (Domenico Scandella) 70, 89, 106, 154
- Menzies, Robert 54
- Mérode, Willem de 135
- Merzario, Raul 145
- Meyer, Anny 143
- Meyers, Jan 220
- Meyers, Jeffrey 48
- Michael, Glyndwr *see* Martin, William
- Michaud, Louis-Gabriel 37, 99
- Michelangelo (di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni) 211
- Michelet, Jules 41
- Mill, John Stuart 215
- Mirecourt, Eugène de 27, 100
- Modjeska, Drusilla 57–58
- Mohammed (Prophet) 77
- Momigliano, Arnaldo 12, 61, 77
- Moneta, Giuseppina 202
- Monk, Ray 4, 15
- Monroe, Marilyn 132
- Mont, Pol de 98
- Montaldi, Danilo 87
- Montgomery, Bernard xvii, 130, 132
- Morelli, Giovanni (pseudonym of Ivan Lermolieff and Johannes Schwarze) 105, 117, 138
- Moreri, Louis 99
- Moretti, Franco 118
- Morgan, Kenneth O. 48, 219
- Morris, Edmund 57
- Mout, M.E.H.N. 18
- Mouzelis, Nicos 109
- Muir, Edward 106, 125–126, 164
- Mukherjee, Arun 201, 204
- Musil, Robert 38, 66, 153
- Mussert, Anton 220
- Musset, Alfred 27, 214
- Mussolini, Benito 39
- Nabokov, Vladimir 30, 56
- Nadel, Ira B. 189–190
- Nagourney, Peter 189
- Namier, Lewis 86–87, 157, 162
- Napoleon (Bonaparte) 21, 41, 132, 145–146, 154, 214
- Neale, Derek 181
- Nerval, Gérard de 55, 181
- Neuman, Shirley 204
- Neve, Fiora della (pseudonym of M.G.L. van Loghum) 98
- Newman, John H. 215
- Nicholl, Charles 117
- Nicholson, Linda J. 200
- Nicolson, Harold 44–45, 48, 214
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 122, 141, 146
- Nissenbaum, Stephen 126
- Nizan, Paul 32
- Nobel, Alfred 233
- Noguez, Dominique 31–32
- Nora, Pierre 86, 147, 149
- Novarr, David 11, 19
- Nussbaum, Felicity 204
- Oakeshott, Michael 162
- Obama, Barack 37
- Oldenbarnevelt, Johan van 220
- Orwell, Georg 32
- Owen, David 5
- Pagello, Pietro 214
- Painter, Nell Irvin 51–52
- Pankhurst, Sylvia 219
- Parke, Catherine N. 34, 43–44
- Parker, Theodore 212
- Parsons, Talcott 110
- Parton, J. 212
- Passeron, Jean-Claude 89
- Paulin, Roger 22
- Pawel, Ernst 32
- Peacock, Sandra J. 191
- Peirce, Charles S. 105

- Pelletier, Fernande 40
 Peltonen, Matti xi–xii, xviii, 4–6, 105–118,
 125, 132–133
 Penn, Nigel 122
 Pepys, Samuel 213
 Pereyra, Carlos 146
 Perkins, Maureen 187
 Perrot, Michelle 142
 Peter the Great 78
 Philip II (of Spain) 86, 142
 Philips, Anton 41
 Phylarchus (Historian) 77
 Pickett, Edward 140
 Piero della Francesca xvi, 106, 116, 163
 Pinagot, Louis-François 88
 Pisani, Edgard 40
 Plas, Michel van der (pseudonym of B.G.F.
 Brinkel) 135
 Plath, Sylvia 49
 Plato 76
 Plechanov, Gheorghii V. 85
 Pletsch, Carl 48
 Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius
 Secundus) 96
 Plutarch (Lucius Mestrius) 12–13, 22, 34,
 37, 77–78, 82, 96, 232
 Polybius (Historian) 77–78
 Pomper, Philip 76
 Poni, Carlo 89, 106, 113
 Poniatowska, Elena 199
 Powell, Amanda 199
 Powell, Sumner Chilton 126
 Presser, Jacques 18
 Pressler, Mirjam 174
 Prévost, Antoine François (Abbé) 12
 Prins, Gwyn 164–165
 Proust, Marcel 66, 153, 158

 Queneau, Raymond 61, 143–146, 153, 157
 Quételet, Lambert Adolphe 82

 Rabinow, Paul 71
 Raggio, Osvaldo 163–164
 Ragin, Charles C. 118
 Rahikainen, Marjatta 185
 Raleigh, Walter 232
 Ramelb, Carol 19
 Ramella, Franco 163–164
 Rancière, Jacques 86

 Ranke, Leopold von 81
 Rapaport, Herman 52–53
 Reagan, Ronald 57
 Rearick, Charles 149
 Redondi, Pietro 116, 163
 Renan, E. 215
 Renders, Hans xi–xiii, xviii, 1–8, 11–42,
 94–101, 129–138, 169–176, 216–231
 Revel, Jacques 90, 113–114, 138, 149, 164
 Reynolds, Ben 148
 Reynolds, Siân 142, 148
 Ribberink, Anneke 184
 Ricœur, Paul xviii
 Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith 201
 Rivière, Pierre 70
 Roberts, Andrew 131
 Roberts, Brian 109
 Robson, Kathryn 172
 Roche, Daniel 68
 Rogers, Richard 58
 Rollyson, Carl 11, 29, 43, 189, 222
 Romano, Ruggiero 106, 143
 Romein, Jan 223
 Roosevelt, Franklin D. xvii
 Rose, Jacqueline 137
 Rosenthal, Raymond 144, 152, 163
 Rossellini, Roberto 155
 Rost van Tonningen, Meinoud 230
 Rostow, W.W. 147
 Roth, Philip 30–31
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 63–65
 Ruddick, Sara 51
 Ruggiero, Guido 125, 164
 Ruiter, Job de 218
 Rösen, J. 82
 Russ, Joanna 203
 Ryle, Gilbert 113
 Ryle, Martin 163

 Sabeau, David Warren 126
 Sainte-Beuve, Charles Augustin 36
 Salwak, Dale 17, 38
 Sand, George 96, 214
 Sandeau, Jules 214
 Sanders, Mathijs 135
 Sarkozy, Nicolas 37
 Sarton, May 200
 Sartre, Jean-Paul 22
 Saunders, Max 181

- Savage, Richard 26, 56
 Sayen, W. Guthrie 119
 Schenck, Celeste 204
 Schindler, Oskar 39
 Schlanger, Judith 79
 Schlau, Stacey 199
 Schleifer, Ronald 196
 Schnicke, Falko 12
 Schwarze, Johannes *see* Morelli, Giovanni
 Schweickart, Patrocinio 197
 Schweiger, Hannes 19–20, 22
 Scott, Gail 199
 Sebeok, Thomas A. 105
 Sec, Joseph 69
 Seignobos, Charles 111
 Sennett, Richard 54
 Serra, Renato 159–161
 Shaftesbury, A.A.C. 65
 Shakespeare, William 13, 38–39, 41,
 117, 213
 Sharpe, Patricia 201
 Shaw, Bernard 171, 213–215
 Shaw, Clifford R. 87
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe 55
 Shelston, Allan 48
 Sherry, Ruth 202
 Shklovskii, Viktor 159
 Shreve, Porter 30
 Simenon, Georges 32
 Simiand, François 83–84
 Simmel, Georg 158
 Simson, George 20, 186–188, 190
 Skidelsky, Robert 49–50
 Slegers, Cees 225
 Smith, Adam 111
 Smith, Barbara Clark 125
 Smith, Grace Cossington 58
 Smith, Paul 197, 200
 Smith, Sidonie 2, 7–8, 52, 183, 185–186,
 193–194, 204
 Smyth, Denis 129
 Soeting, Monica 184
 Sofri, Adriano 106
 Sokoloff, Boris 41
 Solmi, Sergio 144
 Solow, Robert 108
 Soper, Kate 163
 Souciet, Etienne 94
 Soulez, Philippe 216
 Southey, Robert 196
 Southgate, Beverley 16
 Spears, Britney 218
 Spencer, Herbert 82, 215
 Spivak, Gayatri 52
 St. Clair, William xi, 20, 22, 194
 Staley, Thomas 53, 58
 Stalin, Joseph 39, 132, 170
 Stanford, M. 162
 Stanley, Liz 52
 Stanley, Thomas 78
 Stannard, Martin 38
 Stanton, Domna 200, 204
 Steedman, Carolyn 53–55
 Stendhal (pseudonym of Marie-Henri
 Beyle) 154
 Stephen, Leslie 24, 99
 Sterne, Laurence 63–65
 Stevenson, Robert Louis 55, 181
 Stewart, George R. 139–141, 146, 158
 Stiegler, Gaston 33
 Stoianovich, Traian 146
 Stone, Lawrence 153
 Strachey, Lytton 21–22, 43–45, 49–50, 171,
 231
 Streisand, Barbara 218
 Suetonius (Gaius) 12, 232
 Suny, Ronald Grigor 125
 Szijártó, István M. xiv, 6
 Tacitus (Publius or Gaius Cornelius) 78
 Tak, P.L. 98
 Talleyrand, Charles-Maurice de 231
 Talsma, J. 134
 Tas, Louis 229
 Taylor, Alan 119, 124
 Tedeschi, Anne C. xii, 112, 151–152, 154
 Tedeschi, John xii, 112, 151–152, 154
 Tesio, Giovanni 144
 Theodosius (the Great) 80
 Thérenty, Marie-Ève 27
 Thomas, William 87
 Thompson, E.P. 110–111, 114–115
 Thucydides 77
 Thurber, James 189
 Tiedeman, H. xv, 95, 98, 100, 225
 Tjeenk Willink, H.D. 94
 Tolstoy, Leo 154, 157–160, 162, 170
 Torgovnick, Marianna 195, 202, 205

- Torres, Felix 88
 Touati, François-Olivier 67, 88
 Toynbee, Arnold J. 157, 162
 Trebitsch, Michel 67, 88
 Treviño, Joshua xv, 80
 Truman, Harry S. 5
 Trump, Donald 22
 Turvey, Malcolm 3–4
 Tzara, Tristan 31
- Uyl, Joop den 217
- Vailland, Roger 32
 Valensi, Lucette 142
 Vasari, Giorgio 96
 Venturi, Franco 68–69, 163
 Verne, Jules 33, 97
 Verolme, Cornelis 225
 Veyne, Paul 231
 Voerman, Gerrit xiii
 Voltaire (pseudonym of François-Marie Arouet) 78, 189
 Vossen, Koen 220
 Vovelle, Michel 67, 69–70, 148, 152
- Walter, James xi, xviii, 4, 43–58
 Warburg, Aby 157
 Warren, Austin 14, 36
 Wartena, Bert 218
 Washington, George 122–123
 Watson, Julia 2, 7–8, 183, 185–186, 193–194, 228
 Webb, Dianne 174
 Weinberg, Steve 15
 Wellek, René 14, 36
 Werkman, Hans 135
 Wesseling, Henk 170
- Wheeler, Ephraim xvi
 White, Edmund 222
 White, Hayden 162
 Whitlam, Gough xviii
 Whittemore, Reed 13
 Wilde, Oscar 36, 48, 222
 Wilkomirski, Benjamin (pseudonym of Bruno Dössekker) 175
 Willer, Stefan 230
 Williams, Raymond 54
 Winchester, Simon 99
 Winfrey, Oprah 1
 Wing, Betsy 197
 Winnett, Susan 203–204
 Winock, Michel 150
 Winslow, Donald J. 12, 99, 179, 196
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig 3–4, 230
 Woelders, H.A. 101
 Wolf, Christa 182
 Wolfe, Tom 16
 Wolfram, Dirk Jan xiii
 Wood, Gordon S. 119–121, 123, 125
 Woolf, Virginia 21–22, 43–44, 99, 153, 198–199
 Worms, Frédéric 216
- Xenophon (Historian) 232
- Yalom, Marilyn 182
- Zagorin, Perez 161–162
 Zambelli, Paola 106
 Zavalloni, Marisa 202
 Znaniecki, Florian 87
 Zola, Èmile 33
 Zuckerman, Michael 125